

Petition

The agitation has the effect
of causing discussion and discussion groups.
Intellectuals, those who pretend
to be, and those who shun all labels
distinguish themselves from those who call,
as usual, for bombs and martial law.
Some requests (it's unfortunate, merely
rhetorical that they've been called
"demands") are reasonable:
civilization *is* too loud, especially
the sirens; it would be healthier
if more of us could see more stars;
and many of the protested smells
are, in fact, gross (but really, who
these days wears aftershave?). On the other hand,
many of the asks would be, are,
unduly demanding or plain weird.
That stuff about *hair*, for instance
(the table writhes to an inadvertent
remark about waxing); some
would create a new segregation ...
To this I agree, garnering praise, then
resentment (I'm admittedly
an embarrassing old commie) by regretting
that none of the entreaties tends
towards justice, redistribution ...

At the United Nations,
half the delegates are absent as
the mutants make their appeal.

My Kid Could Do That

The aliens care only about art.
They let us live in hopes that we'll make
stuff they like.
If we do, they'll let it accumulate,
then drop a painless aerosol into
our atmosphere and raid museums and mansions.
I should add they're all cutthroat capitalists –
think scarcity value.
For some time things looked bad;
they have no interest in the human form.
Theirs is different.
Abstraction saved us. Kandinsky, Pollock,
Helen Frankenthaler speak
to them. A potent Franz Kline
mysteriously vanished from Vienna graces
their central gym. They have plans
when the time comes to beam up
the Rothko Chapel. Nothing since
pleases. Larry Rivers, for instance,
is spoilt by human shadows. Towards someone
like Koons their critics make
a singularly repulsive gesture.

Upset

At a certain point, causality gets replaced
by magic. Whose principle, moreover,
isn't the ancient, reliable "As above,
so below" but something snarky, literary.
I the interpreter would like to say
it's "Subtlest symbol rules," but half
are embarrassingly barefaced.
In states the heat has turned to veldt,
rhinos happily root. This species
is vicious; some former wives,
approaching, die, others say their husbands
rejoice in their horns, perceive them in fact
as guns. Financial types, weeping
like Adam and Eve in Masaccio's *Expulsion*,
scour the projects. What's done
with Trump himself is unspeakable but really
quite witty. Egregious virtue signalers, meanwhile,
become and chitter like
squirrels. I sit in a corner, thoughts forming
rococo curlicues. The effect is hypnotic
and I force myself to return
to substance. Under the new dispensation,
what will happen
to history? I've always relied on history ...
But the tendrils writhe and knit themselves
into a message: *Your boredom with the world
is itself boring*. Which distresses me
deeply, until I decide it's merely
real.

In the Cracks

As I and the world age, I notice a gradual
flattening of affect. One
could worry about Alzheimer's or rare
late-onset schizophrenia, but I
retain my skill at daily
bloodless computations, vital
resentments, and loves
on whose obsessiveness one prides oneself.
So I can confidently tell myself
that the world, not I, has gone grey.

We attend a party thrown by slightly
or even substantially
more upscale folks. I drink little, maintain
the definite but almost invisible
ordained deference.
One of the guests is the guy who bought
our house. We moved into an apartment; he
has many houses. "I'm curious," I ask,
"have you encountered
the ghost in the basement?" – "Whose?" –
"Someone who lived there before –
miserably," I add, "or so we gathered
from the neighbors." "No," he says,
then graciously enough
confides a bit of upscale knowledge: "I paid, you see,
so much more for the house than you or, certainly,
him. That discourages them.
He no doubt packed his bags and evanesced."

You may also have noticed,
reader, that I'm relying lazily
on adverbs. They direct and confine
responses, yours and mine, and deaden protest.