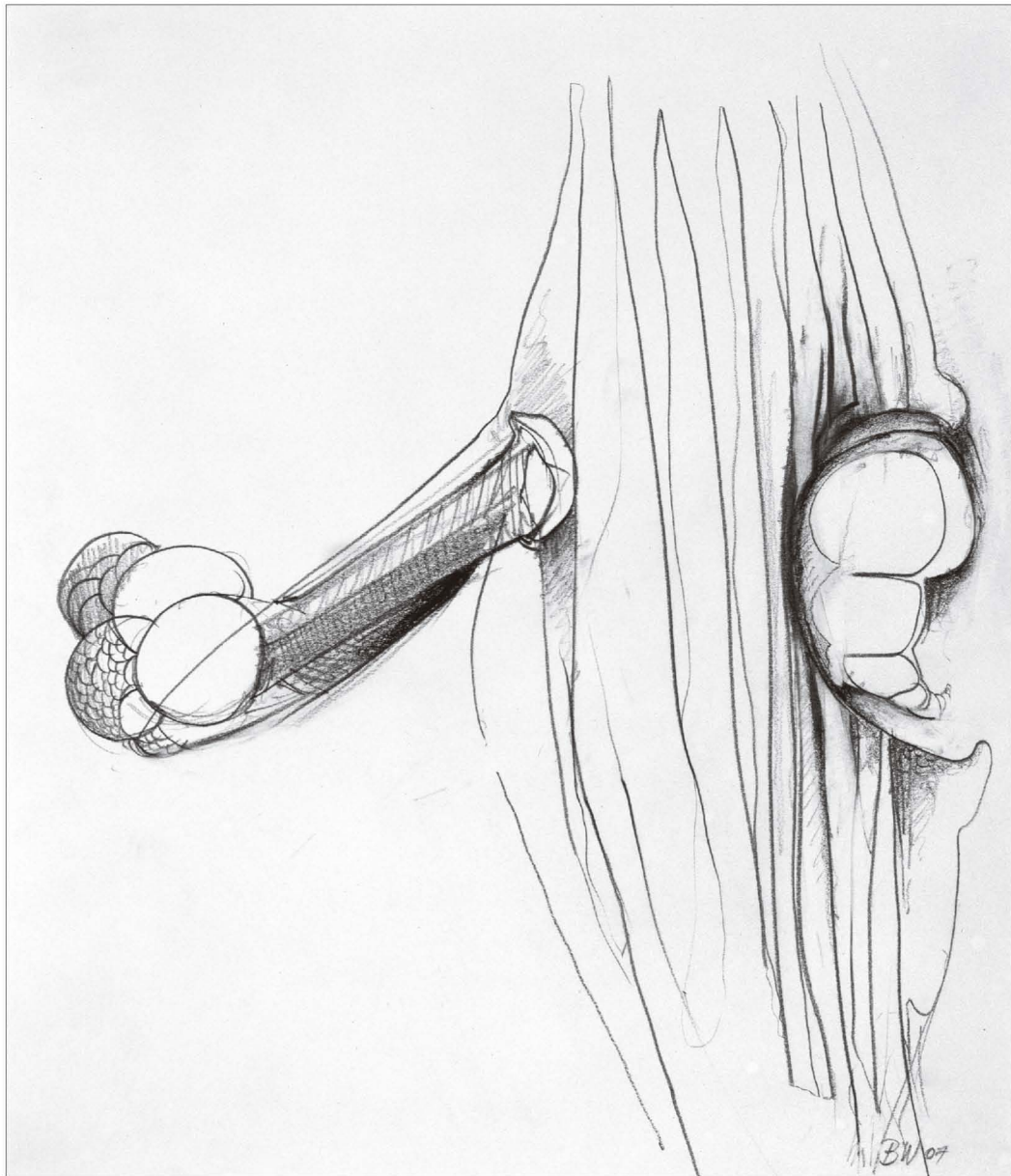
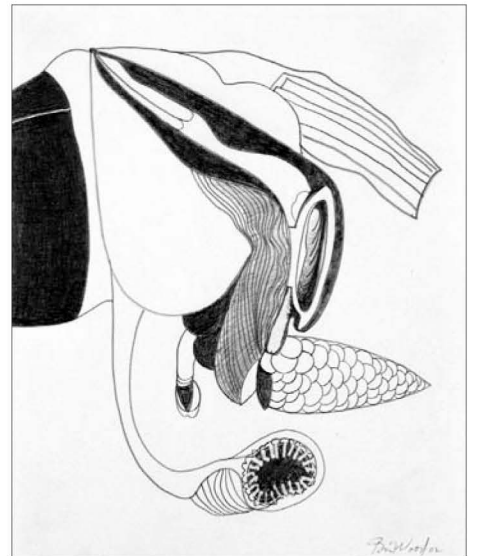
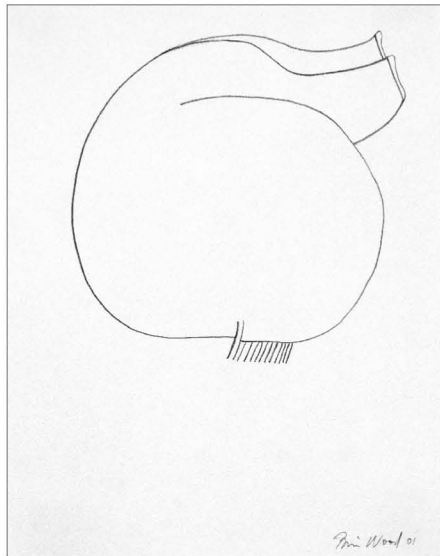
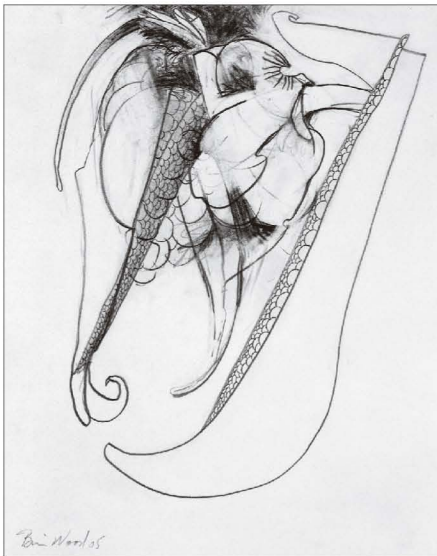
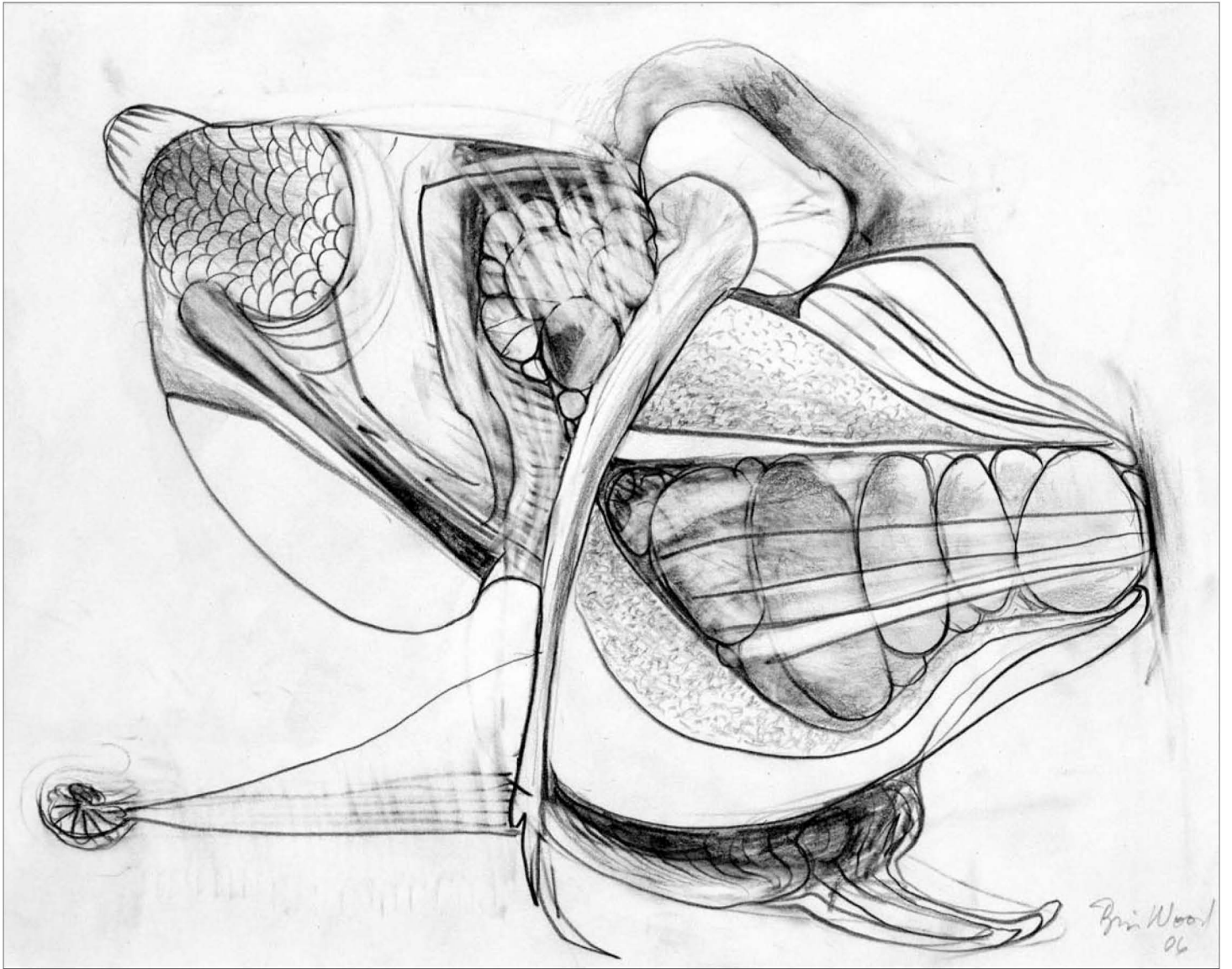


BRIAN WOOD

D R A W I N G S



19 JUNE 2008 — 6 SEPTEMBER 2008



THE DRAWINGS OF BRIAN WOOD: AS REAL AS IT EVER WAS

STANDING BEFORE Brian Wood's drawings, the viewer immediately imagines that all one must do is look at the artist's cast of characters to determine what he has on his mind, but this diverts us from the deeper conceptual and aesthetic issues of his work. To begin with, there is his choice of medium. It is important to Wood's work that drawing is always autographic: among art mediums, the pencil, as an extension of the hand, offers up the greatest opportunity for both control and spontaneity. Indexically, given their scale, Wood's images are little more than the trace of the movement of his hand; what the resulting marks depict may be thought of as sculptural objects whose intuited boundaries and features are formed by the subtle gestural qualities of his line. The contours transform the flat whiteness of the paper into the space these objects come to occupy. In some drawings, shading defines another surface or alludes to yet another space. But the substance these surfaces, spaces, and objects appear to have is only an illusion.

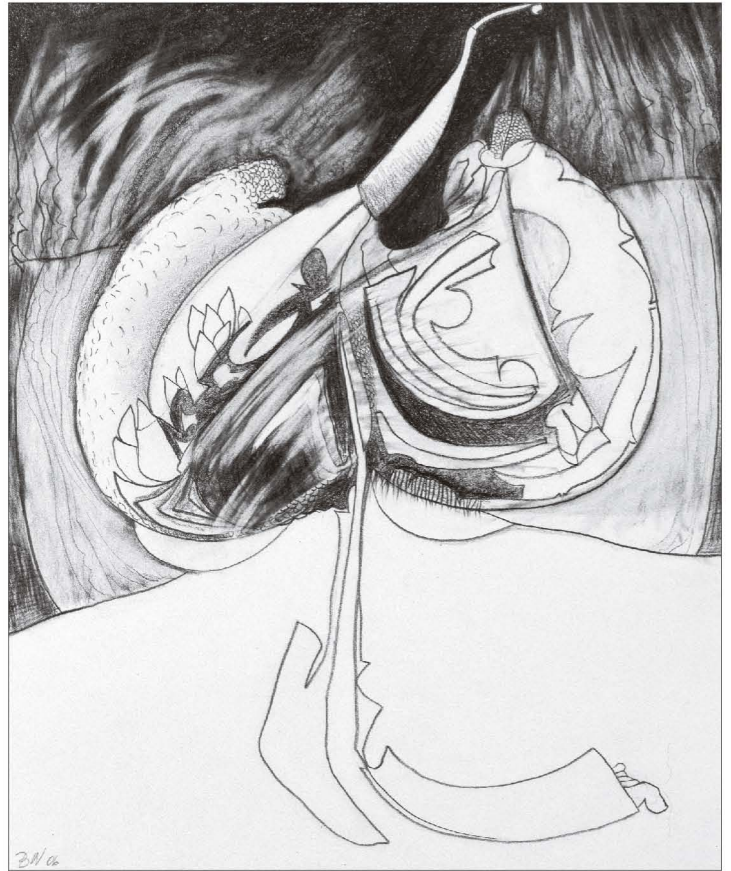
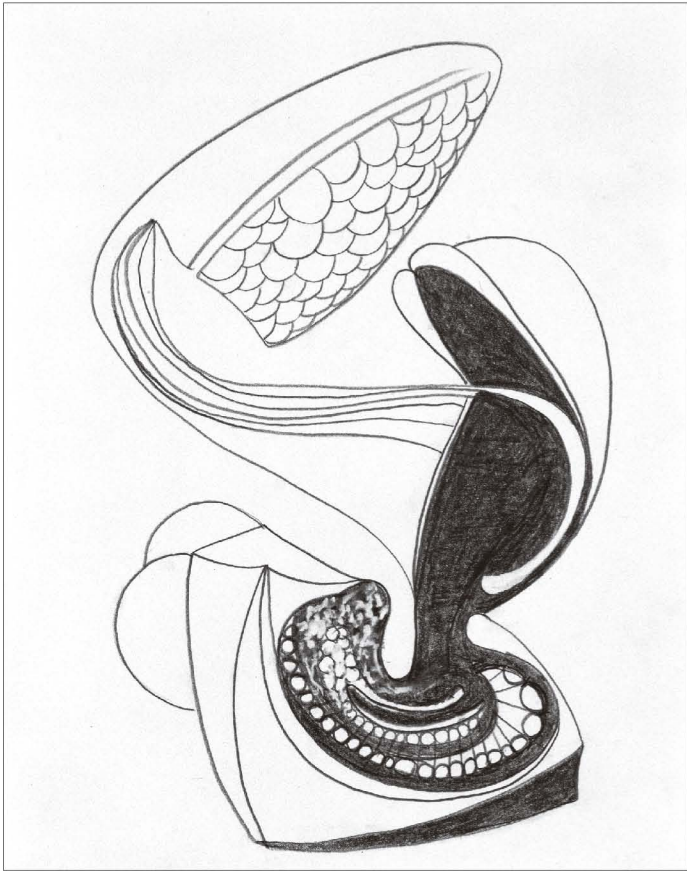
For the most part, Wood produces his drawings in rapid succession, an approach that represses the natural tendency to censure oneself, allowing previously neglected associations and the unintended play of thought to come to the fore. This gives expression to what is identified as the *imagined*, the name we put to something that we suppose does not actually exist. This description, up to this point, accounts for what materially exists in Wood's drawings; beyond that, the process of interpretation takes over. Subsequently, these images, which bear a minimal resemblance to things in the world, give rise, through patterns of textual references and associations, to the suspicion that the artist is intent on revealing some unconscious secret to us. Based on this premise, we proceed to generate interpretations that hang on the notion that these images represent Wood's fantasies, obsessions, or desires.

Seeing these drawings as the artist's own sublimated fixation on genitalia, hands, feet, and varied orifices reflects

our conditioning to privilege this proposition over all others. This submission to convention curtails our ability to identify what else these drawings may touch upon. By dismissing the notion that they are the product of Wood's unconscious, it becomes self-evident, given the recursive elements and the care with which the drawings are executed, that they are neither unintentional nor the result of an obsession, but are the product of the artist's conscious mind and have been shaped and processed by his ego, that psychological mechanism engaged in the control, planning, and interpretation of reality. Wood's phantasmagoric personages evocatively display their parts or partake in lewd acts, but rather than representing the artist's erotic impulses, they provoke us to project onto them our own fantasies.

THE CONFUSED ECONOMY OF sublimation and stimulation that Wood's drawings give rise to reflects the French philosopher Jacques Derrida's conception of *différance*—the interplay of difference and deferral that governs the production of textual meaning. Our desire to determine what Wood intends to summon forth with these images results in our subscribing to a chain of interpretations. For instance, our preference for one aspect (the narrative) or another (the analytic) ultimately determines how we will come to understand them. If we decide to play this game in a self-conscious manner and set aside the literary narratives that can be imposed on the images for those of the psychoanalytic or the philosophical, it is possible to imagine that these drawings (either intentionally or not) reflect a Real that can only be imagined.

Unlike the potential narratives of pleasure and repression that depend on the ability of the the Lacanian "realm of the Symbolic" to make such oppositions as "presence and absence," "male and female," seem to exist, the Real neither represents nor subscribes to any such logic or order. This is because the Real merely exists in

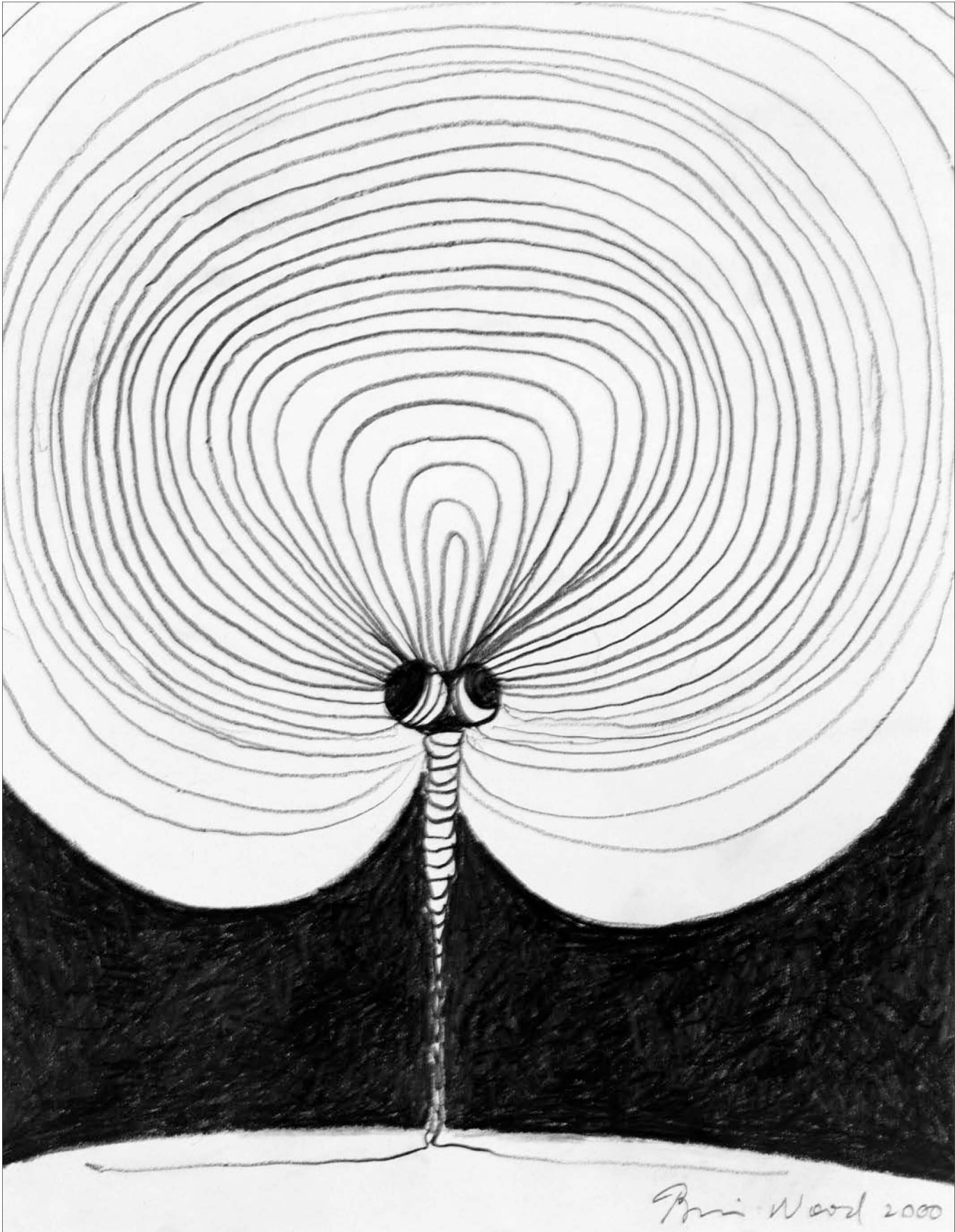


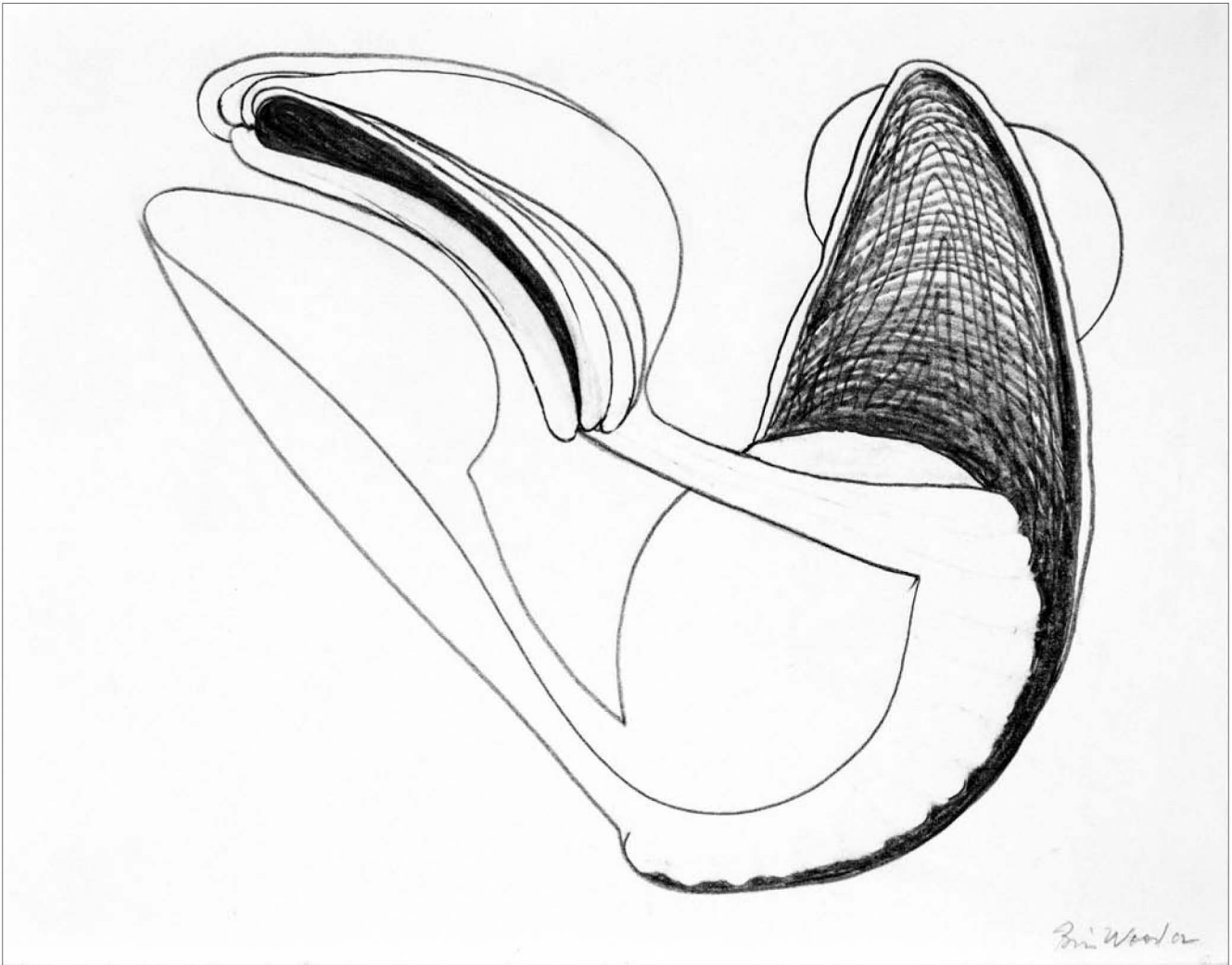
experience as the inexplicable. It is impossible to integrate the Real into this “realm of the Symbolic” because it has no *other* against which to be foregrounded; as such, it can only be imagined. While the Real cannot be portrayed, its evocation has come to be associated with a yearning for a unification of knowledge and pleasure that can only be achieved by dissolving the illusion of control and agency. Subsequently, the Real often manifests itself in the blur or the smudge, taken to be an accident, which defaces the seamlessness of the Symbolic.

The unnamable nature of what Wood draws can, consequently, be understood as a sign of the Real’s resistance to being cut into pieces by the symbolic order of language and representation. By picturing a space in which causality and actuality are nonexistent, Wood offers us an image-world embedded in the notion that all that does exist is the product of our interpretation of signs of our own making. This self-

awareness destabilizes the oppositions between experience and rationality, body and mind, and so on. In an email to the author, Wood explains: “The truly alien and unknown generates impulses which my body/ego forms as image. It’s as if the unconscious and conscious were undifferentiated, each being impossible without the other.” So rather than being the prurient musings of the subconscious, by and large, these drawings can alternately be understood as the product of an unprocessed, unsynthesized, inexplicable aspect of existence seeking representation, and as an attempt by the artist to gain psychic mastery over the unimaginable. It is our inability to differentiate between the one and the other that makes Wood’s work both fanciful and traumatic.

*Saul Ostrow
Cleveland, Ohio and New York City
April 2008*





BRIAN WOOD works with multiple media in New York City. His paintings, drawings, prints, and photographs are exhibited internationally and are held in many private and public collections. Wood is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Metropolitan Museum, the New York Public Library, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Houston Museum of Fine Arts, the Tampa Museum of Art, the Davis Museum, the National Gallery of Canada, the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, the Museum of Fine Arts, the Museum of Contemporary Art and Concordia Art Gallery in Montreal, the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, and many others. Brian Wood's awards include the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, the New York Foundation for the Arts Grant, numerous Canada Council Grants, and the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. The artist wishes to thank Nathan Sambul and Rainer Sabatowski for their generous support in realizing this exhibition. All drawings are made with graphite pencil on paper.



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