

MARCH 1977 \$2.50

# arts magazine



## RICHARD LYTLE

If anyone cares to paint for the pure joy of it, surely it is Richard Lytle. Color sloshes across a large canvas with terrific velocity. Cardboard is scraped over an oily surface revealing a topology of distressed surfaces. And all this is accomplished within the context of controlled biomorphic forms moving energetically in a landscape-like space.

On one level the phenom-

ological process of making paintings, facture, is what these large canvases are all about. Yet they are not the last gasp of Abstract Expressionism, however much Lytle may have learned from the New York School. For Lytle is very much in touch with nature. His is a modern painter's response to a nature alive with noise, color, movement, and a never ending series of morphological transformations so visually complex that only an artist could hope to capture the essence of it all.

Lytle's paint speeds up, slows down, thickens into butter-like batter or thins into gossamer glazes in an astonishing dis-

play of biomorphic constellations. But what appears to have been splashed down or scraped off in a frenzy of physical activity has in reality been built up over time in many layers or strata. The underpaintings tend to be somewhat opaque, highly colored, and tightly closed forms. Now layer upon layer of thick and thin paint is applied as forms, once distinct, begin to merge at the edges and interact with one another. The slow drying oils coat and stain the canvas, and Lytle can scrub off pigment or glazed surfaces and substitute new ones in a process of give and take. The enrichment ends when a picture 'works' and a picture 'works' when the layering is at its most complex and interactive.

In *Sanctuary*, Lytle first establishes the motifs as underlying structural members in a landscape-like space upon which subsequent transformations are then worked. These motifs are biomorphs laid down and built up in plastic complexity strata by strata. As this process matures, adjustments have to be made to the landscape or spatial container as well. The biomorphs, on the other hand, crowd the surface of the picture plane, clatter about, and then dive back into deep space like animate creatures. There is a very real sense of foreboding here, based not upon ethical insights but upon the realization that the natural order has very little to do with human purposes. We feel that in this aesthetic universe we could easily perish and nothing would really change, for Lytle's forms would continue to swoop as artfully as ever.

On the other hand, the central passage of *Sanctuary* has been 'humanized' and gives off just the opposite signals. It is a restful grotto in the midst of turmoil painted in delicate and inviting hues of cool green-blues. The grotto is set into deep space but we are kept from it psychologically by the whirling biomorphs guarding the entrance. Forms are seen from within and without, and hues shift about as do tonalities and textures in a display of technique in the interest of a sophisticated aesthetic goal. And Lytle's aesthetic goals are exciting because nature has been seen, felt, and seized by a painterly sensibility working at a very high energy level. (Marilyn Pearl, February 1-26)

Richard Lytle, *Embarkation*, 1976. Oil on canvas. 72 x 66". Courtesy Marilyn Pearl Gallery.

