

# Monster Road

A Film by Brett Ingram

**“Fascinating, disturbing, and often hilarious.”**

--San Francisco Chronicle

**“Oddly Hypnotic.”**

--Birmingham Weekly

**“A Detailed and Intelligent Portrait.”**

--Senses of Cinema

**“Funny, moving cinematic biography.”**

--Melbourne International Film Festival

**Running time:** 80 minutes

**Year completed:** 2004

**Genre:** Documentary

## Contact information:

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## Awards (partial list):

- **Best Documentary Jury Prize**  
2004 Slamdance Film Festival
- **Michael Moore Award for Best Documentary Film**  
2004 Ann Arbor Film Festival
- **Best Documentary Jury Prize**  
2004 Independent Film Festival of Boston
- **Best Documentary Jury Prize**  
2004 Red Bank Film Festival
- **Best Documentary Jury Prize**  
2004 Indie Memphis Film Festival
- **Independent Spirit Award**  
2004 Casper Valley Film Festival

**Overview:** *Monster Road* is a feature length documentary exploring the wildly fantastic worlds of legendary animator Bruce Bickford. Tracing the origins of Bickford's iconoclastic worldview, the film journeys back to Bickford's childhood in a competitive household during the paranoia of the Cold War, and examines his relationship with his father, George, who is facing the onset of Alzheimer's Disease.

*Monster Road* premiered at the 2004 Slamdance Film Festival where it won "Best Documentary," eventually screening at over 85 festivals around the world, winning sixteen awards before premiering on Sundance Channel in June 2005.

**Synopsis:** Bruce Bickford's collaborations with rock musician Frank Zappa (*Baby Snakes*, *Dub Room Special*, *The Amazing Mr. Bickford*) in the 1970s made him an international cult figure. Three decades later, the sixty-one-year-old animator works alone in a basement studio near Seattle, producing films for no apparent audience. Enchanted forests, animated torture chambers, hamburgers that morph into mythical monsters, and epic battles between giants, fairies, and anachronistic historical figures populate just a small corner of Bickford's animated universe.

Bruce is the sole caretaker of his father George, a retired aerospace engineer of the Cold War era who faces the onset of Alzheimer's disease. George's talents for maximizing the space inside missiles are mirrored by his son's animations, which often contain dozens of matchstick-sized figures fighting battles on a set the size of a grapefruit. George's wondrous musings on the mysteries of the universe reveal a deep admiration for the implicit architect of such splendor while atheism prevents him from admitting the possibility of a God. Painfully piercing the fog of his memories, George considers the suffering of a life spent disengaged from his family and centered on the imperfections in those around him.

While the Bickfords lived a normal suburban life by all outward appearances, the brutality of Bruce's childhood drawings and subsequent animation hints at a darker underbelly. Questions are raised for which there are no easy answers. *Monster Road* untangles myriad personal, artistic, and philosophical strands from the Bickford's lives to illuminate an intricate web of influences that fuel Bruce's cinematic visions.

**The making of *Monster Road*:** The initial spark for the film came in 1994 when Brett Ingram was a graduate film student. His thesis project, a documentary profile of three clay animators, led him to Bruce Bickford's home near Seattle. Fascinated by Bickford's working methods, living environment, and garage packed with thousands of clay people and sets, Ingram planned to make a feature length film about Bickford one day.

Six years later, Ingram managed to scrape up enough of a budget and, armed with a camera and no crew, began production on *Monster Road*. New Year's Eve 1999 was the date of the first shoot. Ingram stayed as a guest in Bruce Bickford's home, delving into his artistic philosophy, working methods, family history, and unique cosmology. Several more trips over the next three years followed, and the film was completed in early 2004.

**About the Filmmaker:**

**BRETT INGRAM—Director, Cinematographer, Co-Producer, Co-Editor**

Formerly a journalist, high school physics teacher, and electrical engineer on the Space Shuttle Main Engine Program, Brett Ingram exchanged his pocket protector for a movie camera in 1990. His short documentaries and animated films have won thirty awards collectively, screening at more than 150 festivals, museums, and cinema venues internationally.

Ingram’s first documentary feature, *Monster Road*, won sixteen awards (including “Best Documentary” at the 2004 Slamdance Film Festival) and screened at more than ninety festivals, museums, universities, and cinema venues internationally before premiering on Sundance Channel in 2005. Ingram has been awarded a Visual Artist Fellowship (1995) and a Film and Video Artist Fellowship (2002) from the North Carolina Arts Council. In 2007 he was awarded a Fellowship in Filmmaking from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

Ingram teaches filmmaking in the Department of Broadcasting and Cinema at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He has also taught filmmaking at Wake Forest University and at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. His current project is a new documentary feature, entitled *Rocaterrania*, about the secret world of visionary artist Renaldo Kuhler.

Brett Ingram is the sole founder, owner, and operator of Bright Eye Pictures.

**Brett Ingram’s Filmography:**

- Rocaterrania (2008)
- Monster Road (2004)
- Armor of God (2001)
- Panic Attack (2000)
- Freak Box (1999)
- Spent (1995)
- The Clay Spirit (1994)
- The Garden Parasol (1993)
- The Homeplace (1992)

***Monster Road* screenings (partial list):**

- Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, Austin, TX
- ANIMA’T – Festival Internacional de Cinema de Catalunya
- Ann Arbor Film Festival, Ann Arbor, MI (*Michael Moore Award for Best Documentary Film*)
- Anney Festival of Animated Film, Anney, France
- Antimatter Festival of Underground Film, Victoria, BC, Canada
- Asheville Film Festival, Asheville, NC
- Calgary Underground Film Festival, Calgary, Alberta
- Chicago Underground Film Festival, Chicago, IL
- Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH
- Clinton Street Theatre, Portland, OR
- CMJ Music Marathon Film Festival, New York, NY
- Cracow Film Festival, Cracow, Poland
- Cucalorus Film Festival, Wilmington, NC
- Dallas Video Festival, Dallas, TX
- Daytona Beach Film Festival, Daytona Beach, FL
- Detroit Docs International Film Festival, Detroit, MI
- Downtown Media Arts Center, Orlando, FL
- Durango Film Festival, Durango, CO
- FilmFest Kansas City, Kansas City, MO
- Flanders International Film Festival, Ghent, Belgium
- Flying Monkey Arts Center, Huntsville, AL
- Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, Durham, NC
- Get Real Documentary Film Festival, Minneapolis, MN
- Hi/Lo Film Festival, San Francisco, CA
- Hi Mom! Film Festival, Chapel Hill, NC
- IFP Los Angeles Film Festival, Los Angeles, CA
- Independent Film Festival of Boston, Boston, MA (*Best Documentary Award*)
- Indie Memphis Film Festival, Memphis, TN
- Iowa City International Documentary Film Festival, Iowa City, IA
- Jacksonville Film Festival, Jacksonville, FL

Lake Havasu Film Festival, Lake Havasu City, AZ  
 Lausanne Underground Film and Music Festival, Lausanne, Switzerland  
 Maryland Film Festival, Baltimore, MD  
 Melbourne International Film Festival, Melbourne, Australia  
 Midwest Entertainment Industry Conference, Lexington, KY  
 Musica Da Tura, Mestre, Italy  
 New Genre Festival, Tulsa, OK  
 New Zealand International Film Festival, Auckland and Wellington, NZ, 2005  
 North Carolina Arts Council Visual and Film/Video Artist Fellowship Recipients Traveling Exhibition:  
     McColl Center for Visual Art, Charlotte, NC; Hickory Museum of Art, Hickory, NC  
 Ottawa International Animation Festival, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada  
 Ozone Film Festival, Covington, LA, 2005  
 RagTag Cinema, Columbia, MO  
 Red Bank Film Festival, Red Bank, NJ (*Best Documentary Award*)  
 Red Vic Moviehouse, San Francisco, CA  
 RiverRun International Film Festival, Winston-Salem, NC (*North Carolina Filmmaking Award*)  
 Seattle International Film Festival, Seattle, WA  
 Sidewalk Motion Picture Festival, Birmingham, AL  
 Slamdance Film Festival, Park City, Utah (*Best Documentary Award*)  
 Soho House, New York, NY  
 Sonoma Valley Film Festival, Sonoma, CA (*Independent Spirit Award*)  
 SPACE 538, Portland, ME  
 Starz Denver International Film Festival, Denver, CO  
 Taos Vision Quest, Taos, NM  
 Texas Film Festival, College Station, TX, 2005  
 Tupelo Film Festival, Tupelo, MS, 2005  
 Waterloo Festival of Animated Cinema, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada  
 Webster University Film Series, St. Louis, MO  
 7 Dudley Cinema, Venice, CA  
 20,000 Leagues Under the Industry Film Festival, Cleveland, OH

**Monster Road credit list:**

Directed and Photographed by.....Brett Ingram  
 Produced and Edited by.....Brett Ingram & Jim Haverkamp  
 Animation by.....Bruce Bickford  
 Music Composed and Performed by.....Shark Quest  
 Still Photographer.....Alex Maness

**About the soundtrack:**

*Monster Road* features a propulsive and evocative instrumental score by Merge Records recording artists **Shark Quest**, whose music has been described as “an ingenious blend of art-bluegrass and lolling post-modernism” (*Portland Mercury*) and “Instrumental indie rock with a cinematic, desert-sweeping grandeur” (*All Music Guide*).

Many of the ideas heard in Shark Quest's score were developed in the summer and fall of 2002 during their work on a musical suite written to accompany a screening of Bruce Bickford's animation. The screening, held on the campus of North Carolina State University, was billed as "Monster Quest" and consisted of over an hour of unreleased clay and line animations by Bickford with live musical accompaniment by the five-piece band. The evening was capped by a personal appearance and Q&A session with Bickford himself, after which he and the musicians launched into a collective blues-rap improvisation about the mythical Monster Road.

Having immensely enjoyed the challenging task of composing and performing over an hour of music to accompany Bickford's work, the members of Shark Quest were thrilled to be asked to provide the score for the film *Monster Road*. The score was recorded at guitarist Chuck Johnson's Cirrus Oxide studio during the summer of 2003. The filmmakers had requested pieces from the "Monster Quest" performance to accompany certain scenes, so for those sections the band re-arranged the material to fit the durations of the scenes. For other parts of the film Shark Quest composed new material and used instruments not typically heard on their recordings, such as piano, Indian instruments, exotic percussion, and analog synthesizers.

The band has been so inspired by their collaboration with Bickford and Ingram that they have adapted several themes from the score into songs for their next album, *Gods and Devils*, which was released on Merge Records in August 2004. Shark Quest are Sara Bell, Laird Dixon, Chris Eubank, Chuck Johnson and Groves Willer.