

AN EXPERIENCE THAT INCLUDES DEATH

I climb the five flights
of the dream
in which my uncle still lives

between waking & sleep
I pass the void between
the living & the dead

after each successive loss
we host a chasm
& acceptance isn't enough

the NYC of my dream
is a texture I can read
the city

is closed
though by reading
I come closer

before he caught
the epidemic of his time
I visited my uncle

in his Battery Park walk-up
sat in his studio
of canvas scraps & spurs

street sweepers' brooms
collected from the shallow
glow before dawn

his was the sickness
of a country that failed him
a whole age of artists

men lost to time
on the wall
over my desk today

a hand of cards is fanned
across my uncle's canvas
a jagged metal shard

is the wave dividing
night sky from the water
the moon reflects

both ways
in the pale grey shadowbox
painted by his hand

the nails holding it all together
are delicate
imperceptible under paint

he gave me
the night the moon
was a star—lake

on the day of my visit
I've had it since I was ten
& it's not just

that America failed him
it fails us & hated him
hates still

that there are so many
ways to love
so many threats to mortal beauty

temporary & dangerous
the body is an experience
that includes death

my father's brother died
& his family
who were my family

called the cause cancer
I know this was common
I didn't know what this loss

would later mean
his night
his moon

his star—lake
precious pale
substitutes for the man