

The Exhibit
Lisel Mueller

My uncle in East Germany
points to the unicorn in the painting
and explains it is now extinct.
We correct him, say such a creature
never existed. He does not argue,
but we know he does not believe us.
He is certain that power and gentleness
must have gone hand in hand
once. A prisoner of war
even after the war was over,
my uncle needs to believe in something
that could not be captured except by love,
whose single luminous horn
redeemed the murderous forest
and, dipped into foul water,
would turn it pure. This world,
this terrible world we live in,
is not the only possible one,
his eighty-year-old eyes insist,
dry wells that fill so easily now.