

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...

SPONTANEOUS COMBUSTION

+ Introduction

Friday 12 June at 7.30pm

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THE HIDDEN

+ Programme note by Mahda Purmehdi



The Owls Are Not What They Seem: A Cinema of Echoes, a House of Mirrors

Words by **Mahda Purmehdi**

The Hidden (1987)

Directed by Jack Sholder

With Kyle MacLachlan, Michael Nouri

Written by Jim Kouf (as Bob Hunt) | Cinematography by Jacques Haitkin

Edited by Michael N. Knue, Maureen O'Connell | 97 minutes

1982: the cinema screen lights up the white snow in Antarctica where a sled dog runs away from bullets fired by a helicopter in pursuit. The dog is taken in by the people working in a research station. It starts to shapeshift, taking over the American bodies one by one. In the same year, a woman adopts a White Shepherd dog after it defends her from an attacker. It is revealed shortly after that the dog is trained to kill black people. Five years later, in Los Angeles, Lieutenant Masterson's dog, hosting an alien, attacks Masterson. The alien switches its host and becomes the LAPD Lieutenant. Three dogs across three films. *White Dog* (Samuel Fuller) is not science-fiction and its eponymous dog is not host to an alien entity as in *The Thing* (John Carpenter) or *The Hidden* (Jack Sholder). It is, however, just like the owls in *Twin Peaks* (1990-1991): not what it seems.

The punk pleasures of the *The Hidden*, its B-movie brevity, and its political undertones aside, makes it feel like a blueprint for Lynch's genealogy of violence in American culture, a condensed text the reverberations of which one could recognize in various corners of David Lynch's cinema (much like his frequent nods to Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) and *Vertigo* (1958), and Jacques Rivette's *Céline and Julie Go Boating* (1974).

The plot begins with FBI Special Agent Lloyd Gallagher (a fresh out of *Blue Velvet* Kyle MacLachlan) coming to LA from Seattle to catch a man on a murder spree with the help of the local law enforcement, Detective Thomas Beck (Michael Nouri). The suspect, we learn soon, is not human, but an alien life-form that switches human hosts orally. Three years later in *Twin Peaks*, FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper (also MacLachlan), is sent by the Philadelphia office to Twin Peaks in Washington to find a serial killer (again, an entity hiding in a human shell) with the help of local law enforcement. The echoes are too obvious to ignore: the non-human entities are good or evil (White Lodge vs. Black Lodge), with one standing for decency and love, while the other is a force of pure unchecked violent id.

David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* (co-created with Mark Frost) grappled with America's history of violence and depravity. Using smalltown America as a microcosm to examine the forces corrupting society, it would later leave its Washington state setting in the sprawling *Twin Peaks: The Return* (2017), which went back in time to trace the genesis of the depravity infesting this supposedly naïve place.

Lynch declared the incomprehensible horror of the atomic bomb as humanity's original sin—an invention that gave birth to an evil descending on earth in the shape of an alien insect entering its hosts through their mouths. *The Hidden*, which operates within the conventions of L.A. action films, similarly illustrates how its alien villain endures through the propagation of violence. Driven by an insatiable urge to consume, it ultimately seeks absolute power by taking control of a senator's body and identity, before uttering its last words, "I want to be president." Conversely, MacLachlan who represents goodness and decency in *The Return* and *The Hidden*, in both films transfers his life energy into a family's dying father to protect them from loss and grief.

Nothing makes these connections more obvious than the body, the shell, the persona, that is MacLachlan himself and the masks of his characters. MacLachlan from *Dune* to *The Return* operates similarly to the dogs from *White Dog* to *The Hidden*. His on-screen presence goes beyond his characterization in one film and summons gestures from past or future characters. Gallagher carries traces of all his characters in Lynch's world, existing in a transitory state of performance between Jeffrey Beaumont's novitiate and FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper's confidence. The good alien within Gallagher's body is named Alhague from Altair, and it is not just his place of origin that recalls *Dune* and Arrakis, but also his weapon: a strange and anachronistic gun with explosive capabilities. Alhague's confusion of existing in a human form further recalls MacLachlan's future turn as Dougie Jones in *The Return*. *The Return*, with its multiple iterations of MacLachlan; the last of which (we are never certain of his name by the end) might be the reality from which multiple echoes of MacLachlan have emerged: crossing an invisible border, he warns, "once we cross, it could all be different."

With *Lost Highway* (1997), Lynch practically made a reincarnation of Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943)—not just in terms of its themes or its Möbius strip structure, but also in making the film in his own Hollywood home. His home became a metaphysical extension, a mirror image of the home in *Meshes of the Afternoon*. With all the similarities between *The Hidden* and Lynch's work, we must view these separate films not as adaptations, imitations, or homages, but as reflections and echoes. For critic Cristina Álvarez López, Lynch, "puts in crisis the very idea of reality as defined by its space-time unity." There are co-existing alternative realities (and films) present in all of Lynch's oeuvre. If MacLachlan's persona, the variations of the masks of his characters, and the ideas and political undertones of the narratives reverberate through these films as alternative variations of the same universe, as reflections in the mirror of the cinema, then perhaps MacLachlan becomes a vehicle for something beyond the sum of his characters: just like the dogs of Fuller and Carpenter, his presence suggests a constellation of fictional entities operating as variations of each other. He reminds us that we should think of cinema not as separate films, but as a constellation of works that summon one another through their common features: a house of mirrors, a cinema of echoes.

Mahda Purmehdi is an experimental filmmaker, writer and educator.

