Directly above us used to live a Russian painter. Twenty years ago he succeeded in escaping from the Soviet Union. He brought along suitcases packed with fear, as well as thirteen employees of the ubiquitous KGB, who trailed behind him like wolfhounds until his death. He lived the lonely life of a God-inspired artist. He seldom left the house. At times he set out on the long voyage to Coney Island, where Russian Jews had their enclave and some ladies appreciated his work. Sometimes they even visited him. On one such occasion, the cold eye of a camera froze him stripped to his waist, showing his bony, strangely beautiful chest. A corpulent aunt with an innocent smile, around her neck a string of pearls, is holding her palm motherly on his frivolous mane of ashen hair. Half seriously, half humorously, the artist is gazing into the greyish-white painting of a bull, mounting with his tongue a spread-eagled woman's body lying on the floor. No faces. The painting is dominated by the bull's rear, his swinging tail, enormous balls and by oddly straddling hind legs which, in an extraordinarily elongated perspective, conjure up the dynamics of blustering passions. Here and there the ladies persuaded the painter to sell them one of his works of bestiality. He had no other income. His trips drained with the passing of time. The ladies have also become more frail. New York, this cold, metal structure without a hint of meat, had been gnawing up his brittle core with the persistence of a mechanical rat. The KGB systematically increased the pressure, even tapped his REM. Life had, so to speak, become a problem. With steady, resigned patience he stuffed the pores of the fated shell of his loneliness. And when he ran out of pores, Vassily Sitnikow set his blessed soul free. No one noticed the anonymous death. Only the heavenly stink, from day to day more unbearable, forced the neighbours to alarm the police. The firemen in gas masks had to drill a hole into a wall to penetrate the apartment. It was literally packed to the ceiling. And there, in one of the corners, were remnants of a decaying body. In the interest of public hygiene, employees of the Sanitation Department, wavering between indifference and disgust, uncovered layer after layer of the fossil imprints of a heart's beat. It was revealed that over the years, the man had crammed the once fussily tidy flat with rubbish galore. He had one of those illnesses, caused by either wars or extreme poverty, where the patient becomes so obsessively frugal, that he dare not even breathe out. Like a diligent field mouse in autumn, the painter
hoarded and hoarded, initially somewhat valuable things and later anything, indiscriminately. Along with this, order grew into chaos. When there was so much trash that he could no longer open the toilet door he started to squeeze his number two into plastic bags. These he stored all over the place. What he did with his number one, we will never know. The excavation took two weeks. The junk filled up nine large containers. Unbelievable that the floor didn’t cave in, the house being so shoddy and shabby. Due to the danger of contamination, the Authorities were careful to prevent looting of the mortal’s belongings. These journeyed via hydraulic compactor into the guts of one of the haulers which continuously drop garbage blocks onto the bottom of the Atlantic.

translated by Monika Zagar