



David Lynch: The Art Life

A film by: Jon Nguyen, Rick Barnes,
Olivia Neergaard-Holm

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Presented by: Duck Diver Films, Kong Gulerod Film

In association with: Xanf Studio, Hideout Films

Executive Producers: Adam F. Goldberg, Lawrence
Makow, Christophe Vandaele, Kurt S. Kittleson,
Alexandre Gama, Vince Di Meglio, Aga Wasiak,
Josefine Bothe

Produced by: Jon Nguyen, Jason S.,
Sabrina S. Sutherland

Co-producers: Dominick Duda, Anders V.
Christensen, Kristina Maaetoft-Udsen,
Marina Girard

Associate Producers: Thure Munkholm, Airron
Copeland, Mahlon Chute, Adam Crossnoe, Collette
Carpenter, Alain Cayrol, Rory Bhandari, Grace June
Cleere, Elliot V. Kotek, Joseph Gribbin, A.D. Liano,
Adam Harding, Andreas Batzel, Alina Holgate,
Jeremy Hobbs, Matt Brandstein, Greg Schuler,
Palmer Stilwell Taipale, Yasmine Mehmet,
Chad Miles Romney, Brandon Dinklage, Jessica
Gerlach, Huib Snijders, Jacques Burtin, Mark
Pickenheim, Kip Piper, Mark Reynolds, Brett
McConnell, Nickie Huai, Clayt Hudson, Carol Gray,
Mario Van der Meulen, Joni Steele Kimberlin, Don
Erlandson, Henry Self, Igor Masnjak, Scott Grieder,
Matt Brandstein, Stuart Douglas Harris, Herve
Gorree Wery

Production Manager:

Noah Maaetoft Nguyen-Udsen

Post Supervisor: Anders V. Christensen

Assistant to the Producer: Lula Nguyen

Archival Footage Researcher: Janne Gartner

Script Consultants: Pilar Alessandra,
Isabel Andres Porti

Cinematographer: Jason S.

Visual Effects: Thomas Irving, Frederik Marbell,

Martin Munck Schmidt, Dicki Lakha

Animation: Rino Stefano Tagliaferro

Edited by: Olivia Neergaard-Holm

On-line: Thomas Irving, Frederik Marbell

On-line: Martin Munck Schmidt

On-line Editor: Dicki Lakha

Post-production: Kong Gulerod Film

Graphic Design: Tobias Røder, Chris Thompson

Main Title Designed by: Tobias Røder

Title Design: Chris Thompson

Colourist: Maria Klarlund

Music Composed by: Jonatan Bengta

Additional Music Composed by:

Josef Maria Schäfers, Stella Luncke, Clayton

Thomas, Bernd Öszevim, Olga Blinky Luncke

Sound Design by: Philip Nicolai Flindt

Sound Design: Philip Nicolai Flindt

Additional Sound Design: Josef Maria Schäfers

Additional Sound Design: Stella Luncke

Re-recording Mixer: Philip Nicolai Flindt

For: Lula Boginia Lynch

Special Thanks: David Lynch

With:

David Lynch

USA-Denmark 2016©

88 mins

Digital

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David Lynch: The Dreamer

David Lynch: The Art Life

Famously tight-lipped when it comes to discussing his work, offering little more than peculiar observations – ‘Keep your eye on the donut’ – David Lynch’s disarming ‘Jimmy Stewart from Mars’ persona has consistently baffled and charmed those who long to know what makes this man tick.

So a doc fronted by Lynch is an exciting prospect. Shot over the course of two and a half years and whittled down to just under 90 minutes (from 24 hours of filmed conversations), *David Lynch: The Art Life* covers the director’s peripatetic childhood, art school years and early forays into movies. Aficionados will find some overlap with Chris Rodley’s book, *Lynch on Lynch* (1997), but director Jon Nguyen’s film takes viewers directly into rarefied spaces: Lynch’s workshop and art studio at his home in the Hollywood hills.

Nguyen knew not to badger or push his friend for info and Lynch set the timetable for the sit-down chats (whenever he felt like talking). In doing so, Nguyen and his co-directors (Rick Barnes and Olivia Neergaard-Holm) caught the pop surrealist in a revealing light, yet still managed to retain the artist’s sense of mystery. Here’s five things Nguyen discovered through making the film.

1) A childhood memory of a naked woman emerging from the darkness was recreated in *Blue Velvet*

Living in Spokane, Washington, as a boy, Lynch experienced something akin to a famous moment in 1986’s *Blue Velvet* – Dorothy Vallens appearing starkers outside the Williams family residence. But if you attempt to draw a direct comparison, you’ll likely get a classic Lynch reaction.

‘That’s the kind of thing we never directly asked him,’ Nguyen says. ‘Of course, I think it’s directly correlated, but knowing David, if you asked him if it was directly connected to that, he might... I don’t know... he’d say [something like] “I haven’t thought about it that way”. But that’s kind of the main thesis of *The Art Life*: the past colours and conjures everything that you do.’

‘A lot of people have said our documentary doesn’t focus on his filmmaking, but I think it does. David’s not the type of filmmaker who you can talk to about their work. We had to talk to him about his films indirectly, by talking to him about his life. This [memory] is one of the clues we dug up. There are little instances in his life that really coloured his films.’

2) His father’s scientific background was a major influence

One of many hilarious stories Lynch tells involved his old man, Donald Lynch. Starting to worry his son was leading an errant life, he visited him in Philadelphia and was shocked to discover David was collecting dead animals and other oddities in his basement workspace. The father was so creeped out, he advised his son never to have children.

‘Lynch’s father turned him on to “organic phenomena”,’ says Nguyen. ‘He’s the one who took David out on his walks, to show him a dead cow or decomposing animals, turning over logs and looking at the bugs. Fast forward 15 years, David incorporated that sensibility, of organic decomposition, into his art. I think [years later] when David took his father down into his basement [studio], he’d forgot all that and thought his son had emotional problems, when really it was a continuation of that love affair with organic phenomena. We asked him about it and he said “Yeah, I understand why my dad got mixed up” but David’s dad turned him on to that stuff and brought that whole aesthetic into his son’s art.’

David Lynch: The Dreamer

Wild at Heart

Thu 1 Jan 14:40; Sat 3 Jan 20:35;
Sun 18 Jan 12:15 BFI IMAX

Eraserhead

Thu 1 Jan 18:30; Mon 5 Jan 18:30;
Sun 11 Jan 13:30 BFI IMAX; Fri 16 Jan 18:10

The Straight Story

Fri 2 Jan 18:10; Sat 17 Jan 20:45;
Mon 26 Jan 18:10

Lost Highway

Sun 4 Jan 15:00; Thu 15 Jan 18:00 (+ intro by
Ben Tyrer, Lecturer in Film Theory, Middlesex
University London); Thu 29 Jan 20:25;
Sun 1 Feb 11:00 BFI IMAX

The Elephant Man

Tue 6 Jan 20:35; Tue 27 Jan 18:00 (+ Q&A with
actor Dexter Fletcher); Sat 31 Jan 12:05

Mulholland Drive

Wed 7 Jan 20:10; Sat 17 Jan 17:45;
Sun 25 Jan 12:15 BFI IMAX; Fri 30 Jan 20:15

Inland Empire

Thu 8 Jan 18:30 (+ intro by Sam Wigley, BFI Digital
Features Editor at *Sight and Sound*);
Sat 10 Jan 14:00; Sun 18 Jan 17:30

Dune

Sat 10 Jan 17:40; Sun 25 Jan 18:10

Twin Peaks – Original US pilot episode + intro by
Lisa Kerrigan, Senior Curator of Television,
BFI National Archive
Mon 12 Jan 20:50; Mon 19 Jan 20:50

Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me

Tue 13 Jan 17:45 (+ discussion); Tue 20 Jan 18:10;
Wed 28 Jan 20:15 (+ intro)

David Lynch: The Art Life

Wed 14 Jan 21:00; Sat 31 Jan 18:30

Philosophical Screens: Lost Highway

Thu 15 Jan 20:35 BFI Blue Room

Twin Peaks: The Missing Pieces

Tue 20 Jan 21:00

With thanks to

Sabrina Sutherland
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3) Living in a rundown Philadelphia neighbourhood had a profound effect on his art and cinema

In 1966, Lynch moved to Philadelphia and enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. The move precipitated a major aesthetic awakening in Lynch. Nguyen explained the profundity of the move: 'There is a dichotomy, a juxtaposition, in his films, between good and evil, the good and the underbelly. Philadelphia represented the dark side and his early years represented small-town America and a sense of innocence. David always said Philadelphia was the number one influence on him.'

For young Lynch, it was a shock to the system.

'He grew up in these small towns, almost like a county boy,' Nguyen says, 'and when he was in his late teens, he moved to an urban, decaying city. What you have to understand is, that when Lynch moved to Philadelphia, two weeks before he moved, there was a huge race riot and during that race riot 224 businesses [properties] were destroyed. He moved into one of the worst neighbourhoods in Philadelphia. Here he is, this country boy from small-town America, raised in the 1950s, now living in late-Sixties Philadelphia. It had such a major impact on him. It was a culture shock.'

4) The American Film Institute's filmmaker's grant changed his life

Having heard about the AFI from painter and mentor, Bushnell Keeler, Lynch applied for a filmmaker's grant to make *The Grandmother* (1970). 'It's one of the most important things that David recognises,' says Nguyen. 'He'll admit that grant changed everything.'

'This isn't really part of the film, but the [archive] footage we have was made up of materials David gave us: 8mm films, photographs and albums, his artwork, even his music is in it. All except for the pictures you see of Philadelphia. We asked him if he had pictures of Philadelphia in that period, and he said he had a friend we should contact, who had a camera at that time. I called up Will Brown and we spoke on the phone. He was so proud of David and what he'd achieved. He'd gone to art school with him. Will wanted to become an artist, but after a year and a half gave it up, because he had to make a living. Will's still living in Philadelphia to this day and his career never really took off. It just made me think "Man, it's like I'm talking to this alternate David Lynch, you know?" If he hadn't received that grant to make *The Grandmother* (1970).'

Today, a filmmaker can have an indie hit and get assigned a major blockbuster as a sophomore effort. One of Nguyen's aims was to show how hard Lynch worked to establish a career. 'One of the things that's touching about the film is that it shows David really worked hard and struggled to get where he is. He never gave up.'

5) Making *Eraserhead* was the happiest filmmaking experience of his career

Given former stables as a studio space, at the AFI's conservatory in Beverly Hills, Lynch spent the next five years making his feature-length debut. His interest in cinema derived from wanting to make his painting 'move'. He didn't know much about movies at all, being so naïve enough to turn in a 'script', amounting to a few pages, for what was to be a feature-length endeavour.

'*Eraserhead* was one big canvas for him,' Nguyen sums it up. 'He imagined the world of *Eraserhead* surrounding him. He was kind of locked in there [in the studio space given to him]. It wasn't like where he is now, with the whole machinery [of film production]. It was just him, a few close friends, [and it took] over five years to create this little gem called *Eraserhead*. I think with that film, he lived it.'

Martyn Conterio, bfi.org.uk, 13 July 2017