To raise money for his 1977 feature film, *Eraserhead*, David Lynch once had a job delivering *The Wall Street Journal* in Los Angeles. “I had a night route—picked up my papers at 11:30 p.m., and I had it down to one hour flat. I made $50 dollars a week,” he recalls over the phone. For Lynch, the director behind films such as *Blue Velvet* and *Mulholland Drive* and the television series *Twin Peaks*, it was one of the more unusual posts he held over the course of his six-decade career as an artist and filmmaker.

Lynch’s film and TV projects are just part of the 73-year-old’s breadth of work. In the 1960s, he attended art school to pursue painting, ultimately setting him on a creative path that has also included drawing, photography, sculpture and even music.
His exhibition of paintings, *Squeaky Flies in the Mud*, opens at the Sperone Westwater gallery in New York on November 1. Featuring an eclectic collection of 30 mostly new works, the show offers paintings rich with dimension and texture, watercolors, sculptural lamps and more. From his home in L.A., Lynch spoke to *WSJ.* about his theories of painting and what he hopes to try his hand at next.

You’ve spoken in the past about how there’s just so much happiness in the act of making art. That’s a bit different than the tortured-artist stereotype.

Well, the practice of transcendental meditation is what brings out the happiness inside a human being. But I have a thing about the suffering artist. I don’t believe that van Gogh, for instance, was suffering while he was painting. Because he loved to paint. Suffering is really not a part of the thing. It’s such a fantastic thing to get into the world of painting and work away in there. It’s one of the best experiences ever. When you’re on a roll, you’re high.
When an idea comes to you, do you automatically know which medium you’ll use?
Yeah—every medium is different. And they talk to us, and you get to know them, how they work, and how to work with them. And so, when you get an idea for a painting, it’s for that medium. And lithographs is one medium, and watercolors is another. All the information is there in the idea.

Do you work in different mediums simultaneously?
No. When you’re in it, one at a time.

Should this show be read as a single work in any way? Are they saying the same thing?
No. They’re separate pieces in a show. Everything is in the eye of the beholder. Some people might see some kind of unity and a whole, and think about that. But that’s not the purpose of putting these things together.

Some of your paintings in the show touch on themes of nostalgia and innocence.
Yes, I like things sometimes three-dimensional. I like childlike painting. I like painting, and I think of it as totally organic, like mud and water and organic phenomenon. I like to get into it, I like to get dirty. I sometimes say I would like to bite my paintings. I just love the world of paint. I like sometimes to cut a hole in the painting. I like sometimes for the paint to come out, like sculpture. Ideas just flow, and it comes out that way.

“Billy Sings the Tune” (2018)
PHOTO: COURTESY SPERONE WESTWATER, NEW YORK
There’s much more solitude in painting than film and television. Do you seek that out? Well, a collaboration, in a way—the whole idea is to get your ideas realized in the best possible way. So the idea drives the boat. And when you work with many people, you try to get them to tune into the idea that inspired you, and so we all go down the same road together. With painting, it’s just me and the paint. I try to find the thing on my own. I try to find my thing on my own in the cinema. I just have a lot of helpers but try to get them on the same road based on the idea.

Do you accept that collaborators may have their own interpretation of the work? Not all the time, no. You get them—you do what is needed to stay on the road based on the idea. Just stay true to the idea in all mediums.

Is there a medium you’re curious to pursue but haven’t?
I haven’t really gotten into sewing. I would like to sew. I got a new sewing machine, but I haven’t learned how to use it yet.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.
Squeaky Flies in the Mud opens at Sperone Westwater gallery (257 Bowery, New York, NY), November 1, 2019.

- Laura Neilson