

Contemplative

Standing
at the crosswalk,
the only thing
he's waiting for,
is the direction
he's going.

Dancers

Some are
on the street
like dancers,
others like
stage hands,
some like they
just wandered in
off the street.

The Cook

The cook,
outside his restaurant,
grips his cigarette
like the wing
of a poisonous
butterfly.

His partner
rolls his head
on his neck,
like a melon
in a salad bowl,
stamps the sidewalk,
as he listens.

Debris

A man sweeps debris
from the sidewalk
into the street,
like brushing
table scraps
onto the floor.

The Glance

A lady
turns to look,
not with a glance,
but with the corner
of a glance,
with the casual slight
of almost seeing
the object
of her scorn.

The Grin

A girl with tiny
silver fork earrings,
steps on her
friend's foot,
grins.

Four Pigeons

Four pigeons
peck away
at the sidewalk,
in front of the man
on the bench in the park,
but his eyes
are on the iris
called Giant
Blue Butterfly.

A Cat

In the arboretum,
a cat, living without master,
rubs the length of its body
against the low branch
of a hybrid,
Mahoberberis
Miethkeana.

A Building

Occasionally,
a building
will look entirely
like a building
you'd imagine
would look;
a *building*
in every detail.

The Clerk

The clerk says,
“They’ll probably be in,
the end of the week,
probably tomorrow.”

The man replies,
“Well, then, I’ll be in,
the end of the week,
possibly tomorrow.”

Shoe Store

What magic
or torture
is meted out
beneath the sign

WE FIT
THE HARD
TO FIT.

Food Tourists

Food tourists,
charting passage
through the culinary sea,
eating for entertainment,
menu mapping
the exotic familiarity
of an edible expedition.

Snapshot

In Ghirardelli Square,
he squats down
to be the picture.

She squats down
to take it.

On the click,
they ascend.

The Command

On the Union Square Monument,
every day, every night,
all day, all night,
Long tells Dewey,
“Destroy the Spanish Fleet.”

On the Wind

On Carl Street,
a newspaper
lies against
apartment steps,
like a large leaf
of legible lettuce.

Stretch Pants

The bicyclist's
blue stretch pants
and yellow knit shirt
are joined
by a safety pin
at the back,
two cats-eyes
of pink flesh,
as she passes.

On the Pond

Ducks and geese
on the pond,
like a floor
with the properties
of water.

The Green Hose

Outside the Tea Garden,
a pale green hose,
its body
hopelessly wounded,
lies on the grass,
perspiring,
violently.

Bad Vegetables

Riding up front,
a woman in a tiger-pattern,
fuzz-ball jacket, hair band,
jeans, and vinyl rain boots,
sits up, does not touch
her back to the seat.

She has a peasant face,
lined like an actress
would pretend to age,
looks up and down the trolley
as if scanning bad vegetables.

She waits, with clenched fists
holding her shopping bag handles.

The Steady Walker

The steady walker
paces himself
to the green lights,
eases up to a red light,
starts slowly,
makes sudden turns,
only in his attention.

Twins

In Union Square,
a blue lady
and a chartreuse lady,
with their twin tam o'shanters,
sit down in unison,
and cross their legs
into the agreement.

Unbalanced

Kim says she'll cut his hair,
says she wants to get
ten good pictures together
for a portfolio, foams a little
at the corners of her mouth,
says his hair is unbalanced.

A Clean Margin

At the beach,
a clean margin
of fog
lies above
the turbulent
page
of sea.

Recognition

A woman
in white shorts, walking,
a man in a Toyota honks,
wiggles his fingers.

A passenger
in a brown Buick
leans out and says,
“Hey, I know you.”

Doorway

In a Kearny doorway,
an old man squats,
in bedroom slippers
and insulated vest,
with an aluminum cane,
his Chinese face
swept clean
of adornment.

Seagull

A seagull
lies against the wind,
like a small hand
from the window
of a speeding car.

In the Surge

Standing
at the corner,
traffic
is a Niagara
of boulders,
no barrel
would stand
a chance.

Restless Eyes

On the 8AM trolley,
amidst a silent, full car
of readers, thinkers,
and nothing-doers,
restless eyes
run from face
to face.

Backyard Towers

Across the city's backyards
are weathered towers
for the laundry lines,
with crude ladder steps
attached.

The next Icarus
will be a housewife.

Dogwash

An Irish Setter
moves past the man
in the doorway.

The man rubs the dog,
pats it, head to tail.

The man's hand
drops behind the dog
like carpet strips
in a car wash.

Income

A panhandler's hat
comes off,
goes down
between
the knees,
becomes
an income.

In the Sun

In the window,
a potted plant
leans to the sun.

Next to it,
a man leans out,
wearing a t-shirt.

In Disguise

On the Stockton bus,
a man with stale gin breath,
takes quick snorts of air
like Superman,
trying to breath up
all the acid gas
Clark Kent
has just
spilled.

Embrace

At Stow Lake,
a couple embraces
by the side of the road
on a patch of grass
near the grill
of their bronze
Mustang.

Faith

In the Inner Sunset,
reading the horoscope,
a woman genuflects
at each church
the streetcar
passes.

Being of Help

In the Arboretum,
a woman in a wheelchair
is moved from flower to flower,
her guide stops at a
long, broken stem
and lifts it, limp,
from the path.

Private Business

In a public urinal,
the Lion from Canada
pulls, from a recess
beneath his rattling medals,
a small part of his soft body.

Coleus

At Hyde and Union,
in a bay window,
at eye level,
gauze curtains,
cheesecloth
on the round table,
a potted coleus
wrapped in tin-foil,
is brought forward in time,
by remaining.

Waterbug

Clear water pond
of bug and bug shadow,
a room through which
one can reach
but cannot walk.

Feather

At Broadway and Columbus,
a feather on the crosswalk
floats with wheel breezes.

Someone says,
“Look at the lights,
they’re all moving.”

Cars

Patchwork cars, molded cars,
toy cars, houseboats,
cars under remote control,
cars that give a drunk
a way to sit down
on the way home.

Small rooms to live and die in,
the streets are full of cars.

Smokey Vase

Walking along,
he looks kicked out,
with his cake box,
decorator pillow,
and smokey vase,
with one paper flower.

Lamplight

Upper Grant Street pub,
a street lamp glows
in the doorway,
like a frame
of parking meter,
narrow street,
pickup truck,
empty yellow
laundromat.

Obituary

AT 2AM,
a cigarette
hits the pavement
like the famous
death
of a firefly.

In the Tunnel

A streetcar rumbles
through the tunnel,
like a determined
piece of gristle,
fighting its way
to the far end
of the frankfurter.

Man and Dog

A blind man,
wearing a wig,
stands centered
against a white,
marble panel.

He holds his hat
waist high
with both hands,
his dog asleep
on the blanket
beside him,
aluminum handle
above its neck.

Safe at Home

Like a base runner
at the ocean,
again and again,
Number 39
slides into home,
throws the ball
out to sea.

Residue

A young man
nods on the bus,
his lips pink
with residue of wine,
a pamphlet,
August Zoo,
on the floor,
an empty box
of Chicklets.

Fishing

At the Municipal Pier,
a mother and son
dip and drag
French fries
in ketchup,
a father and son
split fish heads
into a wire net.

Ripples

On Ninth Avenue
inside the Park,
black pants, bow legs,
black shirt, brown beret,
wiry ponytail, silver bracelets,
newspaper in his left hand,
he throws the ripples
of his soles across
the asphalt
behind him.

Barbershop

At Sixth and Irving,
a row of beige washers,
lids up, in an empty laundromat,
five silver trash cans outside,
a barber, cross-legged
in his chair, reading
the newspaper.

Water Cure

At the sea,
a distraught man
is calm, as nearby,
the waves end
in a gentle wash
boys play in.

Robin

A robin
plucks berries
into its throat,
like quick fingers
to the hors d'oeuvres.

Skulls

A wine merchant,
in swept-wing sunglasses
and white uniform,
carries empty gallons
to his white panel truck,
like glass skulls
on a string.

Tableau

A tableau downtown,
the red aurora
of his jacket lining
on the grassy
green slope,
silver on his breastbone,
silver and red soda can
beside him.

Choice

Challenge

at the Watchtower,

“What are you gonna do
when they take away your food?”

“Hi, sinner, can you give a quarter?”

“Only take you a few seconds
to read it, you might
want to be there.”

Bouquet

In the welfare line,
a selfmade arrangement
of waiting people,
each new flower
adds to the bouquet,
bunches formed
and unformed,
fill to one,
thin to many.

Café

In the Caffè Trieste,
a cappuccino
overflows the cup,
chocolate foam,
sugar grains,
a cigarette
soaks
in the saucer.

Talk

The only
overhearable
conversations
on the streetcar,
in Chinese,
sound familiar.

Transfer

A boy
carries
his transfer
like a note home
from the teacher.

Tool

A jack-hammer
lies near the curb,
like a giant,
battery-powered
nail file.

Puppeteer

Powell and Geary,
a man passing out poems,
a woman passing out cigarettes,

“All these people,
all around,
playing instruments,
are they looking
to get discovered,
or what?”

Here comes Tommy,
the old puppet man,
across Powell
with his bag of tricks.

Bowling

A curly red head
bobs along
the green hedge row,
like a gutter ball
in a bushy
bowling alley.

Pier

The Aquatic Pier

curves

like the arm

of a tour j'ete

against

the green

velvet curtain

of the bay.

Taxí Stand

Lunchtime,
a doorman
blows his
Líonel train whistle,
and a giant yellow fish
consumes two
plump morsels
through a vent
in its left side.

Composition

A woman
at the bus stop,
her legs composed,
two slender vases
support
a month's
laundry.

Thieves

At the Main Library,
thieves slip
emptyhanded
past the guard,
bold as brass,
with their books
in their heads.

Retired

In Funston Park,
five old men sit,
wearing hats,
the women
wear kerchiefs,
under the trees
that show
the wind.