

Not By Lynch is a screening series exploring the "Lynchian": an often-used but rarely examined term whose lineage stretches before, around and after David Lynch's own cinema. While Lynch's films offers the clearest expression of this sensibility, the roots and afterlives of what we call the "Lynchian" extend across film history. From haunted noir and ghostly Americana to experimental digital worlds and paranoid Los Angeles labyrinths, nine films — spanning the nine decades of Lynch's life — trace different faces of the Lynchian: dream-logic beneath everyday life, the uncanny invading domestic space, identities slipping or doubling, worlds that bend at the edges, and dread that mingles uneasily with play, humour and desire.

...at the Cinema Museum
January - October 2026



THE CINEMA MUSEUM
LONDON
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NOT BY LYNCH

THE LYNCHIAN BEFORE
AND AFTER DAVID LYNCH

...at the Cinema Museum
January - October 2026

Curated by **Arta Barzanji**
Presented in collaboration
with **Cinema Year Zero**

Coming soon...

CARNIVAL OF SOULS

+ Introduction

Friday 20 March at 7.30pm

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KISS ME DEADLY

+ Programme Note by **Alison Rumfitt**



Gumshoe Apocalypse

Words by **Alison Rumfitt**

**Contains plot elements*

Kiss Me Deadly (1955)

Directed by Robert Aldrich

With Ralph Meeker, Albert Dekker, Cloris Leachman

Screenplay by A.I. Bezzerides, Based on the novel by Mickey Spillane

Cinematography Ernest Laszlo | Edited by Michael Luciano | 106 minutes

*“Whatever is in that box, it must be very precious...
so many people have died for it.”*

I first watched ***Kiss Me Deadly*** in 2022, which doesn't feel so long ago until you consider that 2022 was not, in fact, last year, the year before last or the year before that. *Kiss Me Deadly* is one of those odd films where one part of the film is so outsized in our cultural memory that it threatens to overwhelm the whole thing; nobody can talk about it without talking about the ending and one is tempted to talk about nothing but. When filmmakers – Spielberg, Tarantino, Cox, and Lynch – lift from this they are drawn to two images in particular: a face lit by the glow of an opened box, and a structure flashing, burning with radioactive light. The film is more than those two things. If all that existed of it was an ending, then it would mean nothing comparatively. It must build up the way it does for this final scream to make the impact it does.

What's easy to forget, of course, is that this is very nearly something conventional. Like many noir pictures from the golden age of the genre it adapts a novel, this one by Mickey Spillane, who wrote 13 (!) novels featuring his signature private eye Mike Hammer. *Kiss Me, Deadly* (1952) was the sixth, the second adapted for screen. I haven't read the novel. I couldn't tell you if the ending of the film is lifted from it. Realistically, I should have sought it out for research, but it barely seems to be in print. I even looked at the Wikipedia page (I'm sorry) and found that it resolutely avoids giving the information I was searching for. The final paragraph of the plot summary reads: “Mike, tied to bed posts, breaks free of his bonds and kills his captors. True to the tradition of Mickey Spillane novels, *Kiss Me, Deadly* ends (Chapters 12-13) in true Mike Hammer fashion.” As charming as I find old-fashioned, badly written Wiki writing in an age of AI summaries, this is spectacularly unhelpful, if rather metatextual. The box around which the film's plot hinges, and thus the device which causes the explosive ending, was an invention of the screenwriter, so one presumes that “in true Mike Hammer fashion” means that the detective defeats his enemies traditionally. I can't imagine typical Hammer novels involve people's faces being burned off by atomic heat.

But in taking as its basis a pulp novel, *Kiss Me Deadly* (the film) can parse things back to the very pure elements of noir storytelling; a man, girls, a mystery and an object for people to pursue. Director Robert Aldrich has a similar relationship to the text that Lynch would go on to have to noir and pulp storytelling in general, including the work of Barry Gifford (1997's *Lost Highway*, which freely lifts from this film, was a title taken from Gifford, though not based on his work).

Aldrich is not as singular an artist as Lynch, of course – I do not mean that in any slight to him, given that the man made *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962). But he directed a lot of films. He was a working director. I don't think anybody under the age of sixty has ever watched *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), but I could be wrong. *Kiss Me Deadly* prefigures French New Wave, New Hollywood and the 90s auteurs not because Aldrich saw the future but because those filmmakers saw this strange, offbeat object that stuck out from the crowd of noir.

When we come back to genres such as westerns and noir we remember the exceptional, strange examples rather than the majority of examples, films like Aldrich's earlier efforts *World for Ransom* and *Apache* (both 1954). It sticks out primarily because it seems so shockingly uninterested in its own plot. Everything – the girls, the violence, the intrigue – exists to get us to one moment, sure, but the matter is entertaining and offbeat in its own way. Don't just shut your eyes and wait for the box to open. Whatever's in there is very precious. A lot of people died for it.

Alison Rumfitt is a writer of criticism, fiction and poetry currently residing in London, England. She is a butch, trans lesbian, which informs her work in certain ways, and she is currently completing a novel about grief, art and the problem of being a daughter.

