

Art in America

How David Lynch Gave Generations of Artists Permission to Be Weird

7 Lynchian artists remember the great American filmmaker.



Rare are the artists whose last names become adjectives synonymous with their distinctive sensibilities: Kafkaesque, Warholian, Lynchian. To honor the recent passing of that latter adjectival artist, *Art in America* spoke to seven artists influenced by David Lynch's work—though we could have easily spoken to hundreds. Lynch was, for many artists and outcasts trapped in suburbia and dissatisfied with the confines of a normative American dream, something of a gateway—an entrypoint to the realm of all things dark and strange. He gave generations permission to express the repressed. Read about how his impact lives on in the work of other artists below.

—As told to Emily Watlington

Trey Abdella



Laura Palmer's Homecoming Queen portrait, portrayed by Sheryl Lee. (Photo by ABC Photo Archives/Disney General Entertainment Content via Getty)



A scene from *Blue Velvet*, 1986. (©De Laurentis Group/Courtesy Everett Collection)

David Lynch, Betty Crocker, and Norman Rockwell: those are my big inspirations.

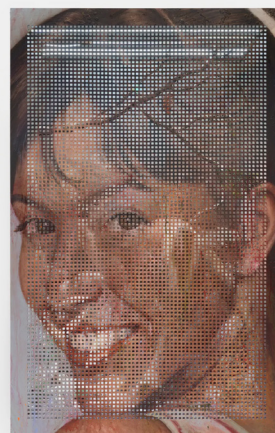
I came to Lynch when I was 15, through *Dune*—which was a kind of predecessor to *Star Wars*. That isn't really what Lynch is known for, but it's how I ended up finding *Blue Velvet* and *Mulholland Drive* (2001) later on. In high school, it was fun getting to show people David Lynch for the first time.

I still consciously think about the intro to *Blue Velvet*... both with my work and with certain aspects of America. In those first five minutes, Bobby Vinton is playing, and we see white picket fences, this picturesque scene that's too perfect to be true. And then suddenly, Mr. Beaumont is having a stroke. I just remember the chills.

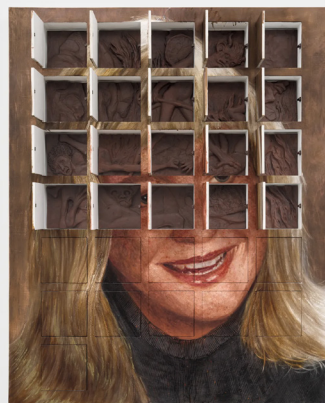
Lynch is a master of artifice, of creating these settings that feel almost like advertisements—they're so perfect they can't be real. He balances all that with the darkness brewing underneath. That dichotomy is something I grapple with in my own work. I borrow a lot from advertisements of the '50s and '60s, which is what he grew up with and was rethinking, making things so sweet, they're sickly.

Lynch is constantly swinging back and forth between sentimentality and violence, the family that's perfect but broken, which I'm super interested in. He's the master of that tension between the banal and the unsettling. I made *Live Laugh Love* (2023) from this portrait I found in a yearbook, and it's definitely reminiscent of Laura Palmer. Then I made the painting into an advent calendar, but rather than chocolate living underneath the picture, there are demons. Lynch has this way of turning the knob up and making things extreme, heightened, and intense, with people reacting in ways that are so over the top, and that's something I try and play up.

“He’s the master of that tension between the banal and the unsettling.”



Trey Abdella: *Doe Eyed*, 2024.



Trey Abdella: *Live Laugh Love*, 2023.