

**Kayne Griffin Corcoran**

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## David Lynch: 'All I wanted to be was a painter'

On the publication of his memoir, the artist talks about painting, film-making — and why meditation will save the world

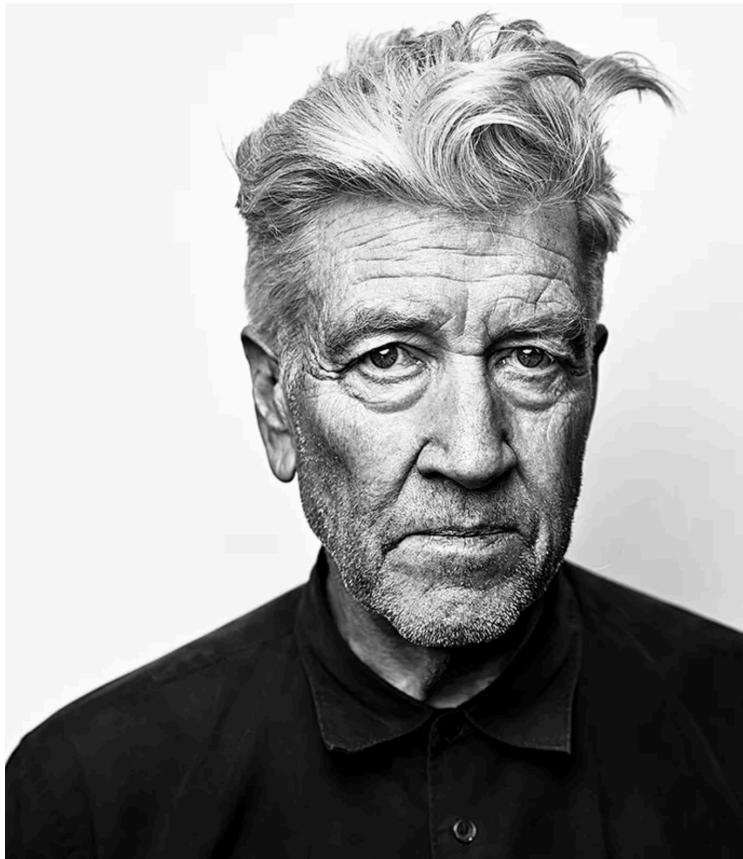


Photo: Josh Telles

The silver hair stands upright in a gravity-defying wedge. The suit is dark. The accent is a flat, aw-shucks American west twang that makes him sound a little like Ronald Reagan. Even sitting in a dimly lit room in a midtown Manhattan hotel, film-maker David Lynch is about as unmistakable as his work.

Lynch's subversive, twisty, maddeningly intricate 1990s series *Twin Peaks* upended the conventions of television. Now, with the publication of *Room to Dream*, he has sought to reinvent the celebrity memoir. Mirroring the concept of duality that peppers many of his projects, including *Twin Peaks* and *Mulholland Drive*, Lynch and his co-author, Kristine McKenna, devised a format in which they alternate chapters in an attempt to reveal truth amid layers of subjectivity. "She would interview people and tell their memories; then I would correct them because they were all wrong," says Lynch, who has the tendency to stare off in the distance, avoiding eye contact.



'Boy Lights Fire' (2010) by Lynch © Courtesy the artist and Kayne Griffin Corcoran

With reminiscences from family, childhood friends, wives and lovers, and Hollywood associates, the Lynch he and McKenna present is an idiosyncratic outsider. It's that same stance that has also earned him notice in the art world. In September Lynch will have a show of new paintings and prints at his Los Angeles gallery, Kayne Griffin Corcoran, followed in November by a retrospective of his boundary-ignoring practice at the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht.

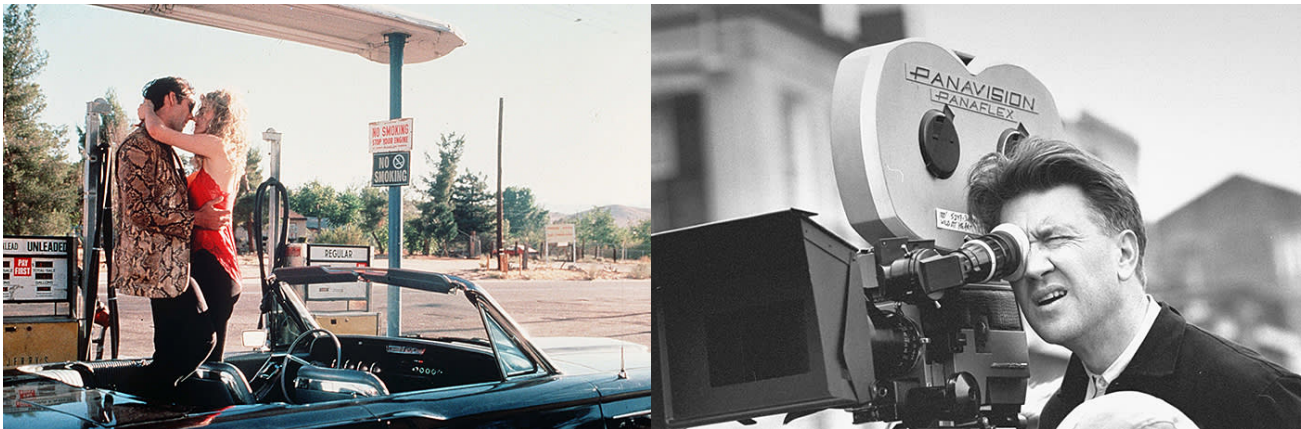
Stijn Huijts, director of the Bonnefanten, believes that Lynch's point of view is remarkably consistent across media. "It is always about the idea that there are more realities and dimensions of existence than just one," Huijts says. "Both in the films and in the other visual art of Lynch, the subconscious is an important well that feeds the creative process. The sphere of darkness and dread that is evoked by the films reoccurs in the art works."

That darkness is also in abundance in *Room to Dream*. Lynch, 72, shares one childhood memory of his father pulling over to the side of the road to chase a porcupine up a mountain, where he proceeded to shoot it. He explains that his father, whom he calls "loving and good", was a forestry scientist who hated porcupines because they kill trees. Another time, his father took a baseball bat to a closet of clothes in pursuit of a mouse. "He didn't have good aim," Lynch says with a smile. "He hit the clothes many times and finally the bloody mouse fell out. He really beat those clothes.

"The things that stick are interesting," he muses.

As the book makes clear, painting has always been primary to Lynch. "All I wanted to be was a painter, since the ninth grade," he says. "Painting led to film, but in between every film I'm painting."

Belcove, Julie. "David Lynch: 'All I wanted to be was a painter'." Financial Times. 22 June 2018. Web.



Left: Nicolas Cage and Laura Dern in 'Wild at Heart' (1990) © Propaganda/PolyGram/Kobal/REX/Shutterstock. Right: Lynch on location shooting 'Wild at Heart' © Acey Harper/The Life Images Collection/Getty Images

When Lynch made his first film, in the late 1960s, he was studying painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia and was enamoured with the tortured expressionism of Francis Bacon. He'd never been a big movie buff; rather, he saw his initial stab at animation as a way of making a "moving painting". The inspiration — or hallucination — came late one evening in the studio: "I'm looking at this painting of a garden at night, mostly black, and it started to move. From the painting came a wind. There was sound and moving picture, and I said, 'Oh, a moving painting,' and that's what led to film for me."

The result was his 1967 piece, "Six Men Getting Sick", for which he shot a minute-long animation and projected it on to a screen sculpted with heads. Other short films followed, and by 1970 he had moved to Los Angeles to join the American Film Institute's first graduating class. At AFI he developed his quirky Eraserhead, which caught the attention of creative-minded producers, and soon his penchant for unorthodox material such as the empathy-inducing The Elephant Man and the nightmarish Blue Velvet gave him a reputation as an American auteur. In 1990 his Wild at Heart captured the Palme d'Or at Cannes.

Hollywood's demands have sometimes interrupted his painting for years on end, and Lynch admits that getting back into the groove is difficult. "It would be great if you didn't have to sleep," he laments. He dreads the thought of being considered a Sunday painter or, worse, a celebrity one, although he deems such labels "total bullshit".

Huijts has made it a mission to recognise artists from what he terms the "secret canon" of compelling outsider artists, like Lynch. "The art world is very unjust when it comes to dealing with artists who have more than one talent," he says, adding that he could easily envision some of last year's rebooted Twin Peaks episodes holding their own at the Venice Biennale.

Like his movies, some of Lynch's studio art has a Surrealist feel: a man floating in a room, a rock with eyes. "I may be in that neighbourhood," Lynch says. But there's also a blunt simplicity — an image of a black rotary telephone underneath the word "telephone", a drawing of a flatbed truck hauling a log beneath the phrase "cloudy day" — that feels reminiscent of the cherry-pie-and-hot-coffee Americana glorified in Twin Peaks.

"I like a story in a painting and characters, and I like words in there," he says. "I call it bad painting, but I like nature playing a part in the thing. I like totally mixed media. Getting this kind of organic thing — that's what I love."





Lynch's 'Telephone' (undated) © Courtesy the artist and Kayne Griffin Corcoran

Lynch often blurs the line between painting and sculpture by building out the canvases with three-dimensional elements. "I like to cut in, too," he says. "Sometimes I put holes in the things." A photographer and printmaker as well, he's currently making lithographs in homage to Fellini's seminal film *8½*.

As for which aspect of his life he prefers, Lynch describes the solitude of his studio as "beautiful". Then again, he calls the camaraderie of a movie set "beautiful". Just don't dare suggest that film-making, with its scores of cast and crew, is a collaborative endeavour. "It's not collaborative," he barks. "It's not. You have help. It's not that you share ideas and decide which is best. I mean, it might be that way for some, I don't know. You have ideas, and the ideas are what you stay true to. Everything has to pass through one person for it to hold together."

His belief in the primacy of the individual aligns with his nearly 45-year practice of transcendental meditation. He has never missed one of his twice-daily sessions. Lynch even started a foundation to tout TM as a cure for the world's ills. Take the epidemic of sexual assault and harassment that has been illuminated over the past year.

"You reap what you sow," he says. "There's all kinds of people going to be reaping bad things. But you can't make a law to make people act correctly or nicely. You can, and people will go to jail and stuff, but you can't change behaviour with the law."



Kyle MacLachlan in 'Twin Peaks' © Suzanne Tenner/Showtime

"[Only meditation] can really change collective consciousness and bring about a peaceful world," Lynch adds, before standing to depart. He is off to show his wife (his fourth) and five-year-old daughter (45 years younger than his eldest child) his grandparents' old house in Brooklyn.

To Twin Peaks fans who've read this far looking for a glimmer of hope that there's more to come, sorry to disappoint you. Lynch isn't sharing, just saying with a snarl, "I don't even want to talk about it."

—Julie Belcove