

David Lynch: Between Two Worlds

by Chris Herden

800 words

A world-first exhibition, exclusive to Brisbane, allows us to get into the mind of a fascinating filmmaker and visual artist

David Lynch is instantly recognisable as he slinks in through a side entrance at the packed media conference. Lean, fashionably ruffled, and with a pompadour of silvery hair, he shuffles to his seat centre stage and casts a wary eye at his audience. With a soft nasally drawl he recalls his early love of drawing and painting: “but I had this thought in my mind that you couldn’t do those sort of things when you get older and then I met this kid whose father was a painter and a bomb went off in my head – from then, all I wanted to do was be a painter.” He talks of his mother refusing to give him colouring books, and his art student days at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, a good school he says, but: “the kids were very serious about partying but not about painting.” And then he mentions the violence, filth and graffiti of the Philadelphian slum that infused his earliest work as a filmmaker: “a kind of a factory town but I fell in love with the architecture”. Pop culture icon, cult figure, film industry outsider; Lynch’s 50-year opus of work is expansive and varied, so much so that it defies simple categorisation. Painter, sculptor, photographer, lyricist, filmmaker, and entrepreneur – he fits the mould of a modern-day Renaissance man.

David Lynch: Between Two Worlds is the first exhibition of Lynch’s work to be staged in Australia. “It is one of the most hotly anticipated exhibitions in Australia this year,” announces Premier and Minister for the Arts Annastacia Palaszczuk. “This exhibition will draw crowds from all over Australia and from across the Asia Pacific region. It will contribute to the economy of Queensland as well as the cultural life of our state.”

Visitors to the Queensland Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) not yet familiar with Lynch’s vast body of work as a visual artist are in for a surprise. *Between Two Worlds*, dredged from his subliminal state of being, oozes in black-and-white surrealism. It is evocative of the style of dream narrative that characterised *Eraserhead*, his first feature-length film which disturbed and mystified audiences in the 1970s with its bizarre imagery and sexual undercurrents. At the front end of the exhibition is a daunting, life-size installation of a living room inspired by one of Lynch’s drawings. Beyond this lies a collection of more than 200 works of ink drawings, paintings, mixed mediums on canvas, and photographs that seem to have been primed to act on our own subconscious; drawing us into the artist’s darker fantasies. Colour is sparingly used, amplifying the dream-like state of the exhibition.

“I’ve never really got any ideas from night-time dreaming, but I love daytime dreaming,” Lynch says. “I like the idea of dream logic, of how dreams can be very abstract but you can understand them.” The 69-year-old artist thrives on exploring the possibility of finding a

deeper reality in our experience of the everyday. “We gain knowledge and experience through combined opposites and finding this unity is the true reality.”

For the past decade Lynch has been an active spokesperson and fundraiser for the Transcendental Meditation technique, advocating its creativity powers and effects on learning. “I’ve been doing Transcendental Meditation twice a day for 41 years. It’s an ancient form of meditation that allows you to dive all the way within – to experience the unbounded eternal ocean of pure consciousness. Tied to that consciousness are intelligence, creativity, happiness, love, energy and peace. As you start growing in that positivity the side effect is that stress, anxiety, depression, hate, anger and fear all start to lift away. It affects not only your work but your whole life.”

David Lynch initially studied to be a painter but from the beginning of his career he experimented with film, a means by which to bring movement to his drawings and paintings. He became a household name when the innovative television series *Twin Peaks* screened for two seasons in the early 1990s [a new Lynch-directed season returns in 2016]. The director of ground-breaking films *The Elephant Man*, *Blue Velvet*, *Wild at Heart* and *Mulholland Drive* is a master of horror but a Lynch movie is never a frenzy of blood and gore, or zombies leaping from darkened places; instead it is characterised by a psychologically-charged tension, a dreadfulness that taunts and envelops you. Similarly *David Lynch: Between Two Worlds* encapsulates Lynch’s powerful use of generalised fear that is unsettling but also strangely beautiful.

The exhibition, until 7 June, includes screenings of Lynch’s 10 feature films and nine programs of shorts and experimental works alongside selected works for television and documentaries, all screened in GOMA’s Australian Cinémathèque.

Exhibition tickets: Adults \$15, Concession \$12. Booking fees apply to tickets purchased in advance. For more information visit www.qagoma.qld.gov.au