

At his estate-like home in Stalinist Moscow, a bourgeois Professor (Paul Dillon) implants the pituitary gland of a dead thief into a stray dog (Joe Fria). The transformation of the docile beast into something quasi-human – vulgar, violent and, well, beastly – represents the evolution of Soviet communism, at least in the imagination of Russia’s greatest 20th-century novelist, the perennially persecuted Mikhail Bulgakov. Meanwhile, the local House Management Committee harangues the Professor into surrendering a couple of his rooms to the proletariat. The problem is, in 2004, even the Russians under Putin are encouraging collusion (rather than conflict) between government and market forces. It’s this turn of events that renders Bulgakov’s novel, with its vicious satire of all things Red, akin to beating a dead dog. (Bulgakov’s play *Molière* and his masterpiece novel, *The Master and Margarita*, are far lighter-handed and more successful in transforming his fury against Stalin into something transcendental and enduring.) Adapter-director Michael Franco’s intriguing production of *Dog* is mostly faithful to the original, despite some diversions into explicit sexual bawdiness. The production wobbles slightly between realism and farce – which may be a consequence of his ensemble’s varying acting styles. Laura Pruden’s maid, Darya, possesses a striking theatricality that’s so large, it occasionally punctures the scene. Adam Bitterman’s doorman, Fyodor Fyodorovich, blazes with hypnotic mania in his every appearance. Dillon’s defiant Professor has a pleasingly gentle wit that grows increasingly strained as his “creation” turns bi-ped and joins the Party. Fria’s metamorphosis from beast to man is simply magical, thanks as much to Joe Seely’s masks as to Fria’s amazing physicality.