



DAVID LYNCH

Someone is in
my house

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SOMEONE IS IN MY HOUSE

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PREFACE

STIJN HUIJTS

Despite his undeniably pivotal position in the international film and television world, David Lynch's work as a visual artist is much less known. Strange, to say the least. Lynch has always insisted that he sees himself above all as a visual artist, one who during his studies at the art academy accidentally came into contact with the medium of film, setting him out on his career as a film director.

"I miss painting when I'm not painting," Lynch says in the recent biography *Room to Dream*.¹ Throughout his fifty-year career he has always continued to draw and paint, even when his work as a film director left him little time for this. This publication includes drawings made while working on *Eraserhead*, on paper napkins, matchbooks, and loose notepad pages, when nothing else was at hand. During the shooting of *The Elephant Man*, he began photographing empty factory buildings in England, and the works *Duck Kit* and *Chicken Kit* originated in Mexico during the filming of *Dune*, as did the first cartoons in the series *The Angriest Dog in the World*.

Given the popularity of Lynch's films in the art community, it is astonishing that his work as a visual artist has until now been rarely explored or exhibited in museums, and that this exceptional side of his artistry is still scarcely appreciated at its true value by the art world. In *Room to Dream*, he himself speaks of this: "It's always been the case that if you do one thing you're not supposed to do other things—like, if you're known as a filmmaker and you also paint, then your painting is seen as kind of a hobby, like golfing. You're a celebrity painter, and that's just the way it was."² Twenty years earlier he had already complained of the "celebrity painter" problem: "It really makes you puke. And it's a terrible thing.... Once you get known for one thing, it's really hard to jump-start the other thing and be taken seriously for it."³

To change this unjust situation, the publication *Someone is in my House* presents a cross section of the visual oeuvre David Lynch has created over the past fifty years. Text contributions by Michael Chabon, Petra Giloy-Hirtz, Kristine McKenna, and the undersigned serve to position Lynch's exceptional artistry more precisely. I am deeply grateful to the authors for their input.

The impetus for this publication is the eponymous exhibition I was commissioned to curate for the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht, with more than five hundred works in a richly varied range of media and techniques, including paintings, lithographs, drawings, lamp sculptures, photography, animated films, and mixed media. Many people have contributed to the realization of the exhibition and the publication. In particular I am indebted to the various lenders of artworks, to Anna Skarbek, Michael Barile, Genevieve Day, Ewa Jurkowska-Brzoska, Sabrina Sutherland, Patrice Forest, Tim Bisschop, Gautier Platteau, to the Bonnefantenmuseum team led by Jacobien Peeters, and very specially to Tom Goossen, who unfortunately did not live to see the completion of this project.

Last but not least, I would also like to thank David Lynch, the artist who misses painting when he is not painting, and even when he is not painting approaches the world as a painter. I hope that this book and the exhibition will contribute to a better understanding of his multifaceted artistry, and that he will be accorded the place he merits in the world of visual art.

(1) David Lynch and Kristine McKenna, *Room to Dream*, Edinburgh, 2018, p. 301.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 461.

(3) David Lynch, in Chris Rodley, ed., *Lynch on Lynch*, New York, 1997; repr. London, 1999, pp. 28–29.

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PAINTING IS A PLACE

KRISTINE MCKENNA

Painting is a place, and things happen there that can't happen anyplace else. Remember that dream you had twenty years ago? You can only remember a fragment of that dream, but in the painting sphere you can latch onto that fragment and breathe life into it and expand it and then there it is. There's that dream you had. You can look at it now.

Painting is an arena, but it's not sunny and cheerful like a circus arena. It's not all fun in the painting arena, and over the centuries people have entered it for many different reasons. At the beginning of recorded history people went there to scratch their own images onto cave walls simply to affirm their existence. Then, for a very long time, people entered the painting sphere to sing the praises of the Holy Trinity. During the Renaissance, the wealth and power of great patrons was celebrated there, and before cameras came along it was a place to record the world as it appeared to the human eye. The action painters of the 1950s entered

it to wrestle with issues of masculinity, and Conceptual Art dismissed the entire endeavor as an obsolete house of cards. Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, efforts were repeatedly made to board up the doors and windows entirely, but painting never goes away because, like I said, things happen there that can't happen anyplace else. It's a place where one can access elemental truths that are deeper and wider than any simple fact. We need it.

It's a shamanic activity, really. Francis Bacon has spoken of the initial idea for a painting as "bait" that operates like a magnet. The bait arrives and announces itself, then metal filings shoot from every corner and attach themselves to the magnet. Thus, the painting begins to create itself, with the artist serving as a kind of midwife. The painting is in charge.

When David Lynch enters the painting sphere he drifts back to his childhood and is rocketed to a distant galaxy. The universe is in perpetual motion in

FIG. 1

David Lynch
*A Figure Witnessing the
 Orchestration of Time*, early 1990s
 Oil and mixed media on canvas
 167.5 × 167.5 cm

FIG. 2

David Lynch
*This Man Was Shot 0.9502
 Seconds Ago*, 2004
 Mixed media on panel
 183 × 305 cm

1



2



his pictures, people get lost, and time collapses in on itself. Lynch has spoken of “the big, big pieces of time” we humans are drifting through, and it’s a folly to think we can either understand or manage the situation; it’s a complex bit of business best addressed in the abstractions of paint. In the early 1990s, Lynch made a painting called *A Figure Witnessing the Orchestration of Time* that tackles the subject head-on. The picture submerges the viewer in a murky, turbulent field where we encounter a lost soul who seems to be ensnared in a scrap of netting that stretches across a portion of the canvas. The atmosphere is vibrating, and we’re trapped in a place that’s everywhere but nowhere. This place exists outside of time, and yet Lynch’s painting is simultaneously rooted in art history. Gustave Moreau’s 1886 portrait of the mythological figure Ganymede—which finds the figurative painter dissolving into abstraction—telegraphs a similar sense of chaos and

emergency. It’s as if both paintings, every painting, are part of an ocean of images mankind has been swimming in for centuries.

Dream logic is at home in painting. In *This Man Was Shot 0.9502 Seconds Ago*, a large work from 2004, a yellow shape labeled “spirit” leaves the body of a shooting victim and rises. The incident occurs in the empty lobby of an office building and we know we’re indoors, yet the man casts a shadow that suggests a sun beating down overhead. These sorts of impossible combinations happen in dreams, and they make perfect sense there. In *Bob Sees Himself Walking toward a Formidable Abstraction*, a diptych from 2000, a figure beneath a parachute form approaches an unwelcoming mass that could be an inscrutable monolith or a snarl of dark thoughts. The title of the painting is spelled out across the two panels in six rows of letters that function like design elements; the text feels modern, but the inexplicably creepy mood of the

FIG. 3

Gustave Moreau (1826–1898)
Ganymede, 1886
Watercolor
Musée Gustave Moreau,
Paris, photo © RMN-Grand
Palais / René-Gabriel Ojéda

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picture does not. Anyone who's seen Odilon Redon's charcoal drawing of 1878, *The Eye Like a Strange Balloon Mounts toward Infinity*, will recognize it. The unnameable feelings in both of these images have always been there quietly waiting for us; they've never not been there.

You can time travel in painting, too. Glance at Lynch's *Bob's Anti-Gravity Factory* and suddenly you're with van Gogh in Saint-Rémy, France. In 1889, van Gogh committed himself to a hospital there, and during that period he made paintings of the surrounding olive orchards that occupy exactly the same emotional terrain Lynch evokes in his painting from 2000. Both artists show us nature in a state of upheaval; we see the same churning field of roiling brown and black, the same instability.

Painting is good for deep, deep diving, and this brings us back to Francis Bacon. The job of the painter, said Bacon, is to "unlock the valves of feeling and



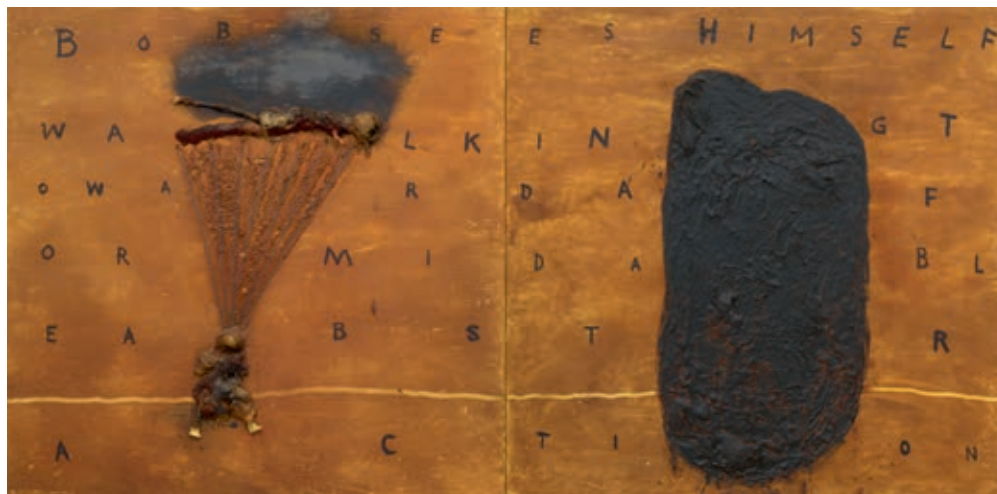
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FIG. 4
Odilon Redon (1840–1916)
The Eye Like a Strange Balloon Mounts toward Infinity, 1878
Charcoal on paper, 42.2 × 33.3 cm
Museum of Modern Art (MoMA),
New York, Gift of Larry Aldrich.
© 2018. The Museum of Modern Art,
New York / Scala, Florence

FIG. 5
David Lynch
Bob Sees Himself Walking toward a Formidable Abstraction, 2000
Oil and mixed media on canvas
167.6 × 335.3 cm

FIG. 6
David Lynch
Bob's Anti-Gravity Factory, 2000
Oil and mixed media on canvas
122.5 × 107 cm

5



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therefore return the onlooker to life more violently.” Paintings are safe containers for mayhem, and that’s certainly what Bacon used them for; he always let the wolves out to ravage and plunder in his pictures. He’s the only artist Lynch has acknowledged as a significant influence, and his presence is detectable in Lynch’s work. Bacon’s sensibility is most clearly apparent in Lynch’s early work, which mainly revolved around portraiture. As is the case with Bacon’s work, Lynch’s paintings from the 1960s employ simple vertical and horizontal lines—Bacon described this as “an armature”—that transform the canvases into proscenium stages that serve as the setting for curious occurrences. The occurrences in Lynch’s early pictures are the figures themselves. Startling creatures that seem to have emerged from loamy soil, they’re conglomerations of human limbs, animal forms, and organic growths that dissolve the boundaries that customarily distinguish one species from the next;

they depict all living things as parts of a single energy field. Stranded in sepulchral environments, the figures often appear to be traveling through terrain that’s freighted with danger. In *Gardenback*, from 1968–70, an eagle seems to have been grafted onto human legs. Growths sprout from the rounded back of this figure who walks in profile and has a breast-like mound erupting from the base of the spine.

Lynch continued to employ that armature in his pictures for several decades. *That’s Me in Front of My House*, from 1988, depicts a figure that’s no more than a head perched atop a long pair of legs striding through a nightmarish environment; the armature works here to suggest the outline of a house. Faint flashes of light pierce the dark sky, but there’s no hope lurking in the picture; it’s an image of isolation and abandonment. “The greatest art always returns you to the vulnerability of the human situation,” said Bacon, and Lynch’s art definitely does that.

FIG. 7

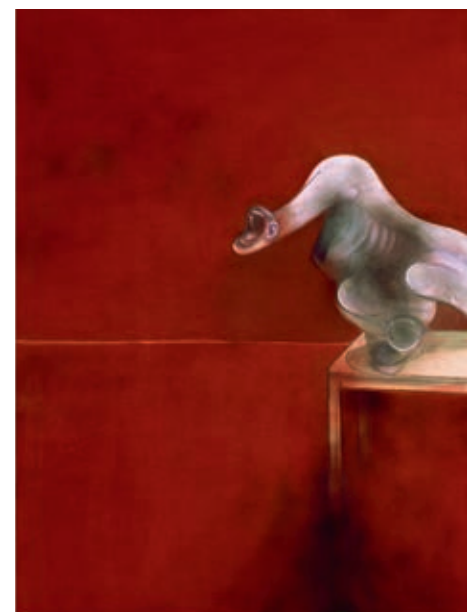
Vincent van Gogh (1853–1889)
Olive Trees, September 1889
 Oil on canvas
 Private collection, F711, JH 1791



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FIG. 8

Francis Bacon (1909–1992)
 Right panel of *Second Version of Triptych 1944*, 1988
 Oil and acrylic on canvas,
 198 × 147.5 cm
 Tate London © The Estate of Francis Bacon/DACS 2008
 ©Tate, London 2018.



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Houses are a recurring motif in Lynch's painted world, but as we all know, a house is not a home. Lynch's houses tend to be situated in bleak suburbs with smokestacks on the outskirts of town. Look at one of these houses and you hear an ominous rumble and screeching white noise, and immediately know that the only thing to do with a house like this is to escape it. In *Suddenly My House Became a Tree of Sores*, from 1990, the branches of a barren tree jut from the windows of a run-down house, and we're plunged into the charred aftermath of some kind of inferno. This is a portrait of desolation. That same suburban house shows up in *Oww God, Mom, the Dog He Bited Me*, alongside a stick figure whose head appears to have exploded. The offending dog ambles away in the lower right quadrant of the painting with a funny look in his eye. A dog? A house? A tree? They're mundane presences in the world, but in Lynch's hands they exude a sense of the uncanny. We've been in these

places and experienced these emotions on previous occasions. They feel foreign, yet deeply familiar.

Lynch has said that he sometimes draws with his eyes closed. Do we all enter the same shared space when we close our eyes? Maybe we do. Or is everyone's darkness different? Darkness and light are major themes for Lynch, and he comes at them from peculiar angles. There's rarely any identifiable light source in the images he creates, but occasionally there's *actual* light. "I love Christmas tree bulbs," Lynch has explained, "and I started putting them in my paintings." He refers here to works he made between the years 2008 and 2013, when he produced a handful of monumental pieces that incorporated electric lights. In *Boy Lights Fire*, a child with impossibly long arms, wearing red gloves and a striped T-shirt, strikes a match and four small bulbs ignite with light. The work from this period employs another extravagant strategy, too; these very large paintings are presented under

FIG. 9

David Lynch
That's Me in Front of My House, 1988
 Oil and mixed media on canvas
 167.6 × 167 cm

FIG. 10

David Lynch
Oww God, Mom, the Dog He Bited Me, 1988
 Oil and mixed media on canvas
 167.6 × 167.6 cm

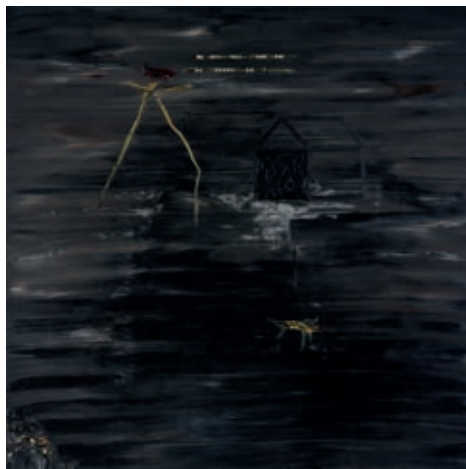
FIG. 11

David Lynch
Suddenly My House Became a Tree of Sores, 1990
 Oil and mixed media on canvas
 167.6 × 167.6 cm

9



10



11

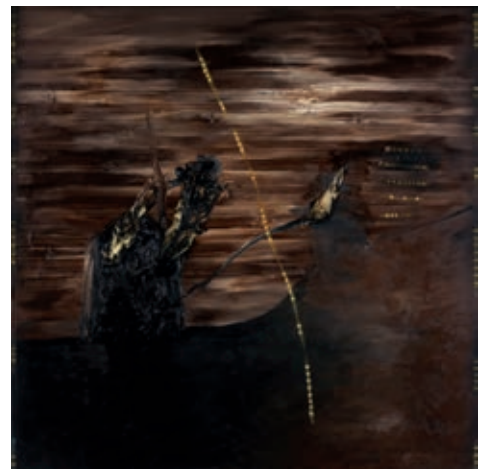


FIG. 12

Francis Bacon (1909–1992)
Chimpanzee, 1955
Oil on canvas, 152.5 × 117 cm
Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart
© The Estate of Francis Bacon/
DACS 2008 © bpk-Bildagentur

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glass in wooden frames so deep that that they're tantamount to boxes. Bacon presented his work this way too, explaining that he liked "the distance between what has been done and the onlooker that the glass creates, and the sense that this thing is shut away from the spectator." It does indeed imbue the pictures with a quality of entrapment, and transforms them into hermetic objects that resist penetration. They're closed systems.

Lynch's paintings are ostentatiously handmade. They have a clumsy, accidental quality and come across as thwarted attempts to make oneself understood; they feel *wrought* rather than painted. In his effort to communicate, Lynch often spells things out for the viewer with text that's incorporated into his images and operates in the manner of captions. When he first began using language in his paintings, in the mid-1980s, he collaged tiny letters into his canvases; the letters felt like vaguely sinister rows of small teeth.

He then began inscribing text into the paintings in crudely rendered printed letters. Like primers for confused children, the paintings often explain themselves. "Because of wayward activities based upon unproductive thinking Bob meets Mister Redman," *Mister Redman*, from 2000, tells us. We see a small figure who utters the words, "oh no," and trembles before an explosive splat of red that represents the demonic Mister Redman. "I think man now realizes that he is an accident," said Bacon, "that he is a completely futile being, that he has to play out the game without reason." Lynch's paintings echo this sentiment, but they're curiously at odds with his larger worldview, which is essentially optimistic. Perhaps painting is where he goes to purge the darkness.

In 2012, Lynch made several mixed-media paintings—*Boy's Night Out*, *Duckman's Injury*, *Two-Tongue Johnnie*—that incorporate figures fashioned out of the polymer modeling clay Sculpey. Given a cursory

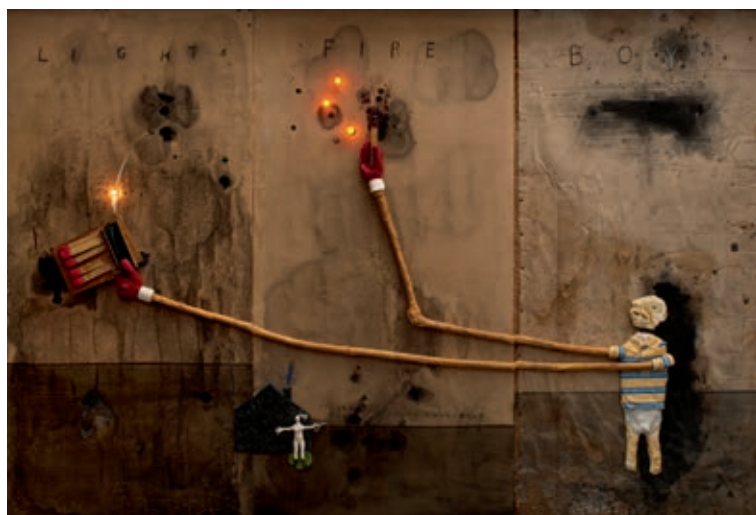
FIG. 13
David Lynch
Boy Lights Fire, 2010
Mixed media on cardboard
182.9 × 274.3 cm

FIG. 14
David Lynch
Mister Redman, 2000
Oil and mixed media on canvas
163 × 203.5 cm

FIG. 15
David Lynch
Duckman's Injury, 2012
Mixed media on panel
78.7 × 68.6 cm

FIG. 16
David Lynch
Two-Tongue Johnnie, 2012
Mixed media on panel
78.7 × 68.6 cm

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glance these pieces feel playful, like diabolical toys, but they're about as playful as *Saturn Devouring His Son*, an unforgettable image Francisco Goya painted on his dining room wall when he was seventy-three years old. The works share the same emotional temperature; something horrific is transpiring. The world shuddered at unspeakable acts of violence two centuries ago, and it still shudders today.

Our relationship with that violence remains the same, too. In Lynch's paintings we repeatedly encounter Bob, the hapless everyman at the mercy of a universe that keeps reminding him that nobody can make anything happen. The world unfurls as it will, regardless of the longings of its inhabitants. Life happens through us, not because of us.



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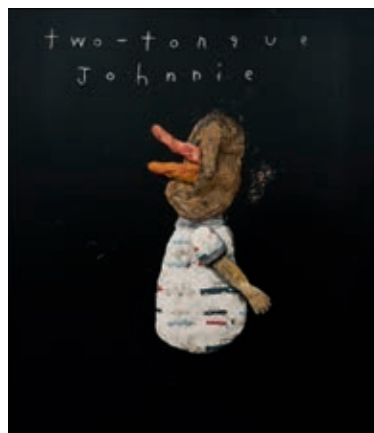
FIG. 17

Francisco de Goya (1746–1828)
Saturn Devouring His Son, 1821–23
 Oil on wall, transferred to canvas
 143.5 × 81.4 cm, Prado, Madrid
 © 2018. Museo Nacional del Prado
 © Photo MNP / Scala, Florence

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(*) All Francis Bacon quotes are from *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, by David Sylvester, Thames and Hudson, first published in the United States in 1981, expanded edition in 1987.

(**) All quotes by David Lynch are from conversations with the author, 1980–2018.





DISTANT DOORWAYS AND NIGHT TRUTHS OF THE WORLD

MICHAEL CHABON

David Lynch's first feature film, *Eraserhead*, blew my seventeen-year-old mind the first time I saw it, at a midnight showing at the Pittsburgh Playhouse in early 1981, in ways that I have yet to recover from. *Twin Peaks* forever rewired the circuitry of the apparatus I use to scan and interpret American life. And I'm just going to totally nerd out a lot of people, when I confess that I have seen Lynch's 1984 adaptation of one of my favorite novels, Frank Herbert's *Dune*, at least five times, and have never failed to totally dig it.

To see what is in front of one's nose, George Orwell said, needs a constant struggle. Think about that. *To see what is in front of one's nose needs a constant struggle*. The human mind—that ancient, dubious assemblage of learned and inherent biases, habits of sensory triage, and cognitive rules of thumb—has been so traumatized by the unremitting grim truths of evolutionary and human history, perhaps, or so contrived by the mocking hand of a cruel god, as to become resistant to truth. It's because of this doubtful gift of being able to wish away and ignore the cold, hard, cheerless facts of existence that, as individuals and as nations, we are continually

surprised by calamities, defeats, and disasters that in hindsight ought to have been—were—obvious all along. When the ice caps melt, and the lowlands flood, and species collapse, and Earth turns inhospitable, those who survive will look back and say, *How could they have missed this? How could they not have known? Wasn't it obvious?* And the answer, of course, will be: It needs a constant struggle to see what is in front of one's nose. *A constant struggle*: Who has the strength, or the time, for that? Those among us who are equal to that struggle we call “prophets,” and in general we treat such people very shabbily.

And that's just when it comes to what's right in front of your nose—the plain truths, the indisputable data, the behaviors that speak for themselves. If even seeing those things requires constant struggle, what about the *ambiguities*? Let's say you step up, as a concerned citizen and devotee of truth and lover of humankind, to undertake the constant struggle of seeing what is right in front of your nose. What about the hidden truths, the buried drives and desires? The things that lie beyond distant doorways, behind the curtains of dreams, deep in the sea-bottoms of memory? Who's going to see all that, while you're busy looking just past the Orwellian tip of your nose?

Over the past half century, no one has taken a harder, clearer look beyond those doors, behind those curtains, and into those deep oceans than David Lynch. “My childhood,” Lynch has famously said, “was elegant homes, tree-lined streets, the milkman, building backyard forts, droning airplanes, blue skies, picket fences, green grass, cherry trees. Middle America as it's supposed to be. But on the cherry tree there's this pitch oozing out—some black, some yellow—and millions of red ants crawling all over it. I discovered that if one looks a little closer at this beautiful world, there are always red ants underneath.”

To see the ooze and the swarm: the weird in the everyday, the horror just beneath the ordinary surface of things, the freak show in the supermarket, and, even more powerfully, to find dark beauty in that freakiness and horror—I want to extend Orwell's dictum and say that this, too, needs a constant struggle. And yet that isn't really true. Moments when we manage to see what is in front of our noses—the degree to which our strongest beliefs are based on wishes and fears, or the racism and misogyny that undergird our most powerful institutions—are rare, and hard-won. Some of us never manage those moments at all. But each of us—even those who might walk past that cherry tree a hundred times and never see the raging boil of ants, even those who try to maintain a healthy distance between ourselves and the freaks and the horrors—every single one of us slips into the weird, easily, helplessly, with astonishing freedom, every single night of our lives, with no struggle at all.

“In dreams,” as Roy Orbison sings, so memorably, on the soundtrack of *Blue Velvet*. In our nightly dreams—our weird, dark, beautiful, freaky, and horrifying dreams—we are all David Lynch, our gazes unflinching and patient and curious, dispassionate, uncensoring, reporting without judgment or reservation on the blue-velvet violence of our thoughts and the deeply strange organ that thinks them. In dreams, once we've been visited, as Orbison horrifyingly and Lynchquely put it, by that candy-colored clown they call the sandman, we all gaze without flinching through the sea-depths of our darkest fears and wishes, behind the curtains and doorways of the daytime rationalizations and evasions and taboos.

That part's easy; the struggle comes when someone tries to wrestle those truths, the night truths, into the light. I'm not talking about the use of forced perspective, Dutch angles, overreliance on dwarfs and shadow puppets and talking animals and all the other conventions that artists—including David Lynch—have employed over the years in an ultimately doomed attempt to capture the “dreaminess” of dreams. To be honest, I kind of hate that stuff. I'm the kind who fast-forwards through dream sequences in movies and skips to the end of dream paragraphs in books. All that is easy enough, too. The truth of a dream is not its dreamlike quality: the truth of a dream is a tree bleeding ants through a gaping wound. It is, in other words, the truth right in front of our noses, which often enough we can't see not because of our vanity or self-delusion or fear but for the simple reason that we go through life with our eyes closed. We call the people who remind us to open our eyes “artists,” and in general we don't treat them a whole lot better than we do our prophets.

Lynch is an artist who for the past forty years has been opening our eyes and aiming our gazes to the night truths of the world, to the truth of your dreams, violent and dark and beautiful as that truth may be.



PHENOMENA OF
THE IMAGINATION
ON DAVID LYNCH'S
PAINTING

PETRA GILOY-HIRTZ

An eerie place, nighttime, gloom, spindly figures, a ghostly house, empty streets, a lone tree. Something threatening in the air. Strange beings, chimeras, little monsters, a man with an animal head. One could become frightened, or at least uneasy in the face of these images, as born of a dream or a nightmare: “Some kind of otherworldliness,”¹ “fringelands,” “a world that’s neither here nor there,” “people ... struggling in darkness.”² With a delight in mystery, riddles, and a certain ugliness, David Lynch’s aesthetics of disorder, darkness, isolation, and imminent doom, at times bizarre and grotesque.

Those scenarios are not taken from his films; they are David Lynch’s paintings. In oil, on canvas, cardboard, or wooden panels, thick layers of paint with his handprint on the surface, with sculptural mixed media embedded within them: cheap materials, found objects—a piece of wire or wood, draped fabrics, a tube bent to form words, light bulbs, glass eyes. The act of painting has its own dynamics, seemingly following the painter’s intuition rather than any precise idea, sometimes an “uncontrolled” process in which “accidents and strange things happen.”³ Sometimes the images are converted into three-dimensional objects, glass placed in heavy frames and lit with flickering light.

Only fairly recently has a broader public become aware that David Lynch—to whose perception of the world and whose imagination and creativity we owe some of the most exciting films of our time—is not only a director, screenwriter, producer, and occasional actor, but also a musician, designer, photographer, and an artist who has created paintings, drawings, lithographs, and sculptures over the space of five decades. The films, cultic for many, have long overshadowed everything and attracted the most attention. When his painting as well as his photography have been seen and “read,” it has been mostly through the medium of his films, by way of comparison and in search of parallels. What an enterprise, therefore, to showcase David Lynch’s complete work, his total universe, with space devoted to the other art forms. Of course, they are all related in spirit, drawing from the same fund of imagination, passion, and experience—but how singular in their respective physical manifestations, and how exciting on close examination. The exhibition at the Bonnefantenmuseum presents approximately forty paintings, plus as many drawings, dating from the late 1980s to 2012.

THE ART LIFE JUST BEFORE MY EYES

Everything started with painting. Already as a very young man, David Lynch was gripped by the idea of being a painter. That painting could be a profession, what a surprise! His schoolmate Toby had told him his father, Bushnell Keeler, was a painter. On visiting Keeler’s studio in Georgetown, a whole world opened up to Lynch: this was a traditional studio, “so beautiful,” the order, the smell, the colors, everything. And this became the vision for his own way of life, the “happiness of working and living that life.”⁴ As if possessed, he painted during every free minute in a room Keeler made available to him. On graduating, Lynch traveled to Europe with his friend Jack Fisk to take lessons from Oskar Kokoschka—Lux Feininger, Lyonel Feininger’s son, with whom Lynch studied for a short time in Boston, had recommended him—but after two weeks (instead of the originally planned two years) he returned home—the course in Salzburg had been cancelled—and began studying painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA) in Philadelphia in 1965. “It was thrilling to live the art life in Philadelphia at that time.... Philadelphia was what started it. It was so good for me.”⁵ Lynch developed his own style there: “He suddenly started doing very dark things. Big, black canvases.”⁶

In Philadelphia he also discovered film—starting from painting. “That idea stuck in my head”: “A moving painting (but with scent) ... it was an almost all-black painting. And it had a figure in it, and the figure was in the center of the canvas,” he relates. “So, I am looking at this figure in the painting, and I hear a little wind, and see a little movement. And I had a wish that the painting would really be able to move, you know, some little bit. And that was it.”⁷ *Six Men Getting Sick*, this multimedia work from 1967, a sculptural painting under a moving projection, was Lynch’s first step toward his videos and films. He moved to Los Angeles and his first film, *Eraserhead* (1977), became a cult classic. There followed *The Elephant Man* (1980), *Blue Velvet* (1986), and *Mulholland Drive* (2001), all resulting in Oscar nominations for Best Director; also *Dune* (1984), *Wild at Heart* (1990), *Lost Highway* (1997), *The Straight Story* (1999), *Inland Empire* (2006), and the television series *Twin Peaks* (1990–91). He has won multiple awards including France’s César Award for Best Foreign Film, the Palme d’Or at Cannes, and the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Film Festival.

And painting? David Lynch loves painting and it has accompanied him throughout his life. His works have been shown in several museum exhibitions, especially in recent years: at the Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, Paris, under the title *The Air is on Fire* (2007); at the Max Ernst Museum, Brühl, Germany, as *Dark Splendor* (2009–10); at the Centre of Contemporary Art in Toruń, Poland, as *Silence and Dynamism* (2017). His first major museum exhibition in

the United States, with paintings and drawings from 1965 to 2014, was held at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, under the title *The Unified Field*.

THERE IS A LITTLE STORY IN MY MIND

Storytelling is what drives David Lynch. It is manifestly what prompted him to exceed the limitations of painting through film and to unfold the narrative potential in the cinematic medium. But he returns to painting and remains devotedly faithful to it—because he succeeds, one can surmise, in imparting to the static image a dimension of movement, to initiate narrative sequences in the suspension of time—if not in the image itself, then in the mind of the spectator. “Your mind can travel in there and dream.”⁸ Mysterious titles help here, such as *Rock with Seven Eyes* (“This is one of my favorite paintings.”⁹), *The Riddle of the Mountain Dream*, or philosophically charged ones such as *The Duality of Nature*, *A Figure Witnessing the Orchestration of Time*, and others directly related to the plot: *Boy Lights Fire*, *This Man Was Shot 0.9502 Seconds Ago*, *Pete Goes to His Girlfriend’s House*. Some paintings appear like a “series” of short stories, with Bob as the protagonist: *Bob Burns Tree*, *Bob Loves Sally Until She is Blue in the Face*, *Bob Finds Himself in a World For Which He Has No Understanding*, *Bob’s Second Dream*, *Bob’s Anti-Gravity Factory*. “With these paintings, I’m really interested in a story—not a long one. But the paintings have a story. There are things to look at, and hopefully you go out on a thought or a dream.”¹⁰ To reinforce the narrative momentum, Lynch also uses the medium of language, writing words into the picture, casually throwing his gawky letters over the entire picture surface. “The words in the paintings are sometimes important to make you start thinking about what else is going on in there. And a lot of times, the words excite me as shapes, and something’ll grow out of that.”¹¹ “A person with a non-verbal nature,”¹² as Lynch has often been called, uses speech to deepen the content of the painting, in a cartoon-like, humorous way, as for example in *Mister Redman*; there we find in the picture the words “Because of wayward activity based upon unproductive thinking Bob meets Mister Redman—oh no.” “Lynch’s images and text ... are always vibrating against each other in unusual ways to create new meanings for the viewer.”¹³

“Storytelling”: the pictures produce spaces of memory, strange dwellings, hauntedness, spectacles, moods—like dream sequences in which the familiar and well known turns alien and threatening. As in hallucinations, logic and proportion are suspended. Dark colors—black, brown, all the nuances of earth—and bright contours contrasting with this opaque depth serve to ignite the viewer’s imagination. “The more you throw black into a color, the more dreamy it gets,”¹⁴ Lynch says; and elsewhere: “And in this ink, this black,

there’s a child of magic. When you don’t know something completely, the imagination kicks in, a dream can kick in. Sometimes, things are lost in the black, and you start imagining, and a story starts coming out.”¹⁵

As a “setting for the narrative” is how Lynch also sees his *Factory Photographs*, the black-and-white photographs of factories in and around Berlin, in Poland, New York City, New Jersey, and England that he has produced over decades. Of course, they are also a historical record, passing on what has survived of the Industrial Revolution. “You are witnessing a dead body and watching nature bring it back to the elements.”¹⁶ But they do not reflect a scientific interest, unlike the documentation of industrial buildings and machinery by other contemporary photographers. Here again Lynch is searching rather for the magic place: shadowy realms, abandoned and uninhabited wastelands, gloomy interiors, bizarre details, burnt out and silent, uncomfortably suggestive—hideaways, caves, tunnels, glimpses diagonally upward into roof ridges and attics, down stairways into dungeons and up stairways into dark rooms, barred windows. Everything seems to carry meaning. Whether romantically enchanted or threatening, something can happen at any time. Everything seems possible in Lynch’s “individual narratives,” which fail to obey the laws of a perfect, highly engineered world. “I just like going into strange worlds.”¹⁷

MEMORY OF A HEAD: DANCING SACK OF DREAMS

From what sources does David Lynch find inspiration for the motifs and storylines of his painting? How does the emotional density and empathy that in its most abstruse variations it elicits from the observer come about? According to Lynch, ideas are nourished by memory. He talks of his childhood: the little world as the humus in which the imagination can thrive—“a few blocks, huge worlds are in these two blocks, everything is in here!”—the pleasure of playing, the rituals of everyday life, unforgettable, marking one’s whole life. Memories of the mother who did not buy him coloring books (but did for his brother!) so as not to kill his creativity; of sitting in a puddle modeling with mud (this playfulness and the pleasure of touch have remained with Lynch, as we see when he spreads the thick color onto the canvas with his hand in the open air). Lynch’s childhood memories are happy ones, without the damage and neurosis that many other artists use their works to exorcise. He comes from a “super happy household”: “I had tremendous freedom, a foundation of love.” With Boise, Idaho, the idyllic American small town, he connects “sunshine, green grass, such a cheerful place.” And yet he has to say goodbye, to the house, to the tree, to the neighbors: the loss of the happy place brings abdominal cramps, “total turmoil.” Virginia was for him “living in hell,” “dark fantastic

dreams,” “drinking,” “smoking,” bad friends, hating the school. Disturbing episodes, including meeting on the street, as in a bizarre dream, and holding his little brother by the hand, a naked woman, who, it seemed, had been the victim of violence: “very mysterious.”¹⁸ Those childhood experiences are mirrored in the titles of his works: *She Wasn't Fooling Anyone*, *She Was Hurt and She Was Hurt Bad*; *Oww God, Mom*, *The Dog He Bited Me*; *Things I Learned in School*; *Boise Idaho*; *That's Me in Front of My House*.

The events and emotions of everyday life provide the fuel for Lynch's imagination: the influence of his father—“a research scientist, he was looking into things ... he always was building things ... fix it. This goes into your brain, makes all this work really fun”;¹⁹ the experience of being alone for the first time after his father had driven him to college in Philadelphia—for two long weeks he did not leave his apartment. Chris Rodley speaks of “early urban panic,”²⁰ agoraphobia. Put differently: Lynch prefers to be in his own world, “in my world.” This is constituted by his curiosity to discover the secrets of the world through experiments in the dim light of the damp cellar: How does a dead bird decompose, how can an insect be disassembled, how many legs does it have? That interests him. He visits an undertaker: “it was strange,” with only corpses around him. The encounters with the insane woman in his neighborhood engage him: “makes you think of stories.” “A lot of times you'll see houses, as you go by, slowly by, and you wonder what goes on in them in the daytime or what goes on them in the nighttime.”²¹

YOU DO NOT NEED ANYTHING OUTSIDE THE WORK

David Lynch has always refused to interpret his own work. Whether those childhood “key experiences” actually reveal the intimacy of his sensations or are themselves inventions and constructions is immaterial. “They're (again) based on ideas not necessarily my stories.”²² What applies to his films applies even more to his painting: “He prefers to show, rather than explain, to feel rather than prescribe.”²³ Lynch mentions the book *The Art Spirit*, consisting of philosophical reflections on nature and the purpose of art by painter and theorist Robert Henri, a rebel against academicism and the idealization found in classical painting, who studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1886. Bushnell Keeler had given the book to him: “that sort of became my Bible.” Lynch mentions Francis Bacon: “Francis Bacon is, to me, the main guy, the number one kinda hero painter.... But for just the *thrill* of standing in front of a painting.”²⁴ “Edward Hopper is another guy I love.”²⁵ And Franz Kafka, no surprise, “the one artist that I feel could be my brother.”²⁶

For the observer, associations develop from what has already been seen and their perception adapts what is to be understood to what has previously been understood. Symbolism! Surrealism! Expressionism! Cubism! “The tragic tradition of European Modernism”!²⁷ Werner Spies has referred in a scholarly article to a multiplicity of associations: to Wols, Antonin Artaud, and Alberto Giacometti, among many others; to the context of the 1960s and 1970s with the “Combine” paintings of Robert Rauschenberg, Jim Dine, Jasper Johns; to Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Luis Buñuel; to Pablo Picasso, Edward Kienholz, Wassily Kandinsky, and Kazimir Malevich.²⁸ This list could be complemented by painting from the 1950s, with reference to elements found in Antoni Tàpies, or to the 1980s, which, following after Conceptualism and Minimalism, restored figurative art to center stage and allowed previously exiled emotion, pathos, and experiences of everyday life, or the observation of one's own body, to become sources of inspiration: “wild,” spontaneous, obsessive, rough, irritating, dynamic, and self-consciously amateurish. For some, the lingering of time within the narrative flow in Lynch's paintings may recall Balthus's cinematographic arrangements, his Paris street scenes, his boudoir or salon interiors, their intermingling of reality and dream, of calm and extreme tension. The same may be said in reference to Edward Hopper's night scenes, in which action is reduced to a minimum, heavy with the intuition of what is to come. Against the background of the many aesthetic currents of his time and with his knowledge of twentieth-century art, David Lynch paints his own vision. His paintings, produced over the years, are interrelated, they bear his authentic signature, which lends them a certain timelessness and makes precise dating unimportant.

THICK FEAR IN THE AIR

These are not the big issues. “Some people ... their mind thinks over thousands of miles, big problems and big situations. That just completely leaves me cold. I can't get there. I like to think about a neighborhood—like a fence, like a ditch, and somebody digging a hole, and then, a girl in this house, and a tree, and what's happening in that tree—a little local place that I can get into. The two are really the same: it's all based on human nature and the same sorts of things.”²⁹ But the big is contained in the little: “I saw life in extreme close-ups.”³⁰ Already a garden is for Lynch an all-encompassing cosmos: “here is a lot of slaughter and death, disease, worms, grubs, ants.”³¹ And what does the viewer see?! The phenomena in the images, the “uncanny,” claustrophobic and labyrinthine, ambiguity, the dissociation of the ego—*My Head is Disconnected*, *Schizophrenic Man*, *With Myself*—reveal not only (possible) individual psychological impulses, are not merely subjective confessions and

the stuff of small stories. The dismantling of the idyll, the exposing of a peaceful neighborhood as an illusion, the aggression and oppression in the images reflect the threats inherent within social and political life. They say something about the world around us, when disaster strikes like lightning from above, fire engulfs the building, an oversize insect approaches the home malevolently, and a hand rises apotropaically. Creating images of harm and attempts to banish it: *angst* fantasies, as handed down in the literatures and pictorial worlds of many cultures over centuries and deeply rooted in the collective memory. But fear and violence are not simply manifestations of the imagination, they are social reality. “Thick fear in the air,” Lynch had described the mood in Philadelphia, “feeling of sickness, corruption, racial hatred.”³² That too is in his pictures: the state in which the world finds itself. “I find it very difficult to understand what is going on these days.”³³

- (1) David Lynch, in *David Lynch: The Art Life*, dir. Jon Nguyen et al., Dux Diver Films, 2016. Quotations where the source is not mentioned are from this documentary, which is dedicated to the memory of David Lynch’s youngest daughter.
- (2) David Lynch, in Chris Rodley, ed., *Lynch on Lynch*, New York 1997; rev. ed. 2005, pp. 55–56.
- (3) *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- (4) Lynch, in *The Art Life*.
- (5) *Ibid.*
- (6) Lynch, in Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, p. 32.
- (7) *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- (8) David Lynch, in Paul Young, “Talking Art: Wild at Art, Interview with David Lynch,” *Buzz Inc.*, 1993.
- (9) Lynch, in *The Art Life*.
- (10) David Lynch, as told to Stephanie Snyder, *Artforum.com*, November 20, 2009, <https://www.artforum.com/interviews/david-lynch-discusses-his-exhibition-in-santa-monica-24199>.
- (11) Lynch, in Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, p. 110.
- (12) *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- (13) Brett Littman, *David Lynch: Naming*, exh. cat. Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles, 2014, p. 9.
- (14) Lynch, in Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, p. 20.
- (15) David Lynch, in Dominique Païni, “The Magic of the Stones: Interview with David Lynch,” in *David Lynch: Lithos, 2007–2009*, ed. Patrice Forest, Ostfildern, 2010, p. 16.
- (16) David Lynch, in Petra Giloy-Hirtz, “A Conversation with David Lynch,” in Petra Giloy-Hirtz, *David Lynch: The Factory Photographs*, exh. cat. The Photographers’ Gallery, London; MAST, Bologna, Munich et al., 2014, p. 14.
- (17) David Lynch, in “Conversation with Kristine McKenna,” in *David Lynch: The Air is on Fire*, exh. cat. Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, Paris, Göttingen, 2007, p. 28.
- (18) Lynch, in *The Art Life*.
- (19) *Ibid.*
- (20) Lynch, in Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*.
- (21) Lynch, in *The Art Life*.
- (22) *Ibid.*
- (23) Lynch, in Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, p. xi.
- (24) *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- (25) *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- (26) *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- (27) Boris Groys, “On the Art of David Lynch: A Conversation between Boris Groys and Andrei Ujica,” November 20, 2006, in *The Air is on Fire*, p. 181.
- (28) Werner Spies, “Dark Splendor—David der Maler,” in *David Lynch: Dark Splendor*, ed. Werner Spies, exh. cat. Max Ernst Museum, Brühl, Ostfildern, 2009, pp. 22, 32–33.
- (29) Lynch, in Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, p. 10.
- (30) *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- (31) *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- (32) Lynch, in *The Art Life*.
- (33) This is the title of a 2009 lithograph by David Lynch.



DARK MATTERS

STIJN HUIJTS

“THERE ARE MORE THINGS IN
HEAVEN AND EARTH, HORATIO,
THAN ARE DREAMT OF IN YOUR
PHILOSOPHY.”¹

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

“THAT THERE IS MORE GOING
ON THAN MEETS THE EYE IS
A THRILLING THING.”²

DAVID LYNCH

FIG. 1

Still from *Twin Peaks: The Return*
18-episode television show
Mark Frost and David Lynch, 2017

FIG. 2

Robert Henri
The Art Spirit
Stellar Classics, 2013

1



SCIENCE

Since mid-2017, the Gran Sasso laboratory in the Italian Abruzzo has been home to the Xenon1T, an underground superdetector with which physicists are trying—so far in vain—to trace particles of dark matter. Scientists believe that the universe consists of just 5 percent of ordinary, visible matter. The other 95 percent is made up of dark energy and dark matter, invisible, hypothetical substances whose existence has never been demonstrated.

At about the same time as the Xenon1T was commissioned in Italy, David Lynch launched world-wide *Twin Peaks: The Return*, the enigmatic “third season” of the legendary television series that, in the early 1990s, turned the conventions of television upside down and kept millions of viewers tethered to the screen. My mind turned involuntarily to the Xenon1T when watching the first episode of the new *Twin Peaks*. In it, a young man in an apartment high up in a New York tower block watches a large, empty glass box, connected to the outside world through a hole in the wall. He tells a girlfriend, whom he has smuggled in against the rules, that this is a mysterious scientific experiment in which several cameras take snapshots of the glass box at intervals. The young man’s task consists of changing the data cards with the recordings and storing them in a safe. As soon as the young couple make love, the Lynchian variant of the Xenon1T fills with a black substance in which a ghost-like figure becomes visible, who later breaks through the glass wall of the cube and puts a bloody end to the amorous adventure.

The idea that reality consists only in a small part of ordinary, visible matter has over time occupied both scientists and artists. Leonardo da Vinci believed nature to be full of countless phenomena that have never been part of human experience,³ a concept that Shakespeare echoed a hundred years later in the famous words quoted above that Hamlet addresses to his friend Horatio. And a few centuries later, French artist Odilon Redon speaks in one of his posthumously published writings of “attraction, the whole evocation, and the whole enticement of the uncertain within the confines of thought.”⁴

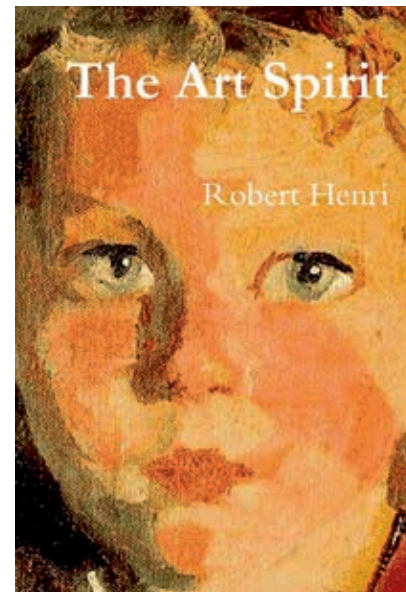
David Lynch himself has commented more than once on the similarities between the artist’s and the scientist’s approach to the world: “I learned that just beneath the surface there’s another world, and still different worlds if you dig deeper. I knew it as a kid, but I couldn’t find the proof. It was just a feeling. There is goodness in blue skies and flowers, but another force—a wild pain and decay—also accompanies everything. Like with scientists: they start on the surface of something, and then they start delving. They get down to the subatomic particles and their world is now very abstract. They’re like abstract painters in a way.”⁵

Philosophizing on the interfaces between Vedic science and modern natural science, Lynch outlines in a chapter of his little book *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity* the similarities between the quantum physics concept of the “unified field” and the “ocean of pure consciousness” that Maharishi Mahesh Yogi speaks about.⁶ While in quantum theory the concept of the “unified field” was not introduced until the 1970s, according to Lynch, Vedic science has always known about this field, which is the “unity of all the particles and all the forces of creation,... a field of pure consciousness, unbounded eternal ocean of consciousness at the base of all matter and mind.”⁷ Thus the “unified field” can serve as a metaphor for the all-encompassing links between the physical and the virtual worlds. This parallel is illustrative of the way in which everything in Lynch’s world is interconnected, and the practices of art and meditation flow holistically into each other. An art that in its essence is multidisciplinary, a “unified field” of painting, film, music, photography, drawing, sculpture, and installation.

ARTIST

An important catalyst in the development of that art practice was Lynch’s introduction—at age fourteen—to the painter Bushnell Keeler (1924–2012), the father of his childhood friend Toby Keeler. Bushnell Keeler put him on the trail of the book *The Art Spirit* by Robert Henri (1865–1929), a painter who taught at the New York School of Art in the first decades of the twentieth century. One of Henri’s students at the art school was Edward Hopper (1882–1967), who studied with Henri from 1903 to 1906 and spoke of him as the teacher who influenced him most: “Henri was the most influential teacher I had.... Henri was a magnetic teacher.”⁸

2



Henri's textbook *The Art Spirit* became for Lynch a kind of bible, providing not only practical guidelines for painting but also a collection of reflections and advice of a philosophical nature, and thus a key to the essence of what being an artist is all about.⁹ *The Art Spirit* is still a readable book almost a hundred years after its appearance. A salient thesis of Henri's is that every person is an artist to some degree, a concept with which he anticipates Joseph Beuys by fifty years.¹⁰ More relevant to my argument, however, is the way Henri's ideas resonate in the poetical views Lynch has developed in the course of his career as an artist.

For example, in *The Art Spirit* Henri talks about the need for an artist to be in contact with the deeper layers of consciousness, with another, extra dimension of reality: "I am certain that we do deal in an unconscious way with another dimension than the well-known three. It does not matter to me now if it's the fourth dimension or what its number is, but I know that deep in us there is always a grasp of proportions which exist over and through the obvious three, and it is by this power of super-proportioning that we reach the inner meaning of things."¹¹ Such a quotation can be associated not just with the "spirit" of art but also with spirituality in general, and given his preoccupation with Transcendental Meditation it is almost as if Lynch himself is speaking here.

Be that as it may, being introduced to Bushnell Keeler's painting studio and to Robert Henri's book *The Art Spirit* made Lynch realize that art was his vocation, and that the only life he wanted to lead was "the art life." In the 2016 documentary of the same name he describes the attraction that such a life had on him: "You drink coffee, you smoke cigarettes, and you paint. And that's it. Maybe girls come into it a little bit, but basically it is the incredible happiness of working and living that life."¹²

LIFE IN DARKNESS AND CONFUSION

That bliss of working and living as an artist does not alter the fact that in many of the creations that Lynch has brought into the world, a dark, sinister atmosphere predominates. "Lynch's work resides in the complicated zone where the beautiful and the condemned collide," writes Kristine McKenna in the 2018 biography/memoir *Room to Dream*.¹³ She describes how Lynch's fascination with the subliminal, dark dimensions of existence originated in his childhood, in the 1950s. This was the period that provided the model for "the American dream," but young Lynch developed a special antenna for the unknown forces that lurked beneath the veneer of innocence and goodness, and for the hidden sexuality with which everything seemed to be charged, a dualism that would become a kind of cornerstone of his artistic oeuvre.¹⁴ Lynch has always managed to keep that child

alive: "I feel between nine and seventeen most of the time, and sometimes around six! Darkness has crept in since then. The darkness is realizations about the world and human nature and my own nature, all combined into one ball of sludge."¹⁵

This preoccupation with the dark and mysterious sides of existence is immediately reflected in the material aspects of Lynch's visual work, and he has remained very consistent here over the years. His palette is dark, with lots of blacks, grays, and browns, colors reminiscent of ash, mud, solidified blood, flesh, and feces. The reason he hardly uses any color is to be sought in the fact that color inhibits his imagination: "Color to me is too real. It's limiting. It doesn't allow too much of a dream. The more you throw black into a color, the more dreamy it gets."¹⁶

In a physical sense, Lynch's paintings are unmistakably "dark matter." They usually come about in an intuitive, organic way, in which chance plays an important role and the artist is happy to be led by the unexpected and uncontrollable impulses that arise during the creative process. There can therefore be no question of a preconceived plan: "I admire people who have an idea and then paint that idea. That could never, ever happen to me. And I don't know why that is. As soon as I start, it immediately becomes something else."¹⁷ For Lynch, texture is an essential aspect of a painting's materiality. Instead of brushes he prefers to use his fingers, trying as much as possible to make the organic quality of paint come into its own, so that nature also gets a voice in the painting: "I like bad painting, I like organic phenomenon [*sic*], I like nature to help me as much as anything, I like fire and smoke, I would like to bite my paintings."¹⁸ These statements also seem to underline how much the child in Lynch has remained alive, as if that early childhood memory he describes in the documentary *The Art Life*, of sitting in a mud pool with a friend on a hot summer's afternoon, is still a reality.¹⁹

Notwithstanding the frightening and dark atmosphere of the works, there is also the necessary relativization. With Lynch, dark forces and humor can go hand in hand, as can the desire for things that give you the creeps and the pursuit of enlightenment, but in the end there can be no misunderstanding about the dominant theme: "The paintings have a fearful mood, but there's humor in them too. But ultimately, I guess the central idea is, you know, life in darkness and confusion."²⁰

A HOUSE IS NOT ALWAYS A HOME

In a narrative way too, Lynch's visual work is anything but cheerful and entertaining. Predominant in his figuration is an atmosphere of fear and threat and of "wild pain and decay that lurk beneath the surface of things."²¹ The human bodies that appear in the works are consistently deformed, mutilated, and incomplete, reinforcing the sense of horror and disgust.

The development of this figuration in the series of photomontages entitled *Distorted Nudes* is reminiscent of the way Surrealists frequently portrayed beautiful but anatomically deformed women's bodies.²²

Lynch's narratives often feature houses—houses that are threatened from outside or from inside by someone or something; by whom or what is never completely clear. What is clear is that a house usually symbolizes family happiness and security, and that nothing has a greater impact than a (threatening) disruption of the domestic idyll: "We know that things are going on. Not in every house, but enough. Things that we can't even imagine are going on."²³ And: "People feel that outside the house—unfortunately, even *inside* the house in a lot of cases—there are problems to be dealt with. And they're not going to go away with wishful thinking."²⁴ It is a theme that is eminently part of the Lynchian universe, in which everything revolves around the dualism of light and dark that dominates our lives.

Threat is also reflected in the titles of the lithographs and paintings, which in many cases pick up texts that Lynch has included in the works themselves. Examples include *Shadow of a Twisted Hand Across My House*, *Someone is in my House*, *Pete Goes to His*

Girlfriend's House, *Going to Visit Ur House*, *House Burning with Dead Man*, *Red Man Does Magic Near His House*, and *Who Is In My House*. Domestic tensions and problems also play a prominent role in the comic strip entitled *The Angriest Dog in the World*, published weekly from 1983 to 1992 in the *Los Angeles Reader* and elsewhere. Leashed in the garden, the extremely angry dog, raging with fury, listens to the quasi-philosophical, at times disturbing monologues and dialogues taking place in his master's house. Here Lynch uses humor to bring the same theme into the spotlight.

And with Lynch, even something as seemingly innocent as a snowman can become a loaded subject. In the photo series of the various snowmen he found in the front gardens of houses in Boise, Idaho, where he spent part of his youth, there is a mysterious tension, partly because the children who must have made the snowmen are nowhere to be seen. The spectator is left with an indefinable feeling and all kinds of questions about what is taking place behind the front walls of the houses. The subject and the location of the photo series leave no doubt that Lynch is also referring back here to experiences from his early youth, as also expressed in *Room to Dream* when he talks about

FIG. 3
David Lynch
Snowman #14, 1993
Archival gelatin-silver print
28 × 35.5 cm



being out after dark, going around on his bike: “Some houses had lights on inside that were kind of warm, or I knew the people who lived in the house. Other houses, the lights were dim, and with some houses they were almost out and I didn’t know the people who lived there. I’d get a feeling from these houses of stuff going on that wasn’t happy.”²⁵

FINAL CUT

While many people have trouble with the dark side of their psyche, Lynch seems to see precisely the positive side of this: “The more darkness you can gather up, the more light you can see too.”²⁶ In short, dark matters in David Lynch’s world, and not only in a negative sense. What counts for him is that the different dimensions of existence, including the dark and mysterious, are seamlessly connected, and that both his art and his daily dedication to Transcendental Meditation enable him to convert the negative energy into positive, and get rid of what he calls “the suffocating rubber clown suit of negativity.”²⁷ That probably explains why everyone who gets to know him experiences Lynch as a captivating, cheerful, and sunny personality.

The strength of Lynch’s multifaceted oeuvre lies in the fact that he chose to live the art life at an early age and always remained faithful to it. The bottom line is that in everything he does he works as a painter, and with no concessions. Just as when painting he has complete control over his work, he is equally uncompromising in demanding the “final cut” when making a film. Also when he takes photographs, makes furniture, or produces music, the artist Lynch is always *in*

control. This uncompromising attitude explains the exceptional consistency of the extensive oeuvre he has built up over the past fifty years. Fifty years may separate *Eraserhead* and *Twin Peaks: The Return*, but contents-wise both works are about the same multi-dimensional understanding of reality. This also applies to the mysterious experience of a slowly moving painting that Lynch had in 1967 when he was studying at the art academy in Philadelphia. That event not only provided the impetus for *Six Men Getting Sick* in the same year, the first work in which he combined visual art and film, but can also be seen as the spark that ignited his interest in the medium of film. Since then, Lynch has consistently, and in a way that now looks *avant la lettre*, developed a multidisciplinary art practice in which visual art, film, photography, and music coexist in a nonhierarchical way.

Consistent, above all, is Lynch’s preoccupation with the hidden dimensions of existence: “That there is more going on than meets the eye is a thrilling thing.”²⁸ From the first drawings and paintings to the most recent lithographs, mixed-media works, and lamps, from the early short films to the successful feature films and his popular TV series, Lynch has always succeeded in maintaining the mystery. He has never let himself be tempted to make statements that interpret or explain his work. More than that, like a child he remains in wonderment at the unfathomable qualities of his own work. The ultimate answer to the question about the underlying meanings of this work is therefore never better expressed than by himself: “what it means I don’t know.”²⁹

(1) William Shakespeare. *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 5.

(2) David Lynch, in Chris Rodley, ed., *Lynch on Lynch*, New York, 1997; London, 1999, p. 26.

(3) “La natura è piena d’infinite ragioni, che non furono mai in isperienza.” Leonardo da Vinci, *L’uomo e la natura*, ed. Mario De Micheli, Milan, 1952, p. 34.

(4) Odilon Redon, “Confessions of an Artist,” cited in Jodi Hauptman, *Beyond the Visible: The Art of Odilon Redon*, exh. cat. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2005, p. 31.

(5) Lynch, in Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, p. 8.

(6) David Lynch, *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity*, New York, 2006, pp. 47–48.

(7) David Lynch, in the documentary *Fourth State*, a film by Tête à Tête and Austin Lynch for *Frieze* magazine, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/friezemagazine/videos/377826019288323/>.

(8) Edward Hopper, in an unpublished interview with Bennard Pertman on June 3, 1962; cited in Gail Levin, ed., *Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist*, New York, 1980, p. 17.

(9) Lynch, in Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, p. 9.

(10) Henri writes literally: “To some degree every human being is an artist, dependent on the quality of his growth.” Robert Henri, *The Art Spirit*, New York, 1923; repr. Seattle, 2013, p. 67.

(11) *Ibid.*, p. 54.

(12) David Lynch, in *David Lynch: The Art Life*, dir. Jon Nguyen et al., Duck Diver Films, 2016.

(13) David Lynch and Kristine McKenna, *Room to Dream*, Edinburgh, 2018, p. 5.

(14) *Ibid.*, p. 12.

(15) Lynch, in Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, p. 14.

(16) *Ibid.*, p. 20.

(17) *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

(18) David Lynch in conversation with Patti Smith at the Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, Paris, 2014.

(19) This anecdote appears in *The Art Life*, dir. Jon Nguyen et al.

(20) Lynch, in Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, p. 20.

(21) Lynch and McKenna, *Room to Dream*, p. 10.

(22) See also Mark Nelson and Sarah Hudson Bayliss. *Exquisite Corpse: Surrealism and the Black Dahlia Murder* New York, 2006, p. 9. Lynch’s interest in the Black Dahlia murder is shown by the

fact that at some point he was in contact with a detective who was involved in the late 1940s in the investigation into the never-resolved murder of actress Elizabeth Short (aka the Black Dahlia), whose body was found on January 15, 1947, sawn through at the waist, in a street in the Leimert Park neighborhood of Los Angeles. See Lynch and McKenna, *Room to Dream*, pp. 353–54.

(23) Lynch, in Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, p. 26.

(24) *Ibid.*, p. 12.

(25) Lynch and McKenna, *Room to Dream*, p. 25.

(26) Lynch, in Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, p. 23.

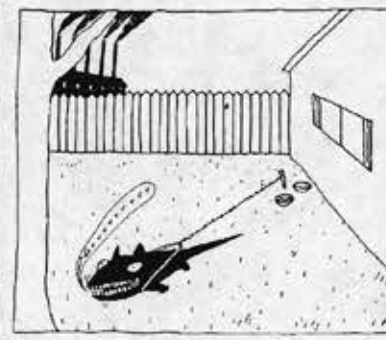
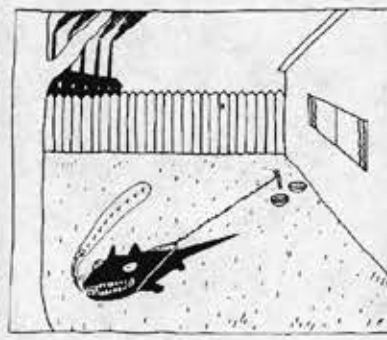
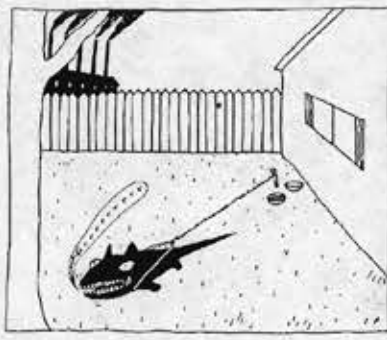
(27) David Lynch in an interview with Andrew Durbin in Los Angeles on July 19, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/friezemagazine/videos/377826019288323/>. In *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity*, New York, 2006, Lynch deals extensively with the conversion of negative into positive energy.

(28) See note 2.

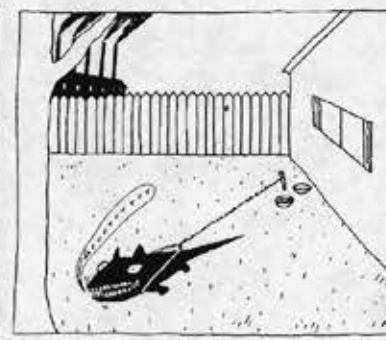
(29) Lynch, in Rodley, *Lynch on Lynch*, p. 73. This interview focuses specifically on why electrical defects, short-circuiting, etc. are so frequent in Lynch’s work.

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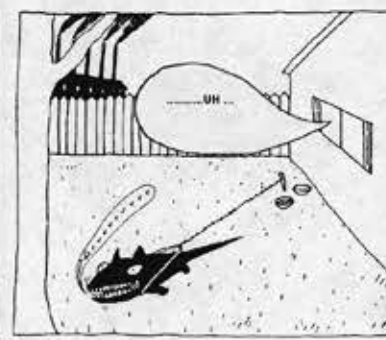
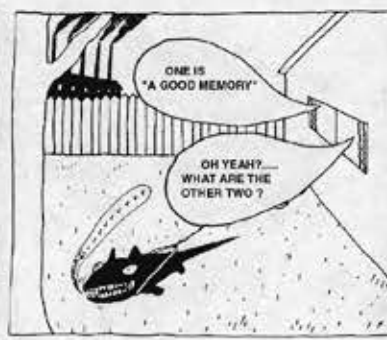
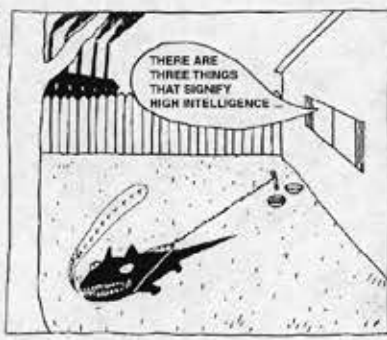
The dog who is so angry he cannot move. He cannot eat. He cannot sleep. He can just barely growl.
... Bound so tightly with tension and anger, he approaches the state of rigor mortis.



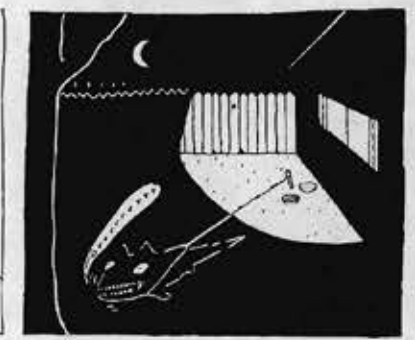
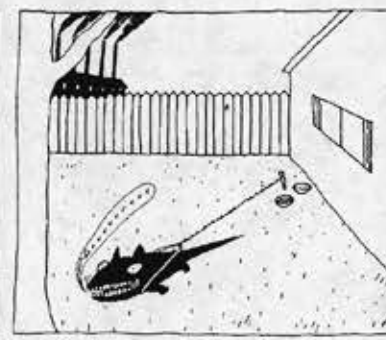
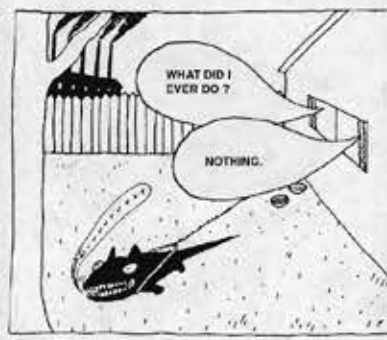
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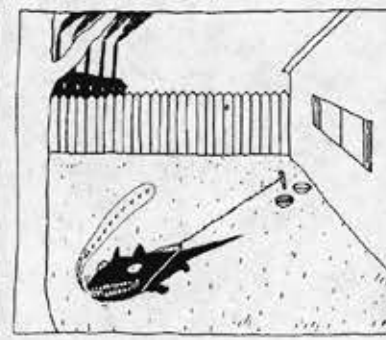
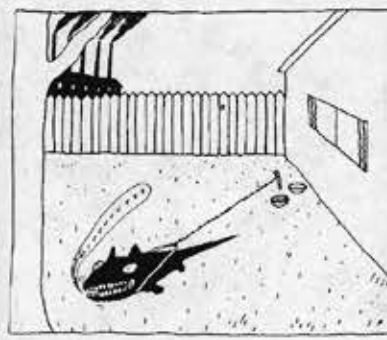
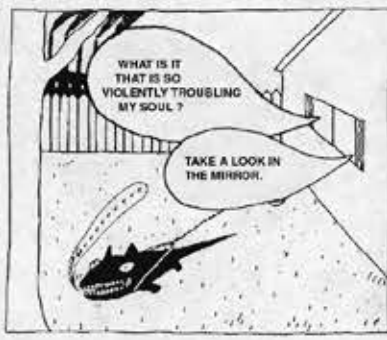
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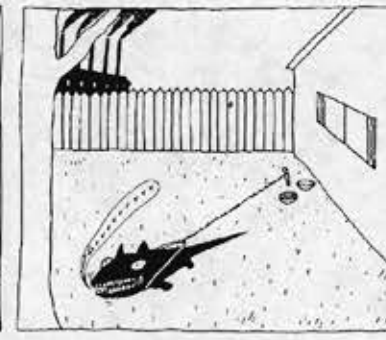
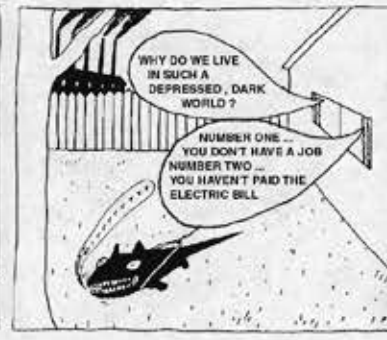
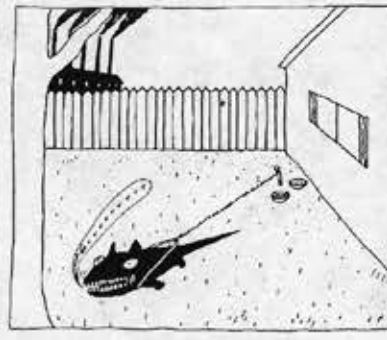
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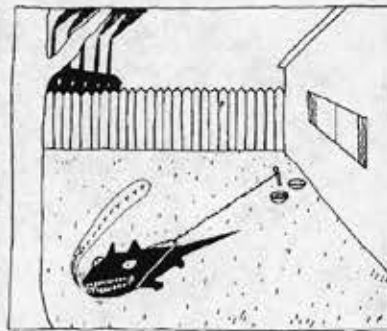
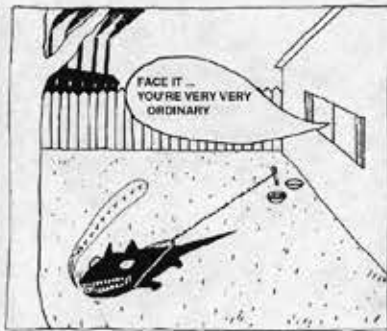
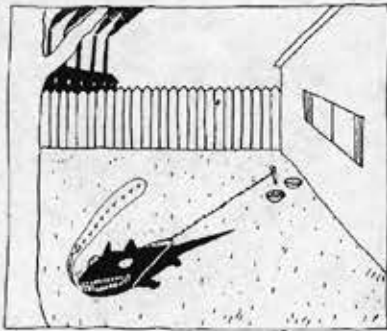
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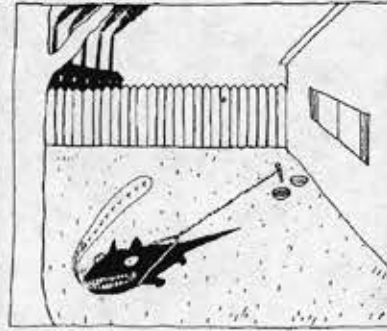
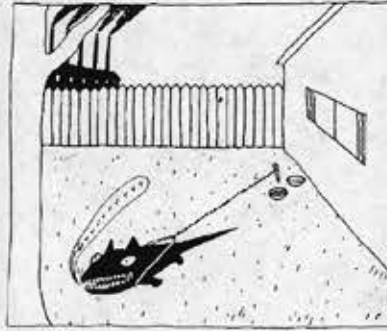
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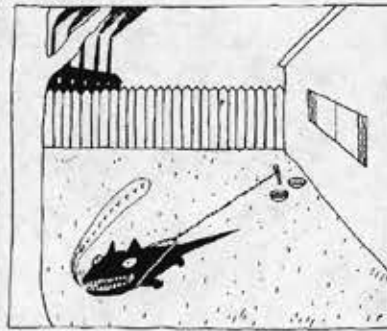
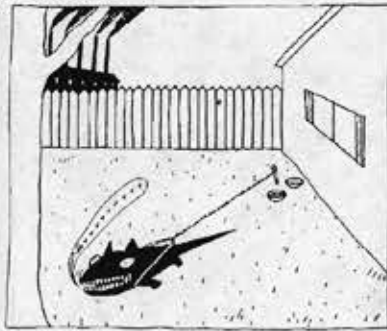
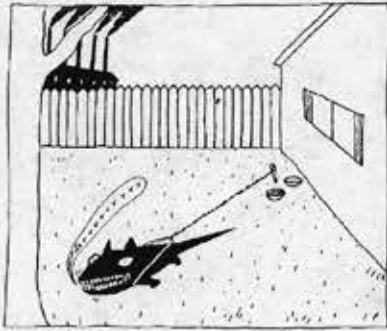
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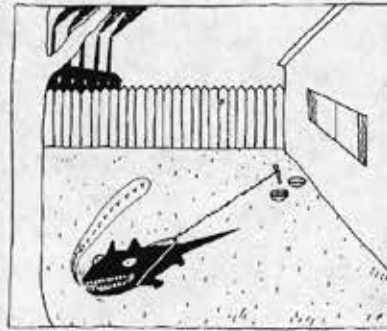
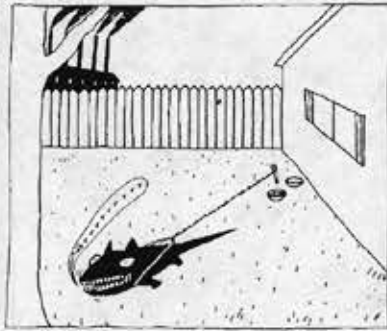
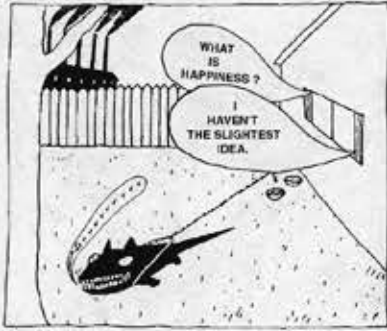
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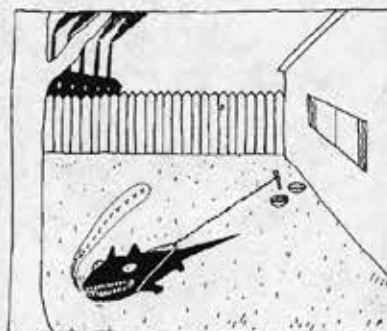
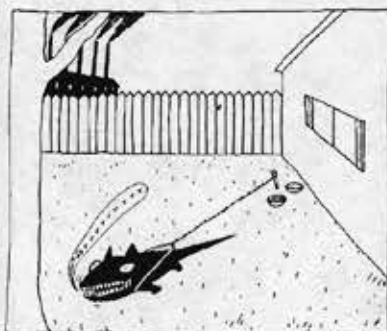
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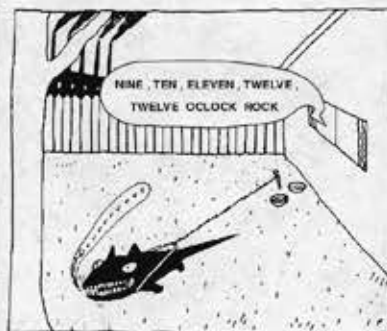
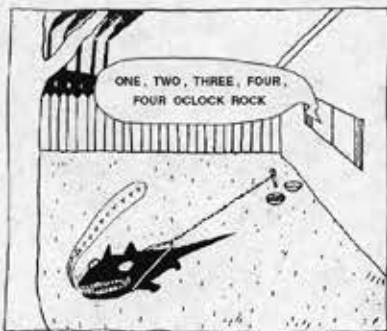
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WORKS ON PAPER



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1960s pencil on paper 30.5 x 22.9 cm



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ca. 1965-67 graphite on paper 35.6 x 27.9 cm



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ca. 1965–67 graphite on paper 35.6 × 27.9 cm



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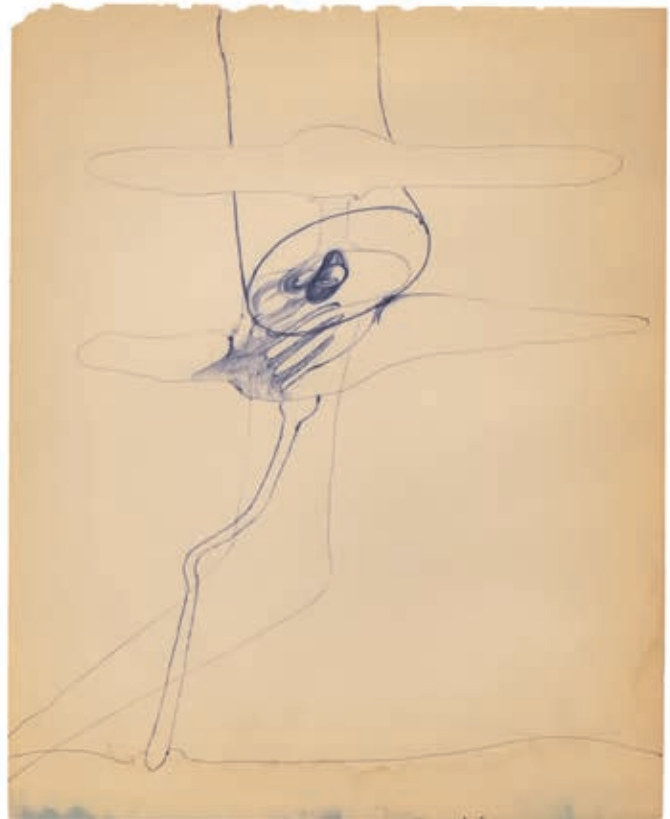
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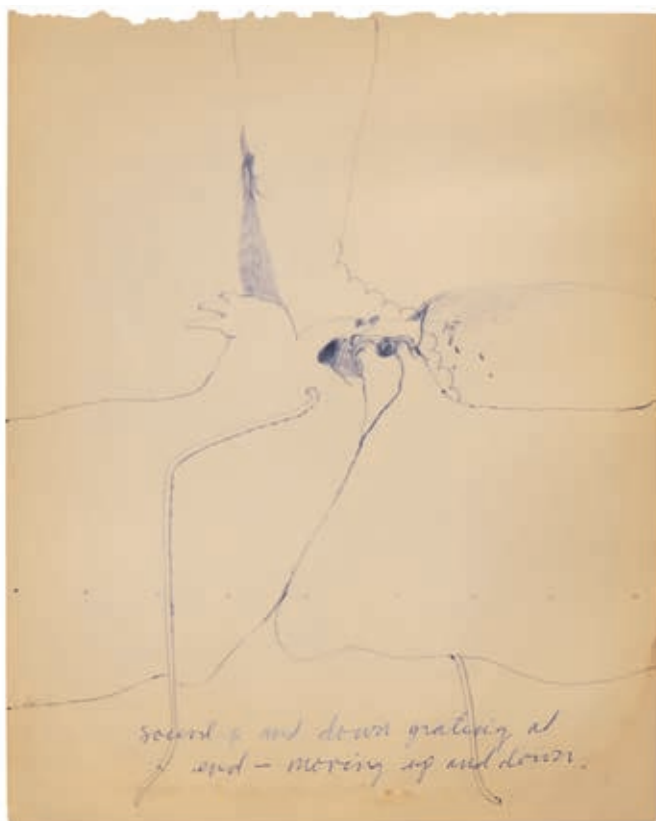
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ca. 1965–69 ballpoint pen on paper 25.4 × 20.3 cm



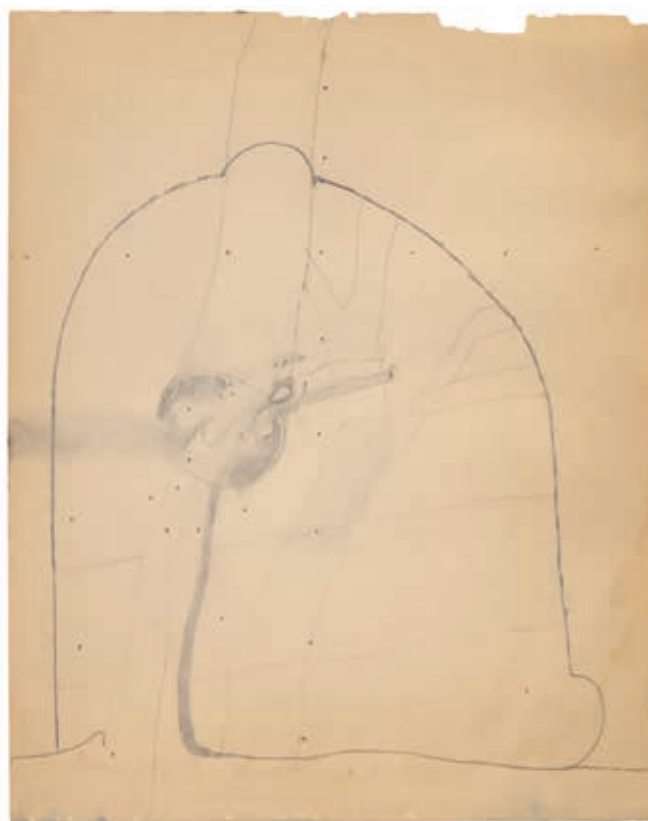
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