

*Jakarta, Indonesia 1988*

## Sumatran Rhino at the Jakarta Zoo

The rhino stands rooted, earthen,  
only the head sways  
side to side  
to catch my scent.

It is not large, not awesome.  
Uncomplicated.  
Part-sculpted from a block  
of soft red clay.

I move upwind,  
call softly,  
approach the green steel corral.

Fleshly nostrils expel  
as if underwater.  
Plates of sienna mud  
cling to russet flank hair.  
Mud hangs from long lashes  
over the clouded eye.  
Eyelids are the only  
soft leather in  
the truck tire face.

It smells me.  
The head heavy as a boulder  
catapults up and sideways  
as if to throw me.



The rhino advances,  
inserts its long muzzle  
between steel rails,  
quests with its  
prehensile lip.

The liphide feels dense  
but malleable,  
like a ripe cantaloupe.  
Two horns, like  
scuffed door knobs  
erupt below the  
furrowed forehead,  
a rubber doormat  
stretched over granite.

This zoolithic beast  
of Miocene swamps,  
innocent as clay,  
and forty kin,  
last of the nation,  
are cursed.  
Extinction.  
Death to all.  
Mud to mud.

Are we helpless?  
Will the red rhino  
be saved in  
reliquary zoos?  
Is the green forest lost?

Faced by its persecutors  
the rhino leans forward  
to have its muzzle rubbed.

