

# PETER MURPHY

## GALLERY ATTENDANT

He tends to squat rather than sit.  
His grey suit is  
neat enough.  
His eyes  
have the interior look  
of two hours of sitting here.  
Behind,  
a canvas of trees and nymphs and horses  
frames a tubular chair and him.  
Across the corridor a peer's prim daughter  
frowns at his shoes and their heavily knotted laces  
through the dark colours of her cracking oils.

Like lizards scattered over rocks in summer  
his kind are squatting all around  
this house of pictures, alert  
but not intense,  
not observing too closely the blank faces  
sailing among the works of art.  
Sometimes they stand and stretch among Tibetan skulls  
or avoid each other's eyes through rows of Roman pots  
or gaze through endless cabinets of crystal.

He knows eventually the day must end.  
The public, no longer swapping coins for tickets,  
must stay outside or leave in twenty minutes.  
Glancing across the courtyard at yet another colleague  
pricking the window with the small blur of his face  
he no longer wonders why they come  
or what they take away.

