

# Kayne Griffin Corcoran

## RIOT MATERIAL

### The Primitive, Expressive Figurations Of David Lynch

Works On Paper And Sculpture at Art Los Angeles Contemporary/ Kayne Griffin Corcoran



*Who Is In My House*



*Man Eating With Two Hands*



*Thinking of Things*



*I Want to Understand*



*House and Garden*



*Pain Comes Out*

At this year's Art Los Angeles Contemporary, the international contemporary art fair of the West Coast, the Los Angeles gallery Kayne Griffin Corcoran devoted its booth to a display of 46 works on paper and two mixed media sculptures by David Lynch. The four day affair, running January 26-29, 2017, offered a dense sampling of the 70 year old artist's drawings and watercolors, the majority of which were dated from 2008 through 2014. Though most of these works have been previously exhibited, it was a welcome reprise, and Lynch's works on paper addressed threads that also repeatedly emerge in the auteur's better known film oeuvre—the desire to probe the unconscious mind, the sense of the uncanny, the need to stare directly into the murky depths of humanity's darkness. But as is the nature of small works on paper, they are quieter than his film work, and more reflective.

Yet the work emphatically creates a phantasmagoric, dream-like space. Indeed, Lynch has at various times been critically associated with the Surrealist movement, most decisively in 2009 for "David Lynch—Dark Splendor" at the Max Ernst Museum; although, not in a literal sense, but more as a successor informed by the spirit of that pre-War movement.



*Going to Visit Ur House*



*Dog*

Before venturing into film, Lynch started as a visual artist, and his myth of origin as a filmmaker involves a moment when he was studying at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art in the 1960s. While working on a painting, he experienced a fleeting sensation, which he later described as hearing a slight wind and seeing movement in the figure on the canvas; the apparitional breeze that blew through his studio compelled him to begin making moving pictures, and in a sense, his painting, drawing and sculpture practices are inextricably linked with his film work.

*Eraserhead* (1977), his first feature film, is, of all his films, most closely of-a-kind with the works on paper exhibited at Art LA Contemporary in spite of being separated by more than 30 years. The black and white of the film and the powerful sensation of dream-space reverberate in the predominantly monochromatic works. Most of these works include text with primitive, expressive figuration, conveying an intense emotional theater and human drama.

Many of the texts within the drawings elaborate on or enlarge our understanding of the scope of the drawing itself. *Going To Visit Ur House* (2008-09) depicts a figure trudging over a small rise on his way to a schematically drawn house slightly down-slope. The outline of both figure and house appear to be made with granules of salt in a kind of relief of the translucent crystalline structure. The figure holds what is unmistakably a rifle. An enlarged head, mouth wide with rage, appears above as if a projection of the figure's psychic energy. A small black cloud sits in the sky hovering over the drawing's text, and in an emphatic gesture, an arrow points to "ur" house in this murderous tableau.

In other drawings, the texts seem unrelated to the figuration and serve to confound any sense of a comprehensive, rational whole in which the work can be summarized, with Lynch preferring to resist any kind of totalizing critical read of his work, and instead allowing contradictory threads to play out in the piece. In the watercolor *All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth* (2012), the predominantly ochre foreground contains a complex set of spatial relationships indicated

by the relative sizes of the figures and objects drawn in simple black contour. A truck occupying the left side of the picture seems to be off in the distance. The beams issuing from the headlamps, traced in broken lines, illuminate what

we come to realize is a night scene. Two figures, a man and a woman, appear to be locked in a struggle, or they may possibly be perpetrator and victim—the exact nature of their interaction is ambiguous. The woman's left leg appears curiously hooked behind the back of the man's corresponding leg, and she appears to be either falling or supine on the ground with her mouth a blackened hole. This kind of representation of a mouth as a shapeless, blurry-edged void is a recurring motif in Lynch's depictions of his subjects. It is difficult to read this any other way than as an expression of abject horror. A house stands on a small rise beyond the figures and truck, forming an implied triangular. And in the foreground, positioned in the space above the interlocked pair, a blackened apparition hovers. Its sharpened, beak-like terminus angles down toward the man's arm, and the mass of it extends into the gray cast of the sky, a coarse, feathered-looking tail spread upward, with a white dorsal wing-like appendage jutting out above the corpus of darkness. To the right of the figures the hand written text, with some letters randomly capitalized the way a child might, reads, "all I Want foR christmas is my two fRont teeth." Whether the black mass is some kind of dark psychic projection or angel of death, the scene conjures a real sense of terror.



*Sally's in the Kitchen*

Another watercolor in the same ochre, black and gray tonal range, *Sally's in the Kitchen* (2013), likewise presents heterogeneous narrative elements in a nightmare scenario, but its use of text fits somewhere between confounding and enlightening. A circa 1940s bomber delivers a payload; while in the foreground, an explosion bursts from the hood of a car. The man next to the car is thrown back by the blast, his hand flung wide. The text suggests that in his final moment he shouts to someone outside of the picture frame, "SaLLy's IN the Kitchen!!"

In yet other drawings, Lynch's text names the objects he is depicting, for example, *Dog* (2012), yet even this simple procedure, that is, naming an object, takes on a perplexity as our understanding of the thing is confounded by Lynch's vision.

Two lamps at the Kayne Griffin Corcoran booth represented Lynch's sculptural production. The first, *Douglas Fir Top Lamp #1* (2002) is loosely figurative, with slits machined from the front facing panel that give the lamp a human-like



visage. The second, *Gray Amber Lamp* (2011) suggests a vaguely industrial/humanoid hybrid, or a kind of rendering of human function for industrial production. Like a vat, the amber rectangular prism sits atop a metalwork stand; it is attached to an intestinally-shaped metal tube that traces its way to the lamp's base. These works convey a loosely



*Douglas Fir Top Lamp #1*



*Gray Amber Lamp*

idiosyncratic design, and they would not be out of place in design showroom. They communicate Lynch's preoccupations with the uncanny, but they do not come close to imparting the naked energy invested in his drawings and watercolors.

Lynch has described in interviews the process by which he arrives at his ideas, saying that thoughts simply come to him, as if alighting from some unknown source. It is not dissimilar to André Breton's description in the Surrealist Manifesto of automatic writing as a way to express the very functioning of thought. But instead of a strict adherence to the tenants of Surrealism, Lynch's work suggests an attention to the whimsical nature of thought itself as it sparks and then evaporates in individual consciousness. More than that, it reveals his willingness to follow unflinchingly the darkest threads to their conclusions, thus illuminating the darkest possibilities in the human condition.

— Christopher Michno