

Lyle's most recent book, *Neo This, Neo That: The Rise and Fall of Contemporary Painting*, had become, to his surprise, a big success. He had been invited to lecture to emerging artists at Skowhegan, an artists' colony in Maine: two days, two lectures, two critiques. After his first lecture, wherein he basically said that to paint without acknowledging that painting was a moribund art form was to deceive oneself, and art produced in self-deception was pointless, he was led through the painting barns and sheds, where the young artists stood about like cows, staring at him, daring him to speak. He began to think he might be murdered while he was there. His lecture the second day was to have been a continuation of the first: a sort of highlights of recent self-deceptive and indulgent painting. But only one person showed up the next morning: the young man who was scheduled to drive him to the airport at the lecture's conclusion. He was being boycotted. This fact seemed not to bother the people in charge; they thought his presence there had been a good catalyst for discussion. So Lyle got in the car with the driver, who was named Robert, and they drove an hour through the gloomy wilds of Maine in silence. Lyle was hovering on the border of sleep when the driver spoke.

"What?" Lyle asked.

"Your lecture," Robert said. "The one you were going to give today. What was it about?"

"Oh," said Lyle. "More of the same vitriol. About the curse of abstraction."

"Abstraction is a curse?" asked Robert.

"Yes," said Lyle, "finally. And I don't mean just in painting. I mean in all the arts. In literature and music. Perhaps not in dance, because of Balanchine. His genius allowed abstraction to reinvigorate the art. But in all the other disciplines abstraction has proved a dead end. A wall that artists have been beating their poor heads against for the better part of this century. I think if painting—indeed, if art in general—is to survive, let alone matter, it must become reconnected to life as we live it."

"Who's we?"

"People," said Lyle. "The man—or woman—in the street. Painting can't be just for painters."

Peter Cameron, *The Weekend*, 1994