

## Three Poems by Alan Catlin

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### Modern Art

Their heads are disembodied  
Magritte in Baghdad with turbans  
instead of felt hats

Their arms and legs and body  
parts are everywhere, stains  
on canvas, fields of blue and white  
and red

Their impact is immediate, urgent,  
but have no lasting effect unlike  
those pieces consigned to museums,  
hung on walls, left in dark cellars,  
chambers and forgotten; relics to be  
exposed, excavated, placed in context

Their absence is briefly noted, heard as  
a message on airwaves or written of  
in newsprint, filmed for international TV;  
their names are scrolled in silence at  
the end of telecasts, mourned or not,  
they have made a mark

Their cumulative effect is that of a collage,  
something by Max Ernst, though not simply  
Dada or plainly surreal, but Modern as Art was  
before Modern Warfare changed all the Methods,  
refined all the Techniques.

## **Killer Klowns**

Heat struck and ill at ease.

Physically, inert, four quarts of beer into a vicious, skunk beer drunk. Vertigo spin of smoke, smog, and still, humid air it hurts to breathe.

Inside, box fans slow the descent into maelstrom to a slow crawl. Quells the bottle rocket's red glare that stains the rancid sticky night.

The dead weight of the TV remote and the white noise, the fever glow emanations from the wide screen, morphing into a SYFY feature in progress. Something involving human-sized aliens in clown suits, beyond incredible to behold. Squeeze the tempting red nose at your peril and suffer the dread consequences later. Plot lines suggest the suits are the actual extraterrestrial forms these things-that-came-from-wrecked-space-ships inhabit. Makes the casual, immobile, observer wonder if the makers of domestic, three ring circus brews, are lacing their product with acid in heavily carbonated, liquid form. If true, imagine the leap in sales to stratospheric heights beyond anyone's reasonable expectation. Imagine aliens inhabiting the earth and how no one notices and the ones that do, don't care.

## **The Shirt Off Pinsky's Back**

The mentor was one of those: outside-every-box-known-to-man thinkers who confused being against everything as dissent. Managed to earn a PHD in Lit as much to make him go away, as by merit. Was proud of the fact he never lasted more than two semesters in a row teaching at the same institution. If there were a black list for adjuncts, his name would have been at the top of the list in BOLD, so no one could miss it, and make the same mistake others had hiring him in a pinch. Still, somehow, he managed to attract acolytes who fancied themselves free thinkers which were just buzz words for opinionated ignoramus. One in particular wrote a long diatribe disguised as an essay/review of a Pinsky book with his long, heart breaking, autobiographical poem about his family's involvement in the garment industry which the reviewer excoriated saying stuff like, "Who cares about a bunch of dead girls killed in a fire like a hundred years ago?" A reference to the Shirtwaist Fire tragedy that revolutionized labor laws in this country for exposing the criminal exploitation of women, children and workers in general. A historical moment that had clearly skipped the notice of the reviewer whose primary interest was ripping the shirt off Pinsky's back and stuffing it down his throat for having been part of the establishment; a former poet laureate of the United States, an office that exempted him from credibility among the hyper-critical masses. Maybe the thinking was, you knock a guy down

a peg, you move up one on the ladder.  
Like the ladders without rungs that leaned against  
the burning factory, reaching several floors short  
of their goal, the fire burning out of control,  
scores of desperate, dying women locked inside.

**Alan Catlin** has been publishing for five decades from  
the mimeos to the Internet. His latest full length book of  
poetry is *American Odyssey* from Future Cycle Press.  
He is the poetry editor of the online journal  
[misfitmagazine.net](http://misfitmagazine.net).