

ARTNEWS

DAVID LYNCH'S DARK DAYS

By Edith Newhall

David Lynch, whose first feature-length film, *Eraserhead* (1977), was inspired by his experiences as an art student in Philadelphia in the late 1960s, has always had a love/hate relationship with the City of Brotherly Love.

But he has no conflicted feelings about his alma mater, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA), which opens a survey of his paintings and drawings, "David Lynch: The Unified Field," on September 13. "I loved the academy, and the academy was very good to me," Lynch, 68, says. He even waxes nostalgic about the terrifying-but-fascinating city of his young adulthood. "Philadelphia used to have grit and soot on everything—and it made a really great mood."

The dark days of pollution are easily recalled in the earliest pieces in "Unified Field," made between 1965 and 1970. Large-scale, mostly black paintings express the fear Lynch felt while living in an apartment across from a mortuary in a rundown manufacturing section of the city and later in a house he shared with his first wife and child that was repeatedly broken into.



David Lynch, *He Has His Tools and Chemicals*, 2013.
COLLECTION OF FRANK AND BERTA GEHRY

These works also reflect his first encounter with the paintings of Francis Bacon. "I was blown away by Bacon," says Lynch, who visited the British painter's 1968 show at Marlborough-Gerson Gallery on a trip to New York with fellow PAFA students. Lynch's *Woman with Screaming Head* reveals the influence of Bacon, as do *Untitled* (cigarette filters) and several other canvases from 1968. Likewise, it's hard not to see inklings of the macabre sensibility and symbolism that permeate such Lynch classics as *Blue Velvet* (1986) and *Twin Peaks* (1990–91).

Lynch has continued to paint and show at galleries throughout his life as a filmmaker, and in 2007 the Fondation Cartier in Paris organized a traveling retrospective. But the PAFA survey is the first to place his early paintings and drawings in the context of his whole career; it also includes a companion show of works by his friends, instructors, and classmates in Philadelphia.

"Throughout a wide-ranging career, painting and drawing have been the resilient constants in his creative life," says Robert Cozzolino, the exhibition's curator. "I can think of no more fitting place to examine their role in his work than PAFA, where it all began."