

FRANK RUSSO

*A Ponsonby Road menagerie*

See the woodblock-mounted rabbit stretched out mid-leap –  
ears upright, hind legs kicked back as it jumps  
over tannin-coloured jars of Wild Rosella Body Balm  
and Dauphin Cleansing Body Milk –

its feet fixed to a log, glass eyes set to catch  
the gaze of passing shoppers. On the wall a fox has snared  
a rodent. It hangs beside a triptych of the Stations  
of the Cross. A woman's hand

reaches to sample a tube of certified organic honey  
and paw paw (petrochemical free). Her hand drops a shelf  
– she can't resist brushing the rabbit's delicate pelt.

In World, the bust of a moose is mounted  
beside a wildebeest, an ibex, a roan antelope.  
They watch over racks of Beau Brummel waistcoats  
and belle époque reproduction dresses with leopard brocade,

saying *Here, there's a hunt to be had*  
on sale item Prussian suits and autocorrelation shirts,  
millennial pants and flamingo trousers in fire engine red  
and Yves Klein blue. Nearby gift stores sell

ceramic parrots in shades of mint and Persian green  
and cardboard trophy deer heads  
with machine-cut slots to affix fragments of antler and snout.

In the gallery at number 10, nature  
isn't something to be tamed, but modified:  
on a pedestal sits a baby doll, its head replaced with a bunny's.  
Its plastic arms and legs reach out as if longing for a hug.

Here the hindquarters of rodents  
trail brightly-dyed cotton balls  
and birds have clusters of glass beads for breasts –  
they lie on their backs, tiny feet curled up in search of a branch.

And when all this art becomes a wild boar, at Murder Burger  
the venison is served with sporty spice hunting sauce;  
at Sidart, the ostrich with liquorice and haloumi.

At Wunderkammer, amongst the cabinets  
stuffed with rose quartz cat rings and garnets  
set in sterling silver, a pole cat hisses, ready to spring  
from its wooden shelf. Wax models

of stillborn calves are set amid the men's costume shoes.  
A school of dried piranha swims in a waterless tank,  
a sparrow's frame is caught in a resin coffin.  
In the window two mallards are on display,

necks stretched, their faces inquisitive.  
Such perfect specimens, they could be exhibits,  
if it weren't for the red bowler hat  
the larger duck sports  
– a nice touch  
when surrounded by so much death.