

Review

EXHIBITIONS

1 Kerry Jameson – *Remade Ceramic Bear Inside Canvas* (table base not shown), earthenware, lead glaze, canvas, jute, hessian and canvas ribbons, acrylic paint, glass eyes, 2013, W38cm (Photo: Philip Sayer) 2 Installation view detail of Emmanuel Cooper OBE 1938-2012: A

Retrospective Exhibition, Ruthin Craft Centre, 2013-2014; (foreground) Bowl, stoneware, blue volcanic glaze, c1990s, Ø27cm (Photo: Dewi Tannatt Lloyd) 3 Emmanuel Cooper – *Jug*, stoneware, white volcanic glaze, blue underglaze, c2000s, H22cm (Photo: Dewi Tannatt Lloyd)

KERRY JAMESON: UNBOUNDED

MARSDEN WOO GALLERY, LONDON

7 NOVEMBER-21 DECEMBER 2013

Do you remember that episode of the television series *Doctor Who* where there was a boy who wore a gas mask that had melded onto his face to become part of his head? He was a boy-mask-monster wandering the streets of London repeatedly calling the question, 'Are you my mummy?' The horror of this scene was that he was a walking mask, a child golem, that contained nothing but that phrase, the repetition and articulation of which kept him animated. The genius of Russell T Davies in producing that television series was his ability to combine nostalgia, familiarity or fond memory with horror in an object.

But this is nothing new. We can trace iterations of this back to the figurative work of the Martin Brothers' pottery in the nineteenth century, the taxidermy creations of Charles Waterton in the eighteenth century, to the gargoyles that adorn medieval churches in Europe, and back even to the gods of ancient Egypt. These human-animal hybrids have the power to unsettle and our interest in being unsettled has had a long history. The chimera, it seems, is a useful way in which we can think about ourselves, or represent the world to ourselves over the ages.

So on wet December evening, I encountered a little group of chimera at the Kerry Jameson exhibition at the Marsden Woo Gallery in London. They were a cast of odd characters who seemed to be in pensive mood: a monster-headed girl silently saying something, an organ-grinder's monkey on a break with head in hand thinking hard about something, a pair of headless soldiers seated and waiting, an entwined group of creatures self-consciously caught in the act (but of what?).

The monsters were taking a break from the job of doing what monsters do – scaring children, proactively being bizarre, giving us the creeps. It was a pause from their task of creating a sense of the abject. But this 'aside' being offered in Jameson's work makes a proposition about how monstrosity itself is a form of performance or show: that the monster's public face is not the same as its private thoughts, or that both monster and viewer need relief at times from the relentless demonstration of the horrific.

While there was a nostalgia and innocence presented by the images created in the exhibition, a sense of violence underpinned these through Jameson's use of material language: a leviathan body comprised of dozens of smaller clambering clay bodies, the layered texture of deep black on black dog fur creating an unnerving textile sublime, the crumbled encrusted skin of a Pompeii-an bear creature. Taken together with the narrative scene of a miniature military battle and death, Jameson turns our attention to the discomfort and horror possible in the fragment and the multiple.

If we can view Jameson's work as adding to the long tradition of chimeric sculpture, the idea of a 'backstage' or 'timeout' to the show of horror or the uncanny is a very contemporary contribution.

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