



Who will survive? 2009
Ink on paper
78 x 56 cm



Mongrel 2008
Graphite and watercolour on paper
50 x 57 cm

MOP Projects

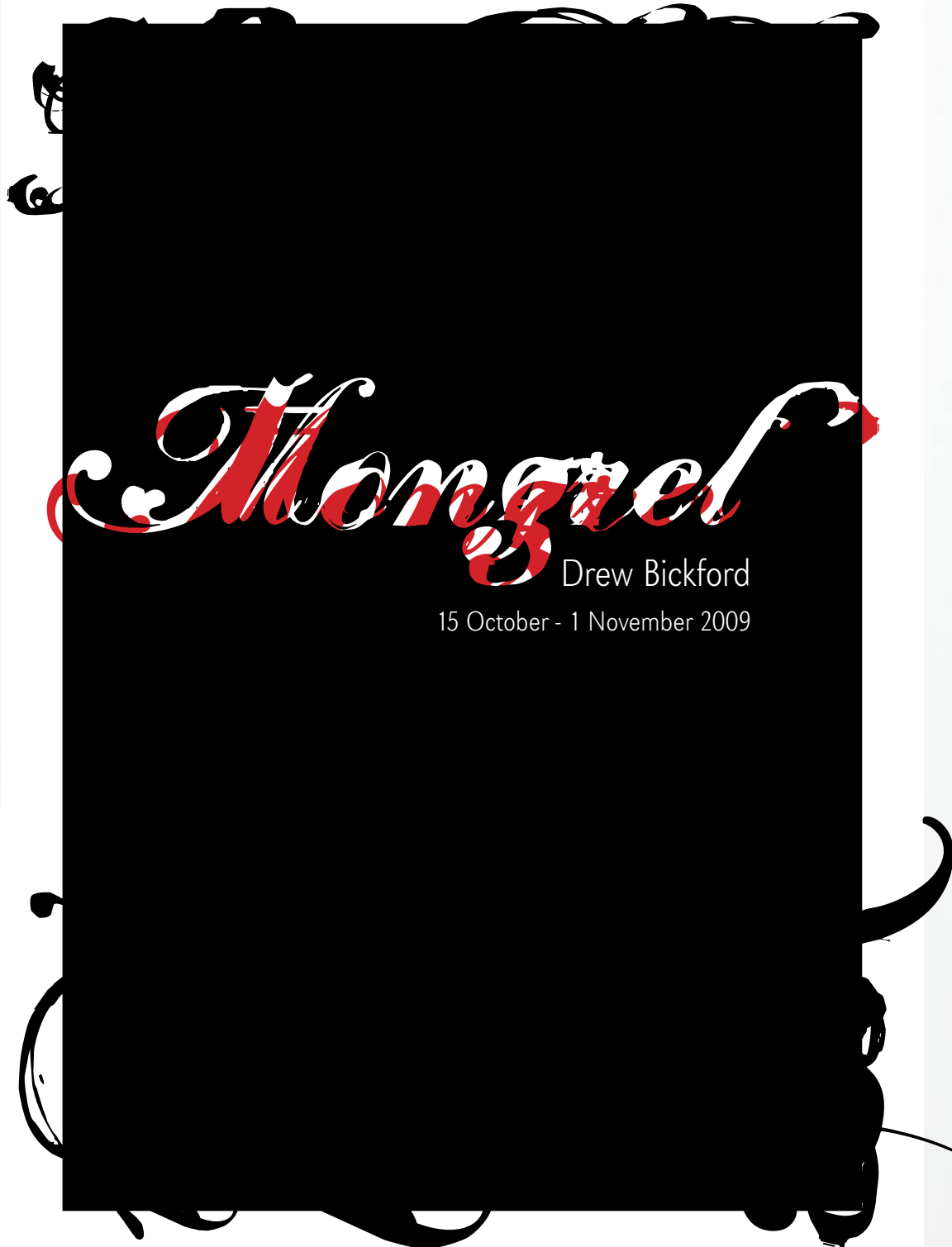
2/39 Abercrombie Street
Chippendale Sydney NSW 2008
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FRASERSTUDIOS



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Mongrel

Drew Bickford

15 October - 1 November 2009



It happened 2009
Ink on paper
78 x 56 cm



THE GRANDMOTHER'S ATM

The Grandmother's ATM 2008
Ink on paper
37 x 39 cm

Mongrel

There is an air of prescience in *Mongrel*. Drew Bickford depicts dark scenarios not really that far away from us. If it has not already happened yet, scientists are very close to successfully creating artificial life. The once unspeakable and unthinkable are soon to be 21st century realities of inter-species reproduction, synthetic bacteria and exponential hybridism. To invoke novelist H.P. Lovecraft, the regime of the "mongrel" is now upon us.

Mongrels are impure creatures, the runt of the litter, random mixtures that by their very nature challenge established orders – social, moral, political, genetic. In their deformed presence we are destabilised – they dissemble and fascinate.

Whereas H.P. Lovecraft fears miscegenation – “They were monstrous and nebulous adumbrations of the pithecanthropoid and the amoebal: vaguely moulded from some stinking viscous slime of earth’s corruption, and slithering and oozing...degenerate gelatinous fermentation”¹ – Bickford is an avid teratologist. In *Mongrel* there is a sensuous embrace of the limitless possibilities of the ugly and grotesque. Bickford’s monsters are sexy accumulations of tangled flesh that have a long heritage within folkloric and religious traditions and the popular culture horror industry. His inbred, monstrous imagery echoes horror cinema classics like *The Fly*, *The Hills Have Eyes* and *The Thing*.

All cultures create monsters. It is interesting that around the world the repertoire of the monstrous is strikingly similar. They usually come from the outside or from the edge of standard cultural categories, the marginal or the liminal spaces. For example, most monsters live in graveyards, swamps, sewers, abandoned old houses, dense impenetrable forests, under bridges, deep within caves. They come from the next town, lost continents and outer space. Monsters are most at home where humans are not – water, slime or oxygen-less atmospheres.

In some cultures, monsters are sometimes figured as intermediaries between humans and the gods. Hybridism produces the combined animal and human – centaurs, the Minotaur, the sphinx, Medusa, mermaids and sirens. Then there are the flying quadrupeds – Pegasus, the griffin and dragons. Interestingly, in western culture the dragon represents the evil to be vanquished while in the East they represent, power, wisdom, prosperity and perfection.

However in *Mongrel* we are witness to open-ended meditations on the carnal rather than the ethereal. Moist and hairy, wrinkled and slippery, vaguely phallic pendulous forms expand and shrink back into their selves to ensnare the viewer in the base undergrowth of the earth. Bickford’s monsters explode in a cancerous efflorescence. He willfully rearranges orifices, skins and limbs. Various crustaceans, rats tails, worms, hammerhead sharks and goats, amongst others, constantly metamorphose. Bickford depicts humans that act like beasts and vice versa.

We have monsters because they harness a communal fascination and compulsive fear of the unknown. Monsters represent a seemingly unstoppable threat to the idea of community. Traditionally the most effective of these creatures are not quite living or dead, part animal and human. In pre-urban days the monstrous boogeyman was often fashioned to help successfully ward off dangers such as wild animals, diseases, nearby communities and slave traders. Consequently, many monsters are given distorted racial and ethnic qualities. As hybrids or mistakes in nature they are enemies of the village or community and so must be vanquished. With the ongoing collapse of community, monsters now roam free. Perhaps this freedom is a good thing?

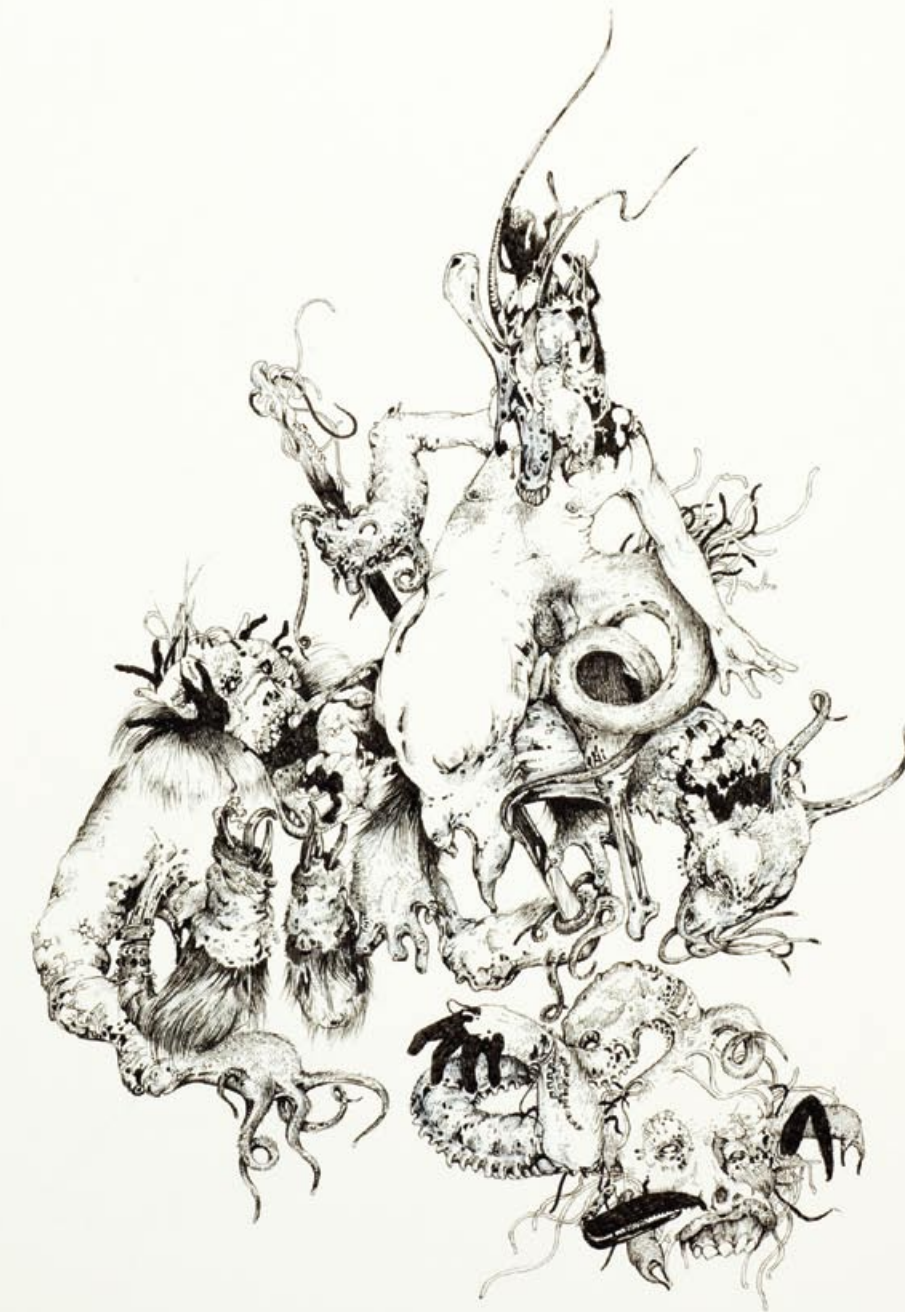
Drew Bickford’s *Mongrel* suggests that monsters are aspects of ourselves. In this exhibition of exquisite drawings he re-presents the primordial but still ambiguous relationship that exists between humans and other animals. It is a relationship that we are still negotiating with limited success. Across societies, the monstrous has been theorised as a way to express individual and collective conflicts and that by externalising these conflicts in the form of monstrous beasts, humans gain some sort of mastery over these conflicts. In spite of the artist’s apocalyptic call “Who Will Survive?”, there is a lingering sense that we keep perpetuating, in fact breeding, the monster within.

CRAIG JUDD is a curator and arts writer.

Notes
1. Michel Houellebecq, *H.P. Lovecraft; Against the World, Against Life*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2006, p. 106



Who am I here? 2009
Ink on paper
56 x 38 cm



Help me be human 2009
Ink on paper
47 x 29 cm