

JOHN STONE (1936-2008)

American Gothic 1998

after the painting by Grant Wood, 1930

Just outside the frame
there has to be a dog
chickens, cows and hay

and a smokehouse
where a ham in hickory
is also being preserved

Here for all time
the borders of the Gothic window
anticipate the ribs

of the house
the tines of the pitchfork
repeat the triumph

of his overalls
and front and center
the long faces, the sober lips above the upright spines
of this couple
arrested in the name of art

These two

by now
the sun this high

ought to be
in mortal time
about their businesses

Instead they linger here within the patient fabric
of the lives they wove

he asking the artist silently *how much longer* and worrying about the
crops she no less concerned about the crops but more to the point
just now
whether she remembered
to turn off the stove.