

TO A CHEETAH IN THE MOSCOW ZOO

Furs this expensive you normally only find wrapped around
the shoulders
Of gangsters' molls outside the casino, movements this slinky
Only on the catwalk from the androgynous models,
Eyes dilating in the flashbulbs. As lean a feline
As Pisanello once painted with a ravished brush
(The fur spotted, whiskery, a golden fleece).
She sashays swishing up and back. Her spine measures out
The least movement.

To change direction
Millimeters in front of the ditch is something for which
She doesn't even need eyes. There's nothing out there
For the ear or the sensitive nose but the noise and sweat
Beyond the wire fence, where those monkeys congregate
With their baby carriages at visiting time. Her breath
Coming hard, she magics the fetor of the metropolis
Into a charmed ozone . . . the white ribbons
In the girls' hair into strips of gazelle meat. Her fine head,
No bigger than your fist, keeps its alert posture
As she spies zebras in the flickering at the gates of Moscow.
Then she yawns, the prisoner of the cement.

DURS GRÜNBEIN (1962–), Germany

Cheetah Siesta, Robert Bateman (1930–), Canada

