

Brian  
Wood  
Drawings

# Brian Wood Drawings

July 13th - Sept 1st, 2019



# PREFACE

Working across a variety of mediums, Brian Wood's practice is intimately attuned to the specificity of his materials. He draws with a richly varied array of expressive lines, marks, and tonal effects. The artist's handling of line is central to his practice, in turn fluid and sharp, a quality that functions as a lightning rod to inner emotional and psychological states.

Wood is an originator of what is now called neo-Surrealism or neo-Symbolism. His deep inquiry into psychology and spirit, reaching back to his earliest work in the 70's, bridges and melds these identities. Wood's drawings hover between reality and the unconscious, manifesting as impressions of otherworldly dreamscapes, yet appear refracted from the organic textures of our surroundings. In the artist's own words, the work is "immersed in questions about consciousness and ontology, the mystery of intense images arising to awareness and being, and their complex relationship with and away from time." Emphasizing the equivocal nature of their meaning, they have an interactive, Rorschach-like relationship with the viewer.

While Wood's work is predominantly abstract, characterized by biomorphic and other non-representational forms, they are interlaced with figurative, almost forensic glimpses of reality. These remnants, ranging from floral imagery to skulls and claws, take on an almost totemic presence, suggesting buried unconscious drives and deep psychological gestalts. In *Chora*, a bat is juxtaposed with images of a claw and sperm-like forms, a fusion of psychosexual anxiety and metaphorical imagery that appears in *Arrival* and *The Wait*, amongst others.

The artist hones in on the allusive potential of floral images, examining aspects of their existence as organisms both beautiful and tragically fragile, as well as their predatory and carnivorous habits, as in Venus fly-traps and other tropical plants. These forms take on a threatening nature in *Quicken*, *Plank*, and *Passage*, wherein the bulbs of the plant take on menacing, jaw-like traits and sharply conflict with our presumed understanding of them as harmless and non-sentient.



*Samir Nedzamar is an artist and writer based in NYC. His work and writing focuses on qualities of abjection and psychological expression, with particular emphasis on the movements associated with post-WWI German Expression. Samir studied at Bard College and Hunter College in NY.*

*Cathedral*  
2018  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches







*Maw*  
2018  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches

*Hathor*  
2019  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches





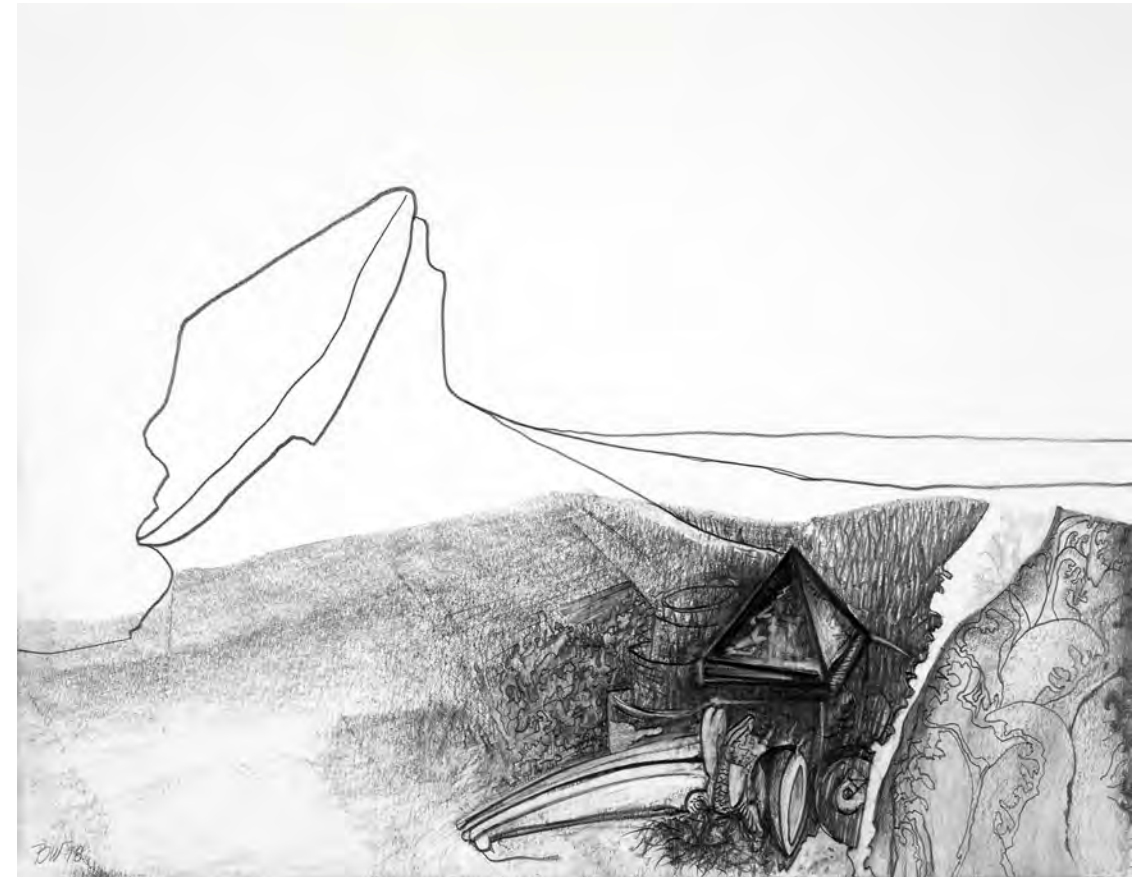
*Buckler*  
2017  
Graphite on paper  
17 x 14 inches



*Infant*  
2018  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches







*Word*  
2018  
Graphite on paper  
11 x 14 inches



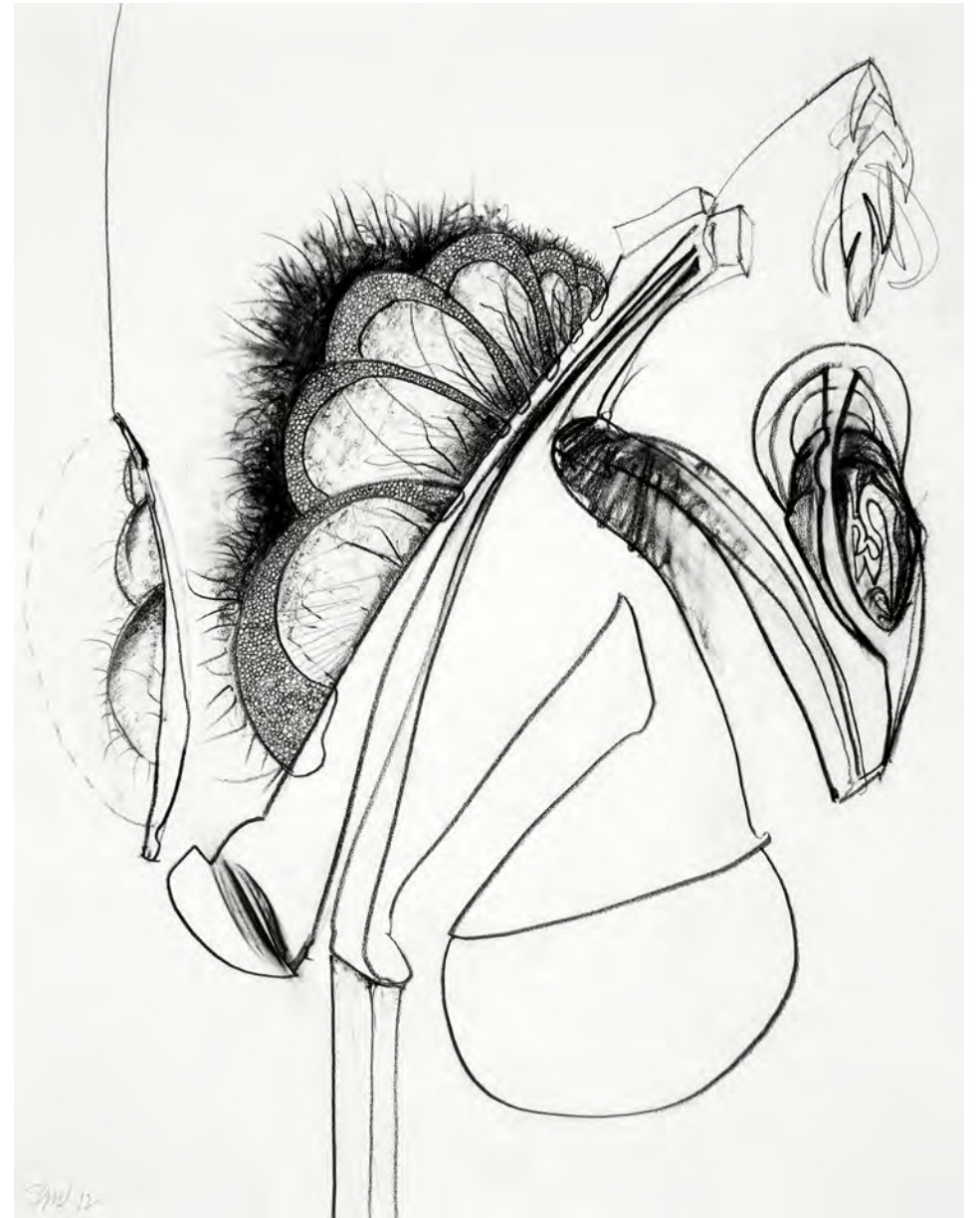
*Flute*  
2012  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 in

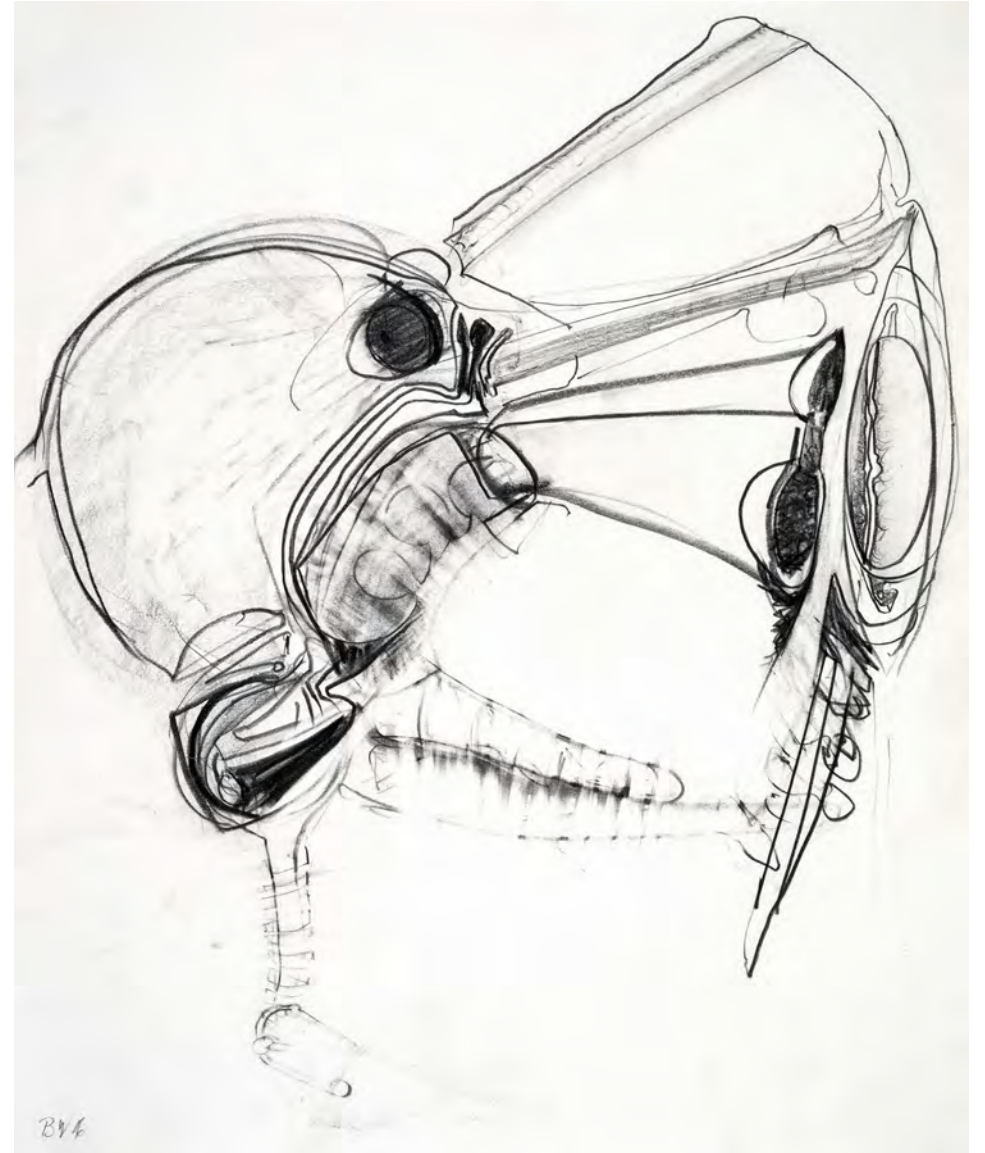
*Suckle*  
2018  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 in





*Cross*  
2012  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches





*The Bouquet*  
2016  
Graphite on paper  
17 x 14 inches

*Crowed*  
2018  
Graphite on paper  
17 x 14 inches







*Edge*  
2017  
Graphite on paper  
6 x 4 inches

*Revel*  
2017  
Graphite on paper  
6 x 4 inches

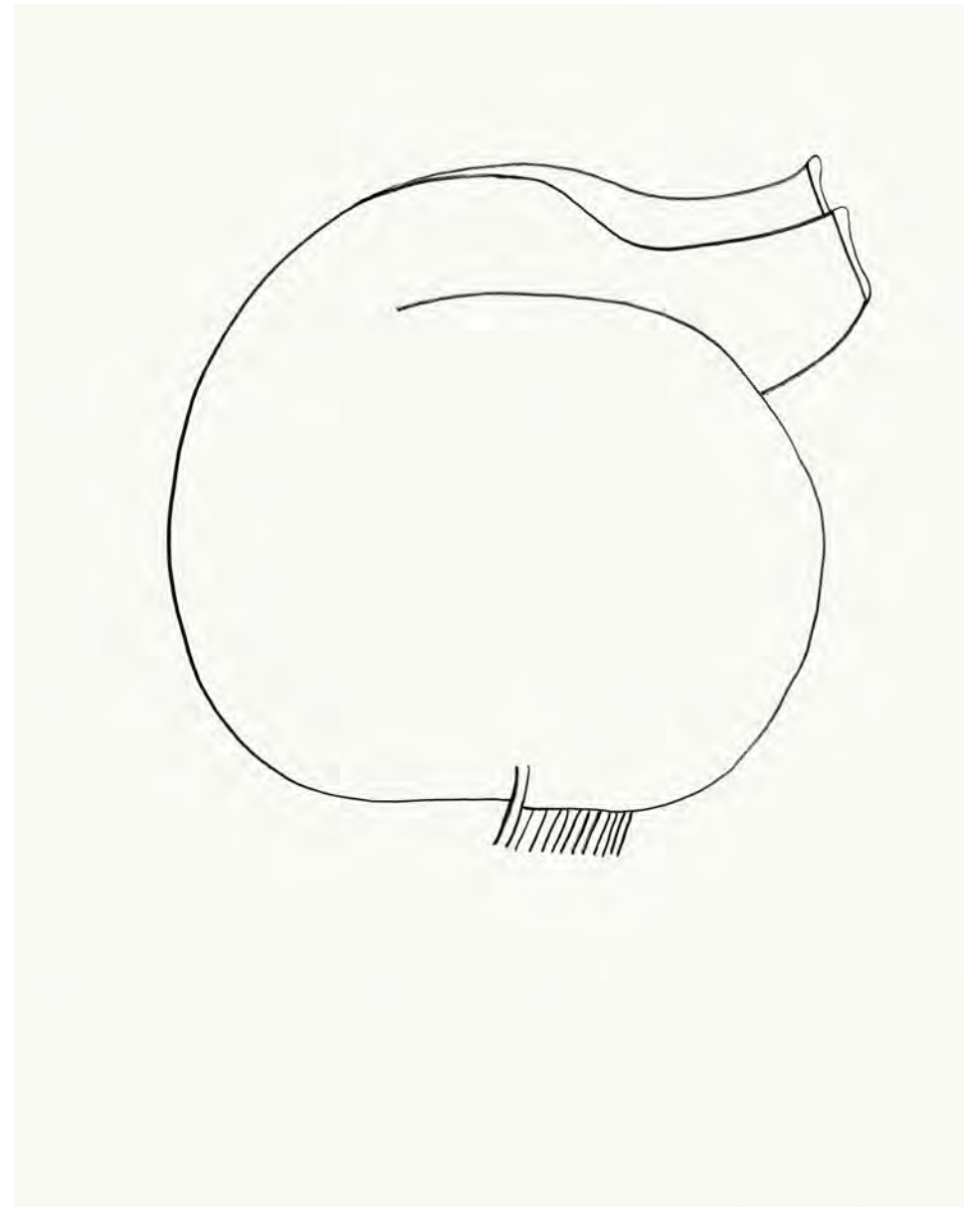
*Path*  
2017  
Graphite on paper  
6 x 4 inches

*Threshold*  
2017  
Graphite on paper  
6 x 4 inches

*Sensor*  
2016  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches

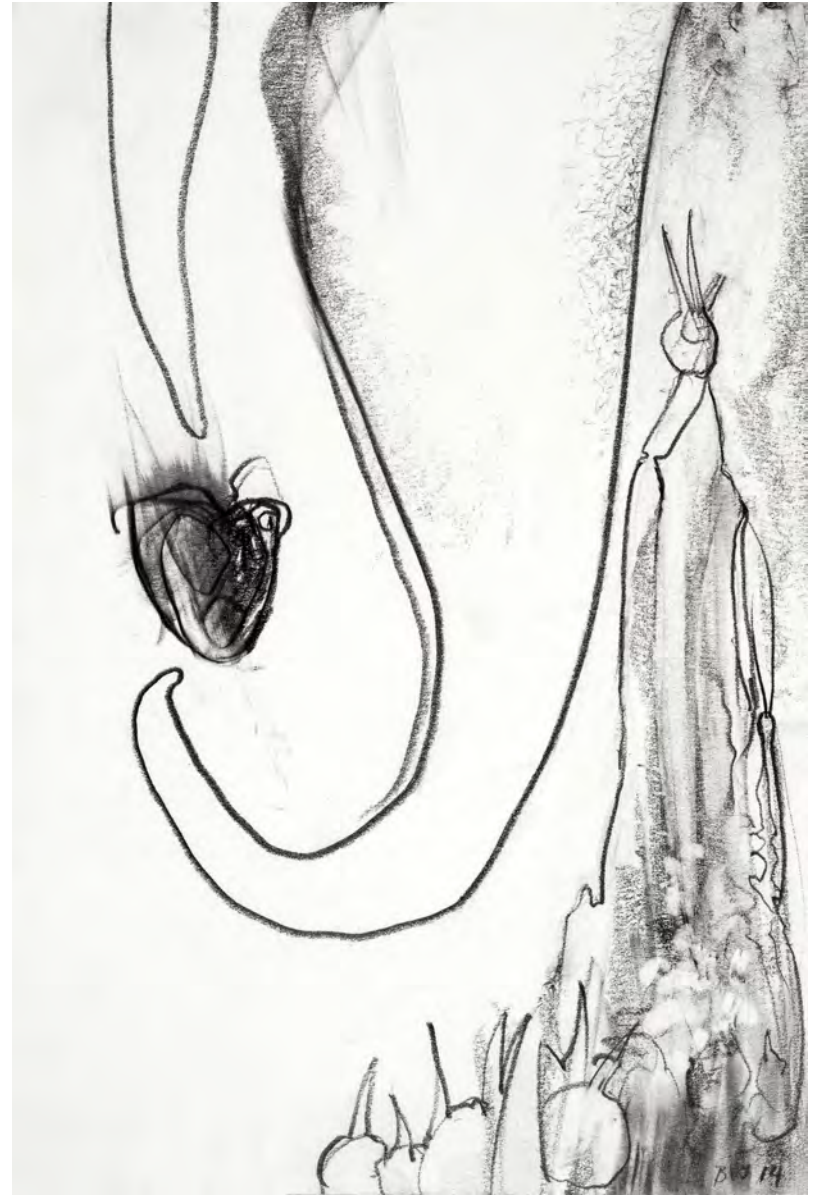


*Sup*  
2001  
Graphite on paper  
12 x 9 inches





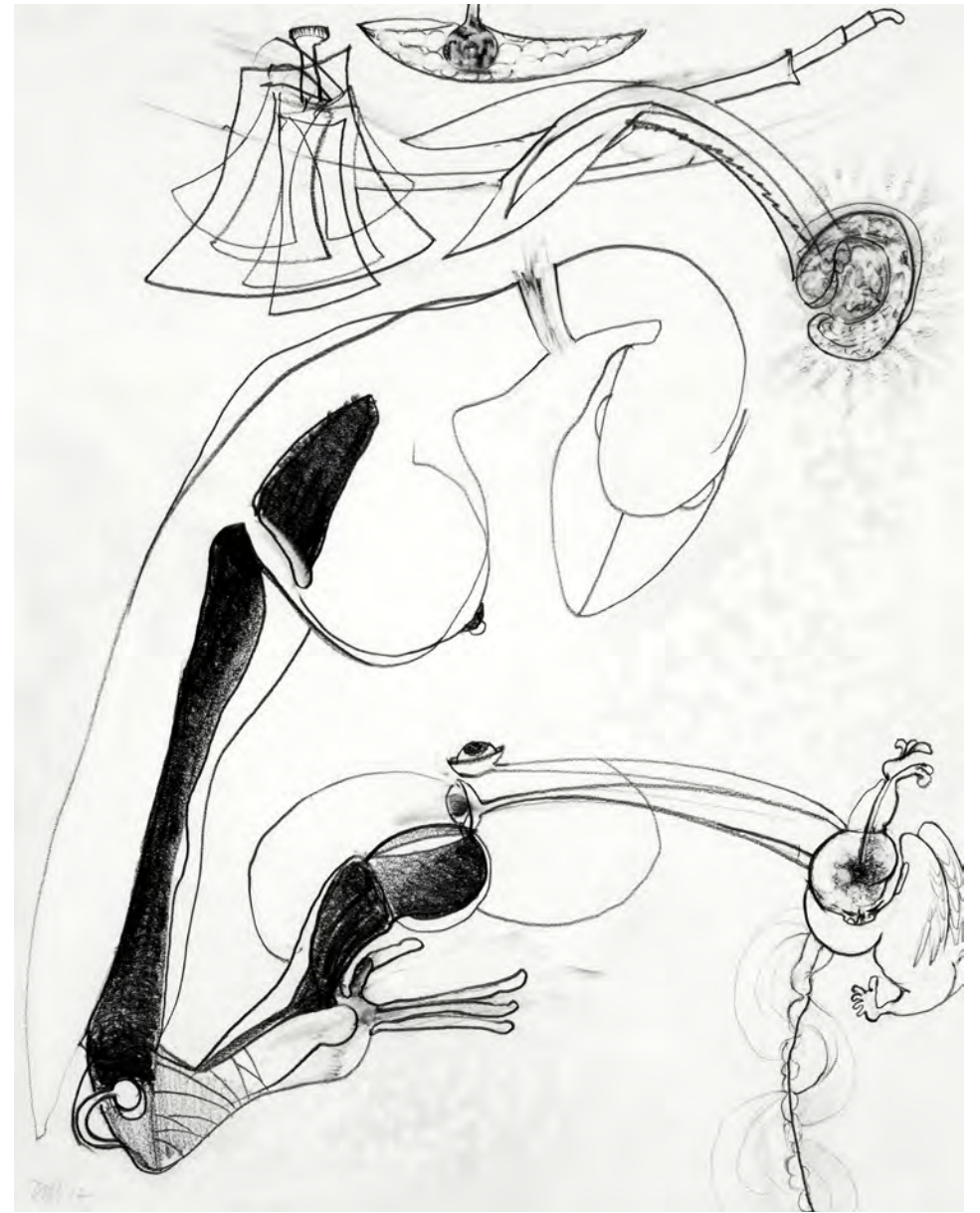
*Valve*  
2014  
Graphite on paper  
9 x 6 inches





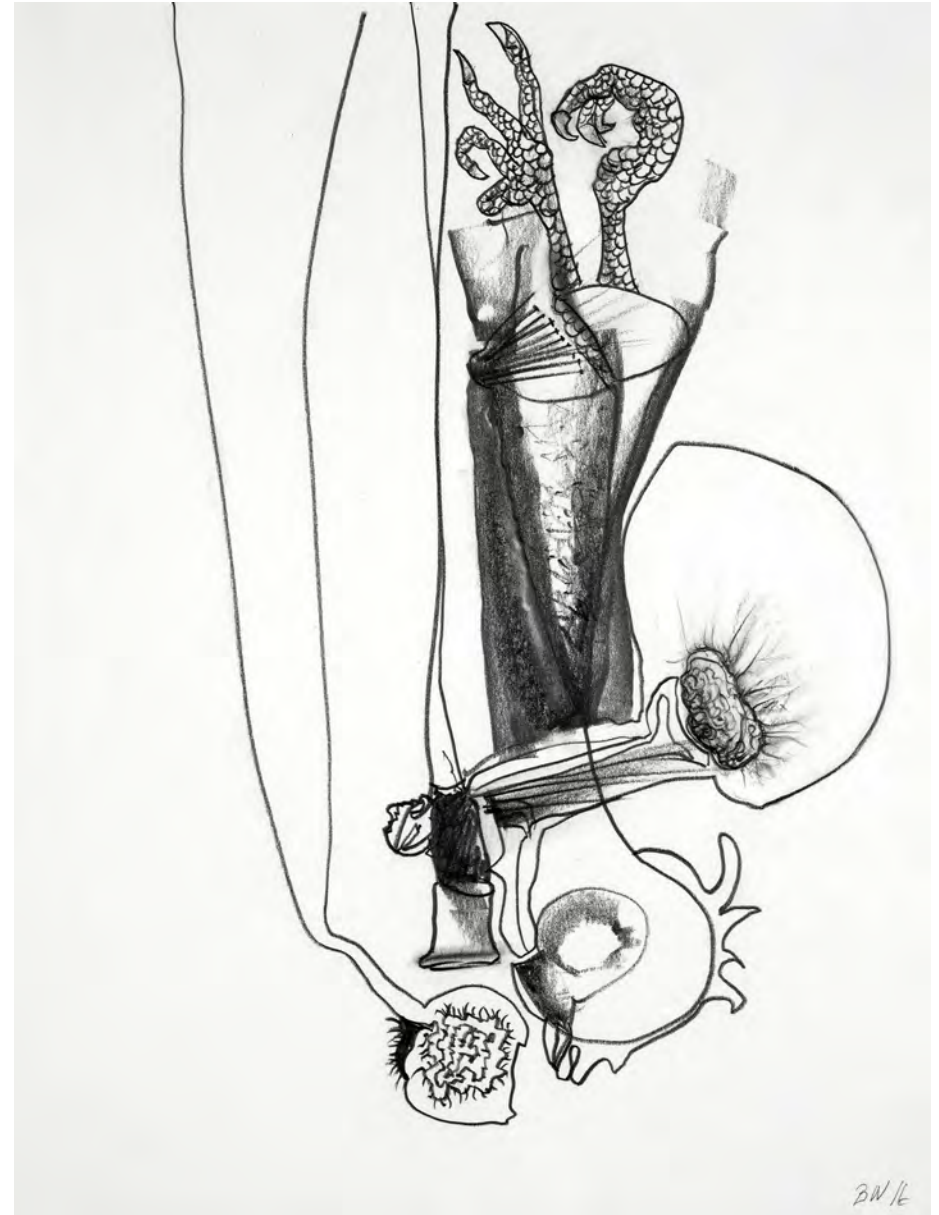
*Plank*  
2017  
*Graphite on paper*  
11 x 14 inches

*Riven*  
2012  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches





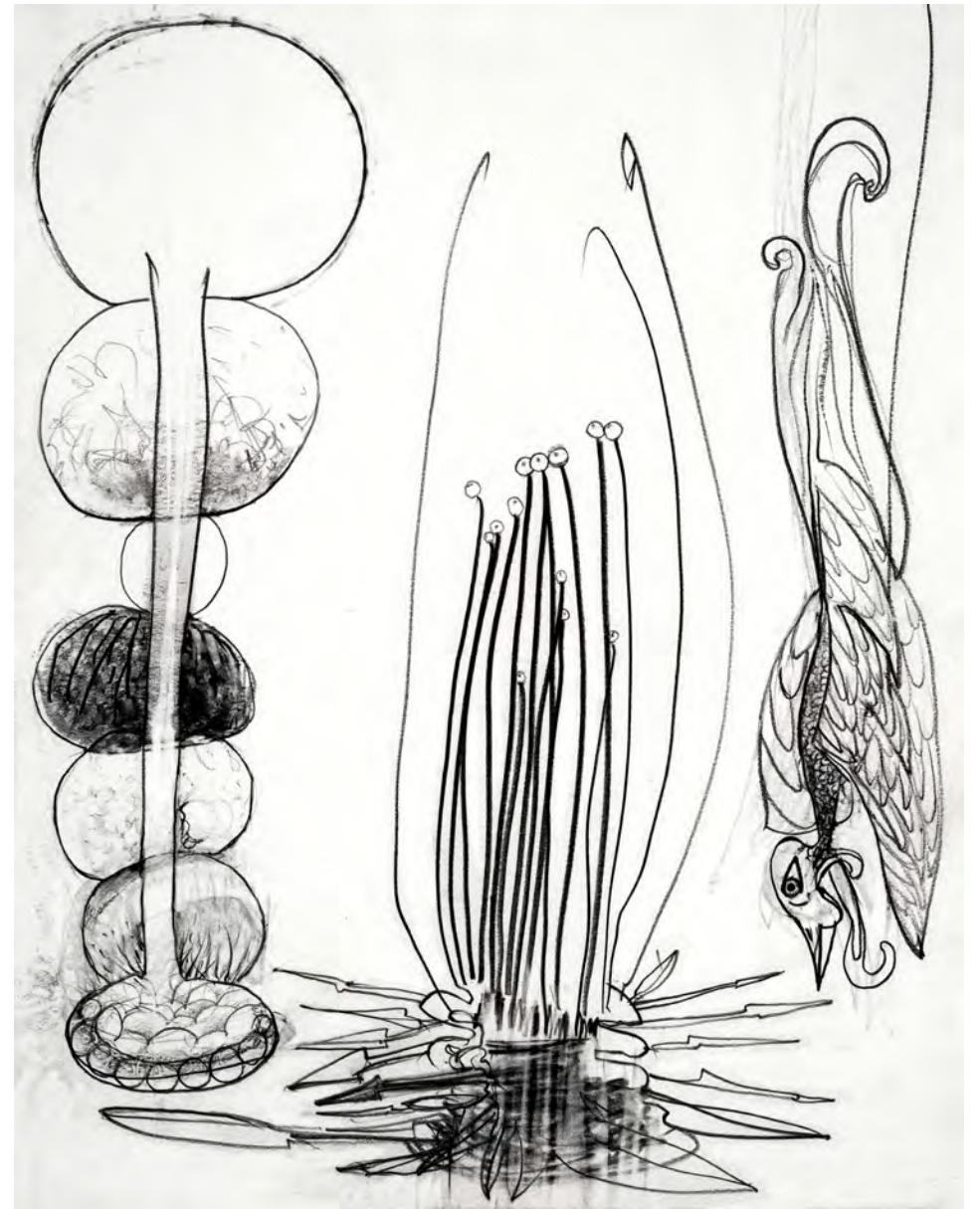
*The Wait*  
2016  
Graphite on paper  
12 x 9 inches



*Father*  
2019  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches

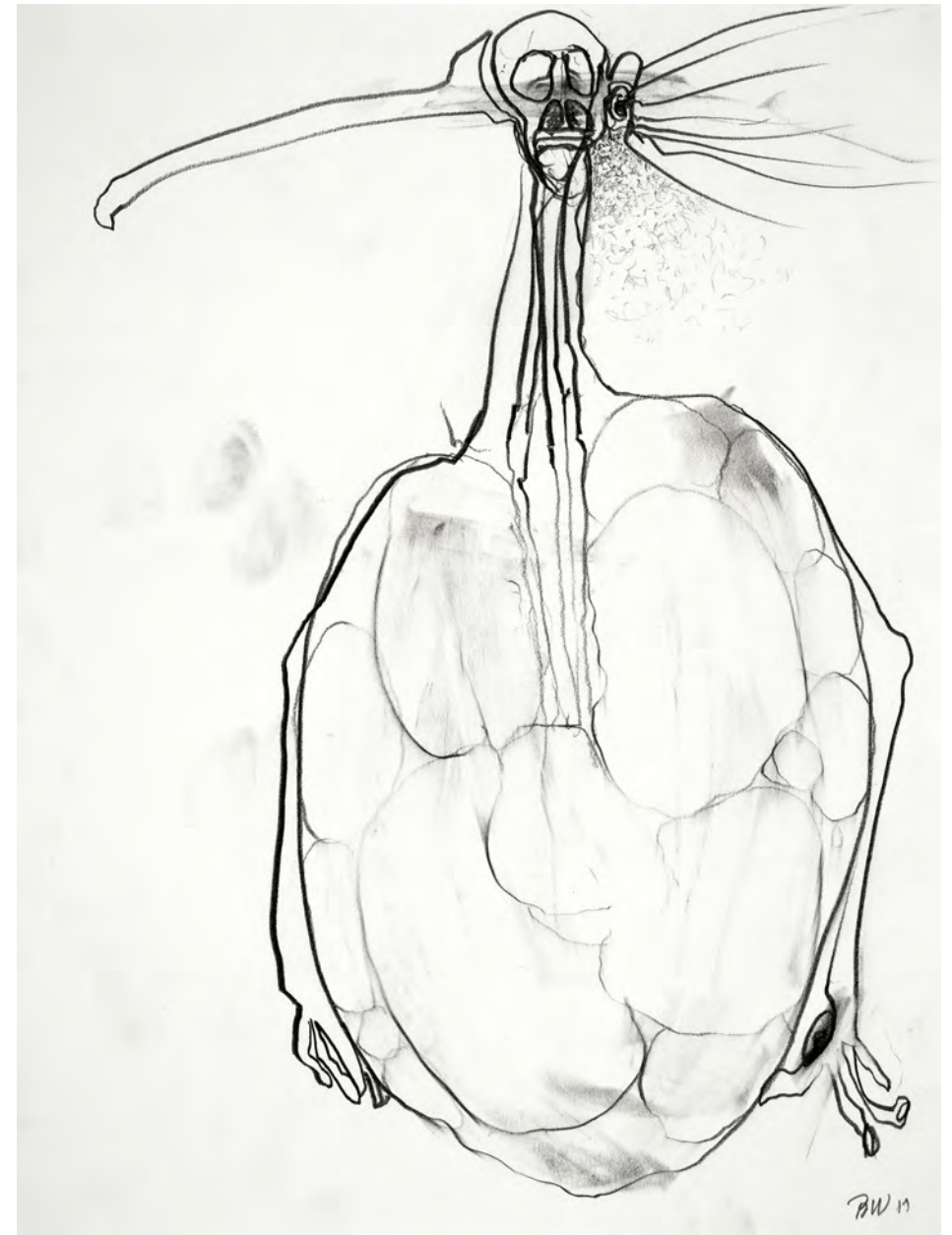


*Arrival*  
2018  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches





*Slung*  
2017  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 in



Brian's Vision on October 6th

My skeleton is laid out on cobalt blue cloth with all bones in alignment as if still connected by tissue, all my bones' surfaces beautifully smooth, like yellowed ivory reflecting blue. The breeze feeling fresh and cool as it gently flows through my ribs and skull and around my bones. My consciousness is apart, in a gelatinous sphere, close and slightly above my body and yet everywhere in everything. This is exactly the same experience I've had in three near-death episodes in my life: awareness leaves my dying body to a precise location above, witnessing my body below, but consciousness becomes hyper-aware. It exists everywhere in every object, in every space, in every nearby being and mind.

This airy, open pleasure then collapsed groundward in crushing, dense compression. My body buried deep, squeezed by earth, face down, rotting flesh grown through with roots of trees, mycelia, and threads of grass, pervious to water and underground life. While I knew I was dead, I felt buried alive and tried to breathe. Facing down, with a tremendous weight of earth pressing my body tight, I couldn't make my lungs work and felt I was inhaling mud and water in claustrophobic terror. I felt compassion for the trees and plants and worms that were moving through me, but sadness for my body having to suffer this gradual undoing. It felt too slow, too wet, too alone. I really didn't like it and wanted to take my body out.

(Visionary experiences I've been blessed, or cursed, with since early childhood are nothing like normal discursive fantasy. Images arise suddenly, usually uninvited, with great intensity and an emphatic sense of being. Akin to hallucination but not, visions bring life and unknown knowledge to what is happening or about to happen, as if from some other world or dimension. Linear time is obviated so they can often be or contain pre-cognitions. Once present, their transformations can be affected but not controlled by inner or outer suggestion, desire, or wanting to know. When asked, consciousness usually moves, but in unpredictable ways that are rarely conjunctive. Resistance to fear, horror, pleasure, or even to resistance itself, often locks the mind in self-amplifying oscillations or narrowing repetitions as if in hellish halls of mirrors, killing vision. But a non-narcissistic request - in some traditions called prayer - moves and opens consciousness. The truly imaginal reveals its form and internal logic but refuses egoic agendas and reductive control. When making paintings and drawings, my consciousness opens itself to such visitations).

From this pit I flashed up to high and light-filled space under the arching right transept of a tall and spacious cathedral. It seemed English Gothic, like Westminster Abbey. I looked down at my body laid out on a wheeled stone slab for its funeral. Dressed as a Hierophant in a brilliant cadmium red robe, covered with intricate gold embroidery of plants and vines and flowers, and wearing a tall bishop's hat of a darker more earthy red, the center of my forehead looked up to the exact crossing of the transepts and nave. My body lay about thirty degrees off perfect alignment with the nave, the slab's foot angled north. With arms out-stretched, almost forming a cross, but lowered thirty degrees like wings about to take flight.



At the interment, body and slab were inserted into a narrow wall cavity and the marble wall stone sealed in place. I felt a dark, dry claustrophobia with heavy stone squeezing my body and I knew I wanted out. Not to escape death, which I fully accepted, but wanting out of that confined permanence. Awareness yearned for another place.

With whirring rush of feathers in roaring air, I burst out in flight: a compact, dense brown owl with massive beating wings. Seeing in blackness, bright through owl eyes, I landed on the gutter of the verdigris roof of Chartres cathedral at night, just near a projecting gargoyle spitting into the darkness under moonlight. I lived as an owl but could also watch myself being an owl, feeling whole in a different body, comfortable in the dark.

As I felt the sensation of eyes flicking in my owl eye sockets, I remembered a recurring experience from my early childhood in Saskatchewan. I'd awake some mornings and be looking out past bone-hard circular sockets through the bright green eyes of an alien creature. Its pale grey skin held constantly shifting shapes – soft contorted slippages that didn't correspond to any bi-symmetrical structure of earthly skeletal creatures. It had no bones. Feeling safe and protected, I'd say, "Oh, you're back," and would remain in that body all day. As I looked out, contrast and chroma were high, everything had a granular transparent beauty and the periphery of my visual field would dissolve into emerald green light. I felt fully in my being, my inner/outer world was one. We kept our secret.

Soaring up on my owl wings, I perched in the highest arch of Chartres' right transept. Sunlight radiated rich color through stained glass roses as I marveled at the intricate incandescence of this pulsating space so rich with infinite detail and surfaces all alive. Very aware of the yellow-green spheres of my eyes under the perfect circles of feathered 'eye-brows,' I was painfully conscious of being inside my body looking out, incomplete in some way.

Instantly I was Chartres, shooting up and out of earth in driving speed and mass. A chthonic creature of tremendous power pulling darkness and light to the highest realms. Growing the history of everything into articulate piles of thought, density, and endless surface; rushing up in color and light; darkness so brilliant; time and space defined and obliterated. Awestruck by the beauty and richness of my surface and space, I completely surrendered to my being. Looking down, my belly a living limestone hive, I felt the lives and deaths of saints, living skin carved by human hands, shaped intensities of meaning and minds with their yearnings of love, ambition, awe, lust, hatred, and fear. The myriad eruptions of unearthly creatures and celestial color all grounded in stone. I wept with gratitude.

Once more, my disembodied consciousness saw my corpse laid out, this time in a 'cradle' of hammered-flat bronze strips. Shaped like the curved bovine horns of Hathor's crown,

each three inches wide, each with space between, they formed a long couch or cradle. The arching curves reached over my corpse and a channel of space ran underneath, centered up the bier. My body began to burn and as the flames grew higher my body rushed into intense ecstasy. Each cell exploded in flame and as the mass of flames grew so did the orgasmic euphoria that I knew contained all that ever was or could be. I felt each limb, each organ, every unknown part, burning in extreme joy and reaching out as fire. But my skeleton remained untouched and left behind on blue, the bones burnished like the ever-touched relic of some ancient saint or magus. As the fire grew, my watching consciousness joined the flames and became the fire and remained thus embodied.

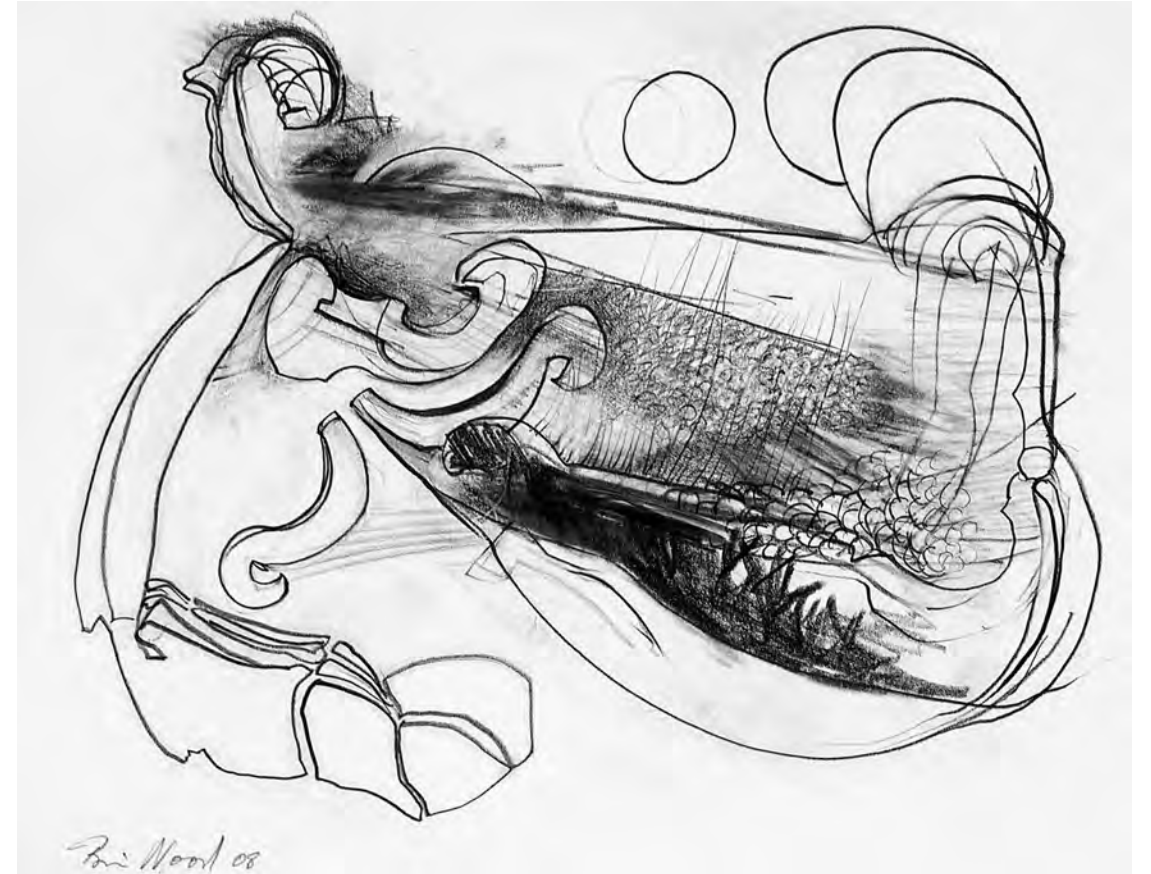
As a pillar of fire, with a pure sapphire center, surging, reaching, turning in complex form and gesture, shaped empty space or forms of detailed specificity, sharp-edged or gaseous but all the essence of flame, I moved through space and time. At one moment, I was in my studio working drawings and a large painting. As the conduit of forms moving through my flames with great energy, I made images directly on the linen without paint or tools with no hesitation or resistance. It all moved fast as light but felt eternal and still. Passing through linen surface, I was out in galactic space far beyond earth, as a roiling mass of fire, gliding at great velocity on curved invisible fields like grooves though immense space. I could feel the shifting gravitational fields as they weighted my fire, torquing through brilliant blackness – a darkness generating intense, transparent light but still the deepest of complex blacks. With profuse detail of structure and form, I saw billions of objects in such intricate detail, seemingly impossible for a single mind to perceive. I lived through births and deaths of stars, huge roaring explosions of supernova, rushing or sucking or bursting of space over immeasurable distances, eruptions and endless patterns of light, complex arrays of matter and whirling condensations, black holes, and vast distances of empty but living space. Extraordinary beauty and unbearable energy – but I experienced no fear. While moving near the speed of light, I had the sense that I am all of this, witnessing it all but containing it all, being it all, in complete silence and stillness.

After traveling for aeons I cried out, called and wept for my celestial twin, my angelic double, to reveal itself. I instantly saw a point of light in the distance and then a leg or arm with alternating foot or hand or a hybrid of both, reaching across millions of miles and beckoning me to follow. As I spun closer, near the edge of the universe inflating always beyond reach, I could see a simian-like creature gamboling in from beyond to meet me while still holding to the knife edge of space. It played and teased and stretched its limbs to me, reaching and retracting in elastic velocities over vast distances. Its body made of twining layers and bands of red-gold light, bands like muscles stretched over black interior space, a deep black emptiness revealed as its body opened and folded: no skeleton, no skin, no fixed scale. All sexes and no sex, its limbs and body stretched and pulled in humorous, boneless, irrational contortions. Always I could see two sensitive, brilliant eyes, glittering emerald orbs, coalescing to pale yellow where an iris might be, both perceiving and composed of light. Its head and face swarmed in protean flashes: faces replacing faces,

multiple heads and shapes, creatures, animals, humans. Dog-like snouts with sharp pointed teeth, wolves and lions, my mother, lizards, insects, birds, monsters, my father – loving faces, violent faces, seductive faces, impassive faces, faces I knew, many I didn't, lustful faces, angels, gods, beasts, devils, persons. And yet I knew I was all this: my twin's body of light my most true reality. Its motility and grace, humor and sight, in constantly changing scale my truest being.

As I drew close, suddenly on the edge of the universe, I then became the edge of the universe: a writhing edge of rich black flames, not the oranges, reds, and yellows of before, now melding into alien unknowable light. Tonguing out into an empyrean realm beyond space, words fail to describe the indescribable. What I experienced exceeded known dimensions, I seemed able to identify five, knowing there were infinitely more, exceeding more than vision or language or image could possibly contain. All feeling, body, location, view, thought, all that was me, vanished. This space/non-space was all, a sense of self or I or me or you was not even a possibility. To speak of rapture cannot describe the all-ness, the silence, the completeness: any of these words are clichés that fall short. I saw golden light in every saturation, in every chromatic possibility, in all intensities, opaque and transparent, like vast steel 'I' beams of light shoulder to shoulder but in every dimension so they had no direction, or had all directions, they were everything. And billions of golden spheres of light that had no scale, they could be smaller than atoms or larger than universes. I couldn't tell. But I know they were souls, souls of all beings reaching behind and beyond time. All were perfect spheres in motion. While I could distinguish form and edge and the shifting changing color and intensity, I knew it was all one light of being. A light structured of infinite photons in multiple dimensions, surpassing meaning. Then I knew and saw into each photon, each revealed its interior as another vast cosmos of black light, a universe of forms, another edge, another empyrean.

—Brian Wood  
10/06/2018

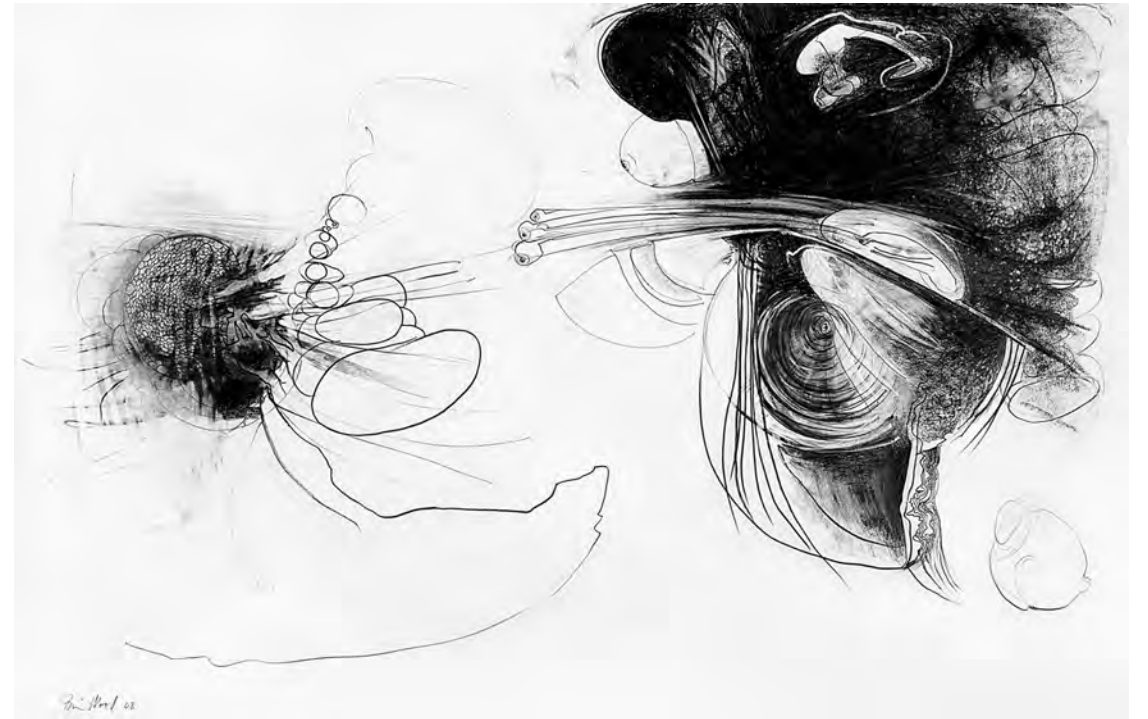


*Realm*  
2008  
Graphite on paper  
11 x 14 inches



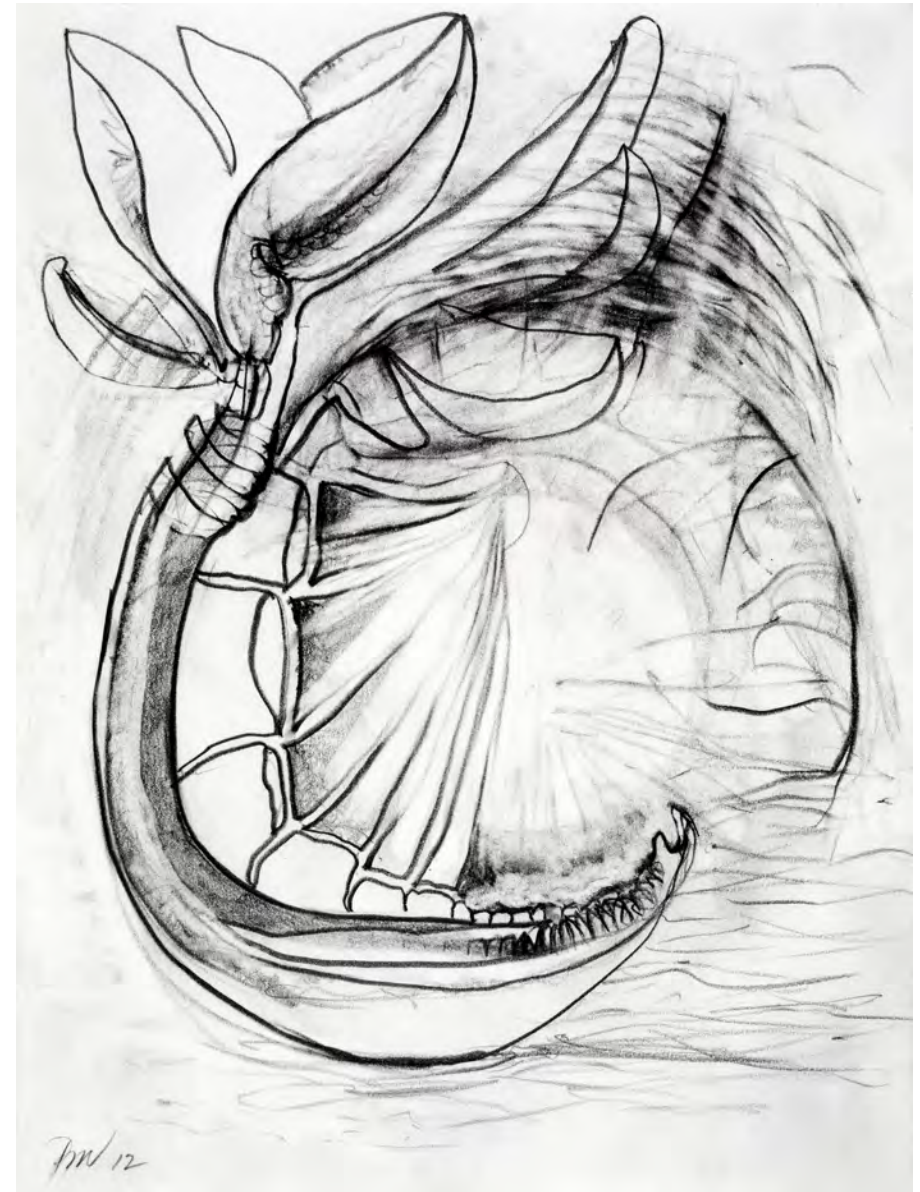
*Prairie*  
2014  
Graphite on paper  
9 x 6 inches





*Torque*  
2008  
Graphite on paper  
26 x 46 inches

*Passage*  
2012  
Graphite on paper  
12 x 9 inches







*Incendere*  
2012  
Graphite on paper  
11 x 14 inches



*Quicken*  
2012  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches

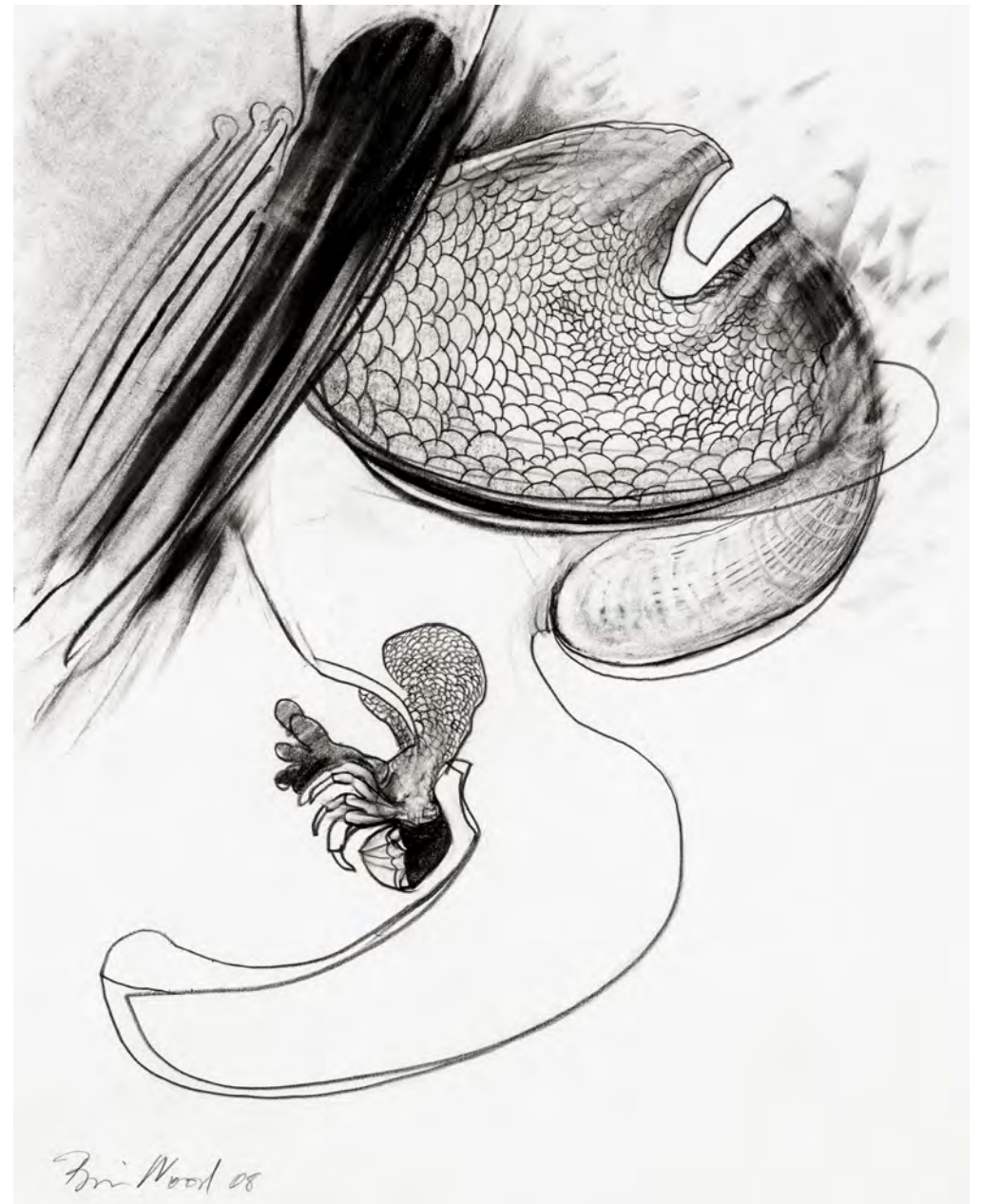


*Chora*  
2018  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches





*Choke*  
2008  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches

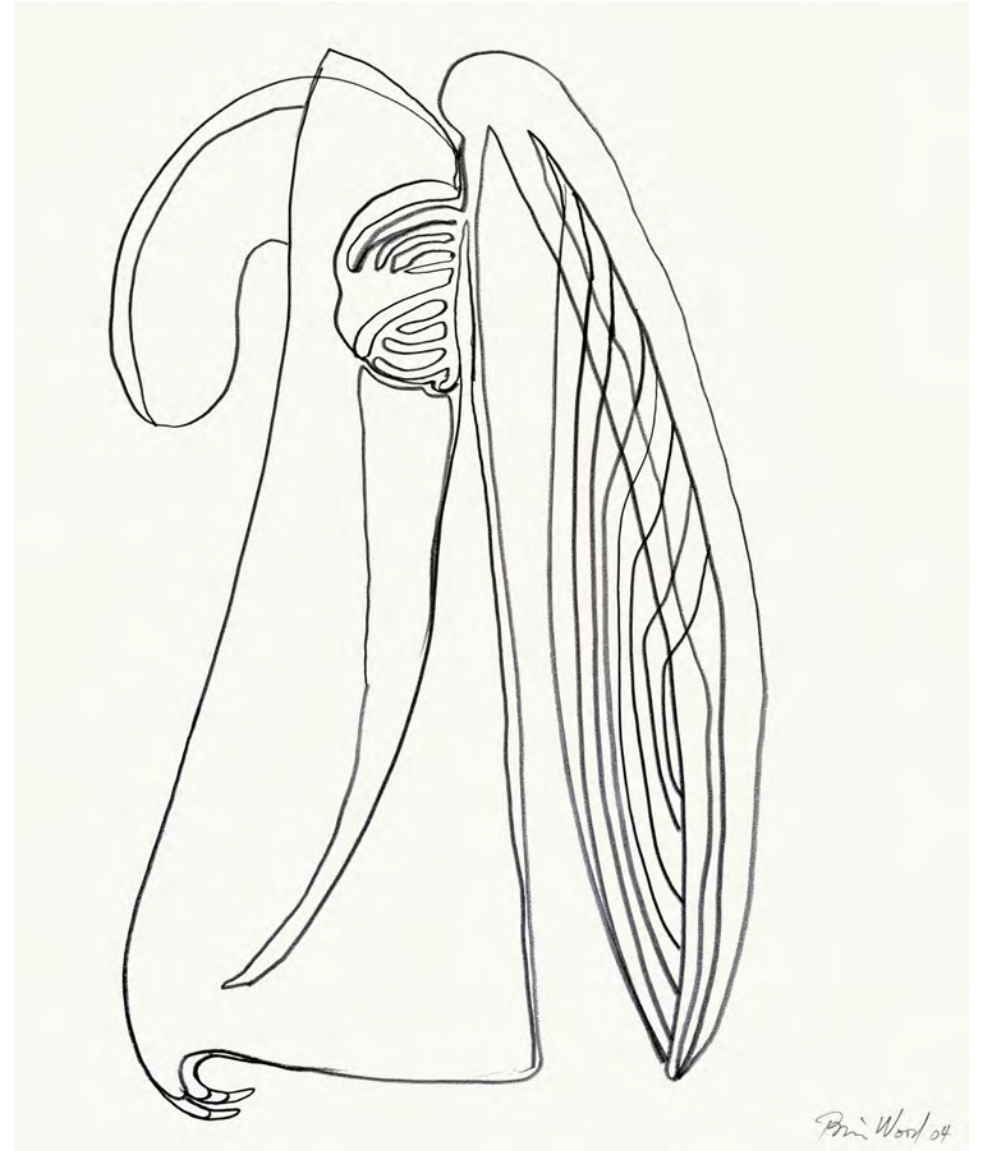


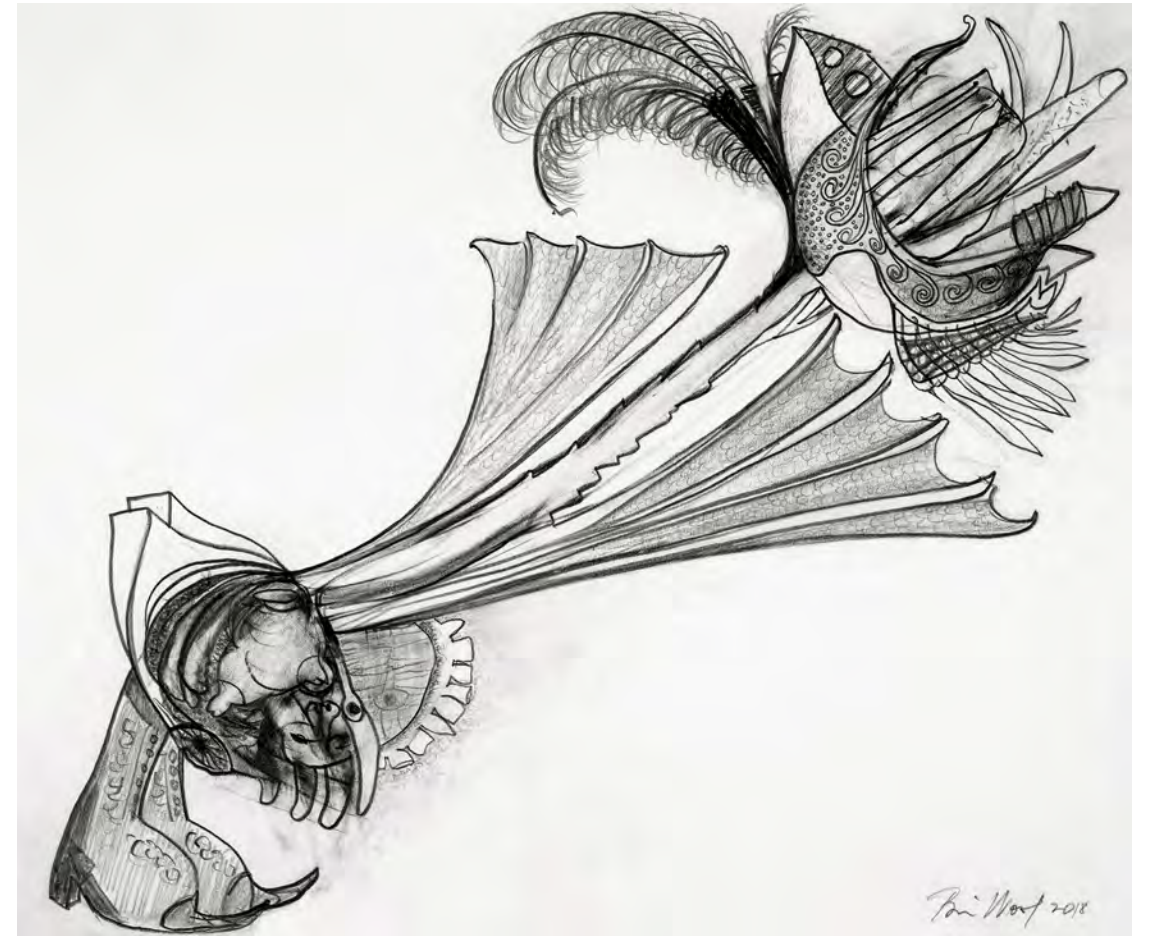


*Nod*  
2012  
Graphite on paper  
11 x 14 inches



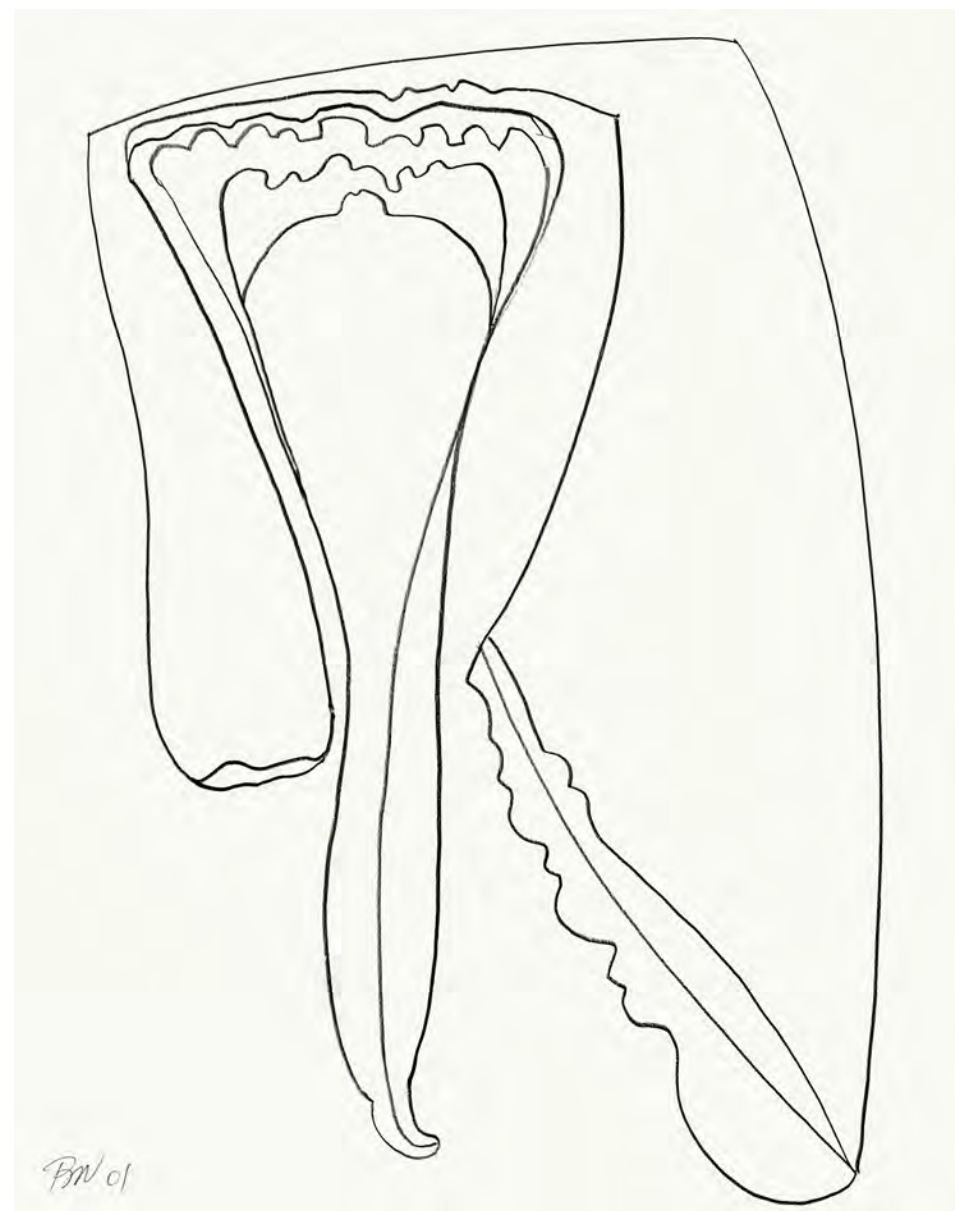
*Scalar*  
2004  
Graphite on paper  
17 x 14 inches

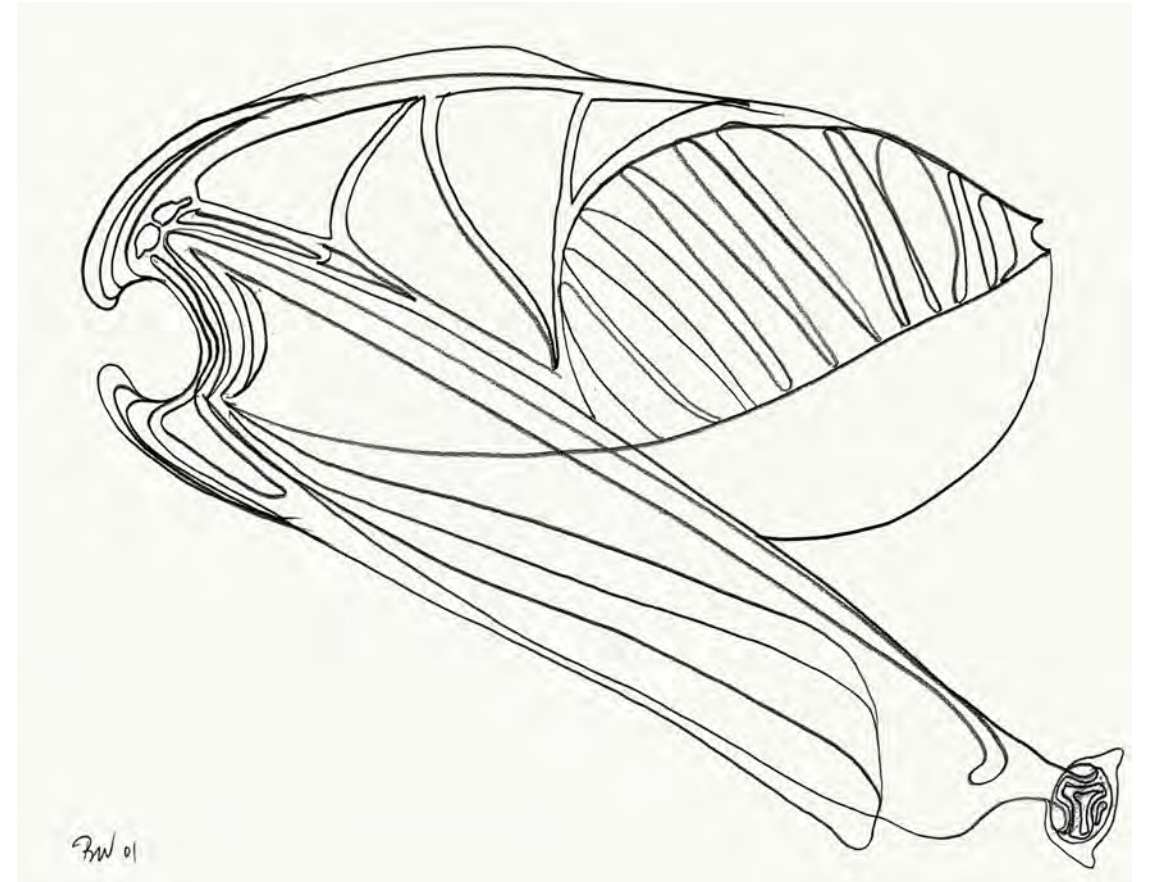




*Gift*  
2018  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 17 inches

*Sheer*  
2001  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches





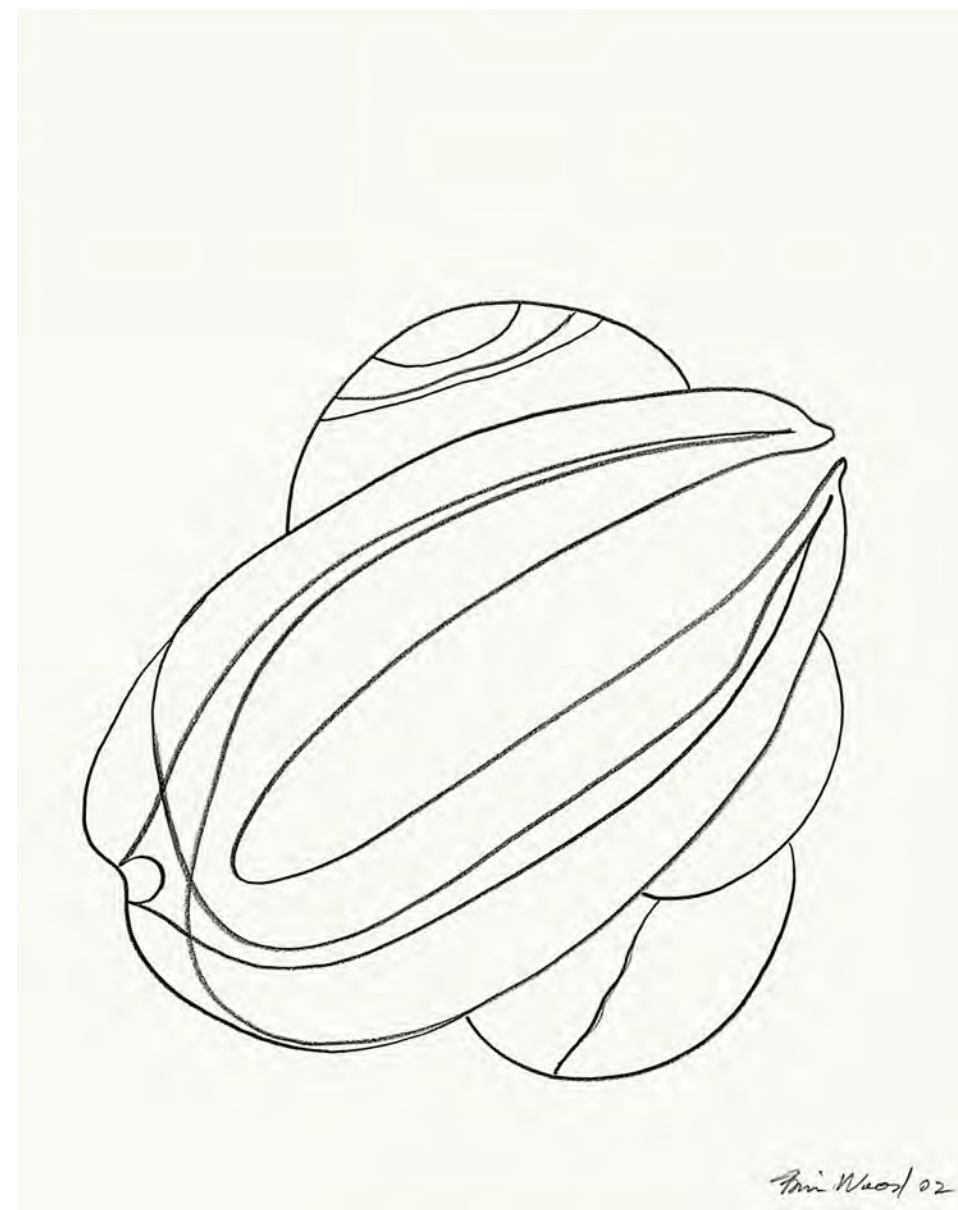
*Homing*  
2001  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches



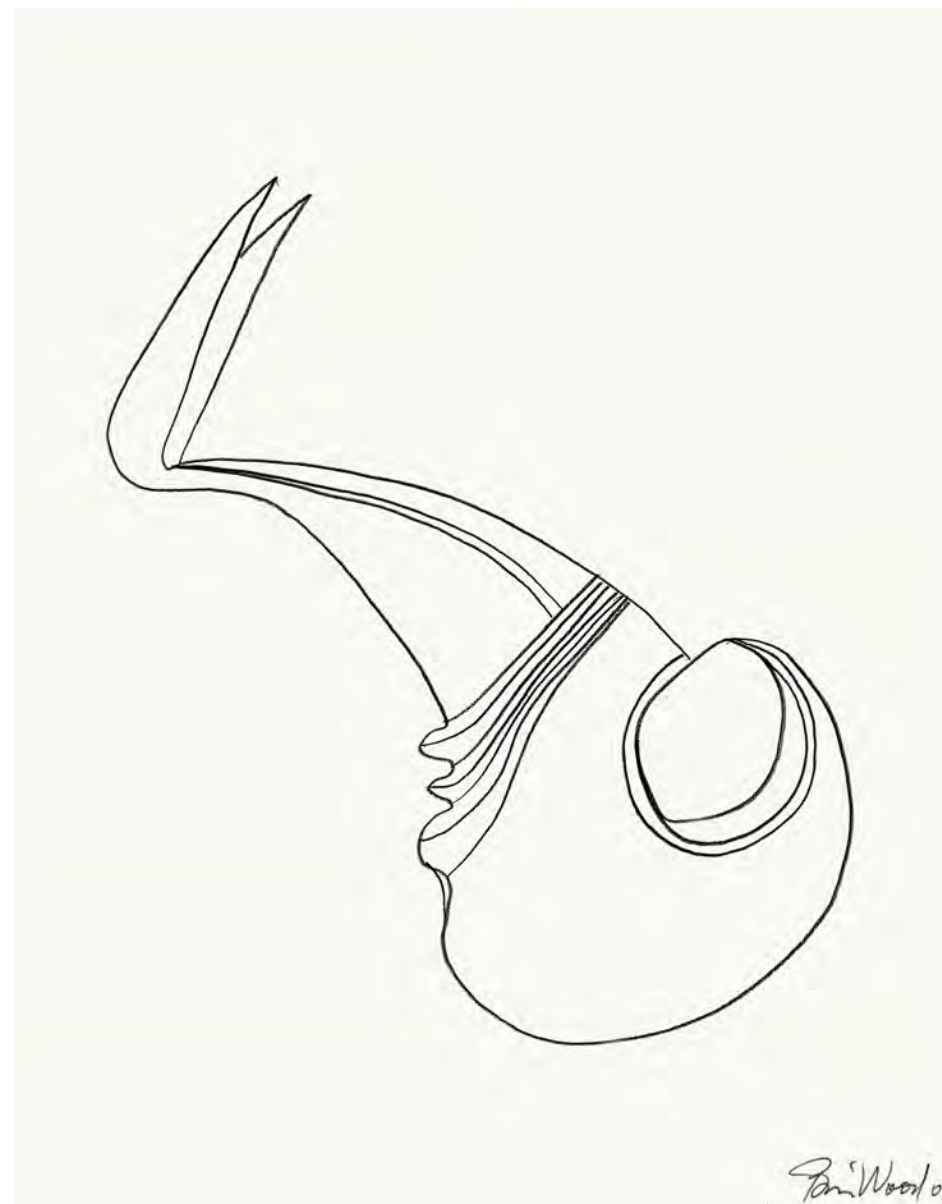
*Vent*  
2005  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches

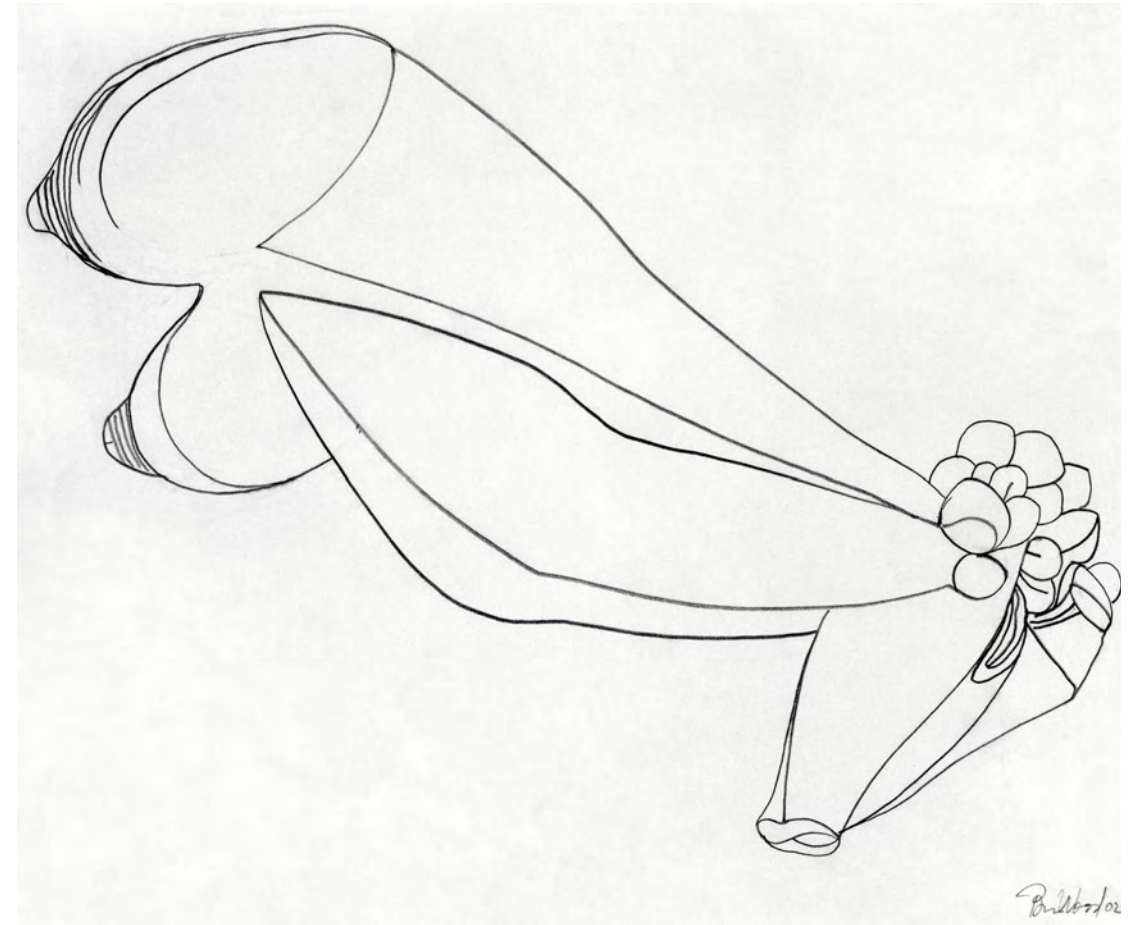


*Void*  
2002  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches



*Veil*  
2001  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches

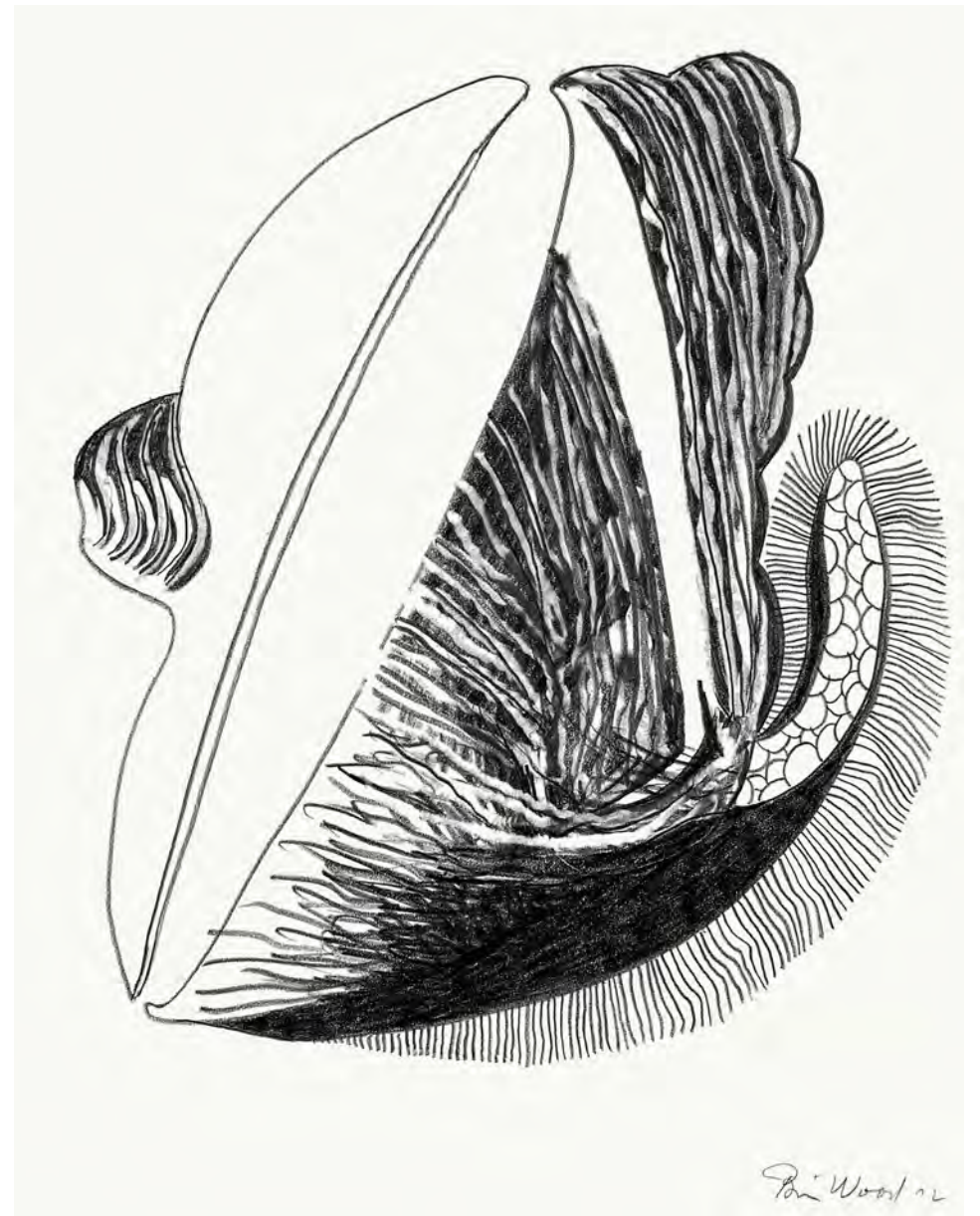




*Tux*  
2002  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 17 inches



*Facer*  
2002  
Graphite on paper  
14 x 11 inches



*Lick*  
2002  
Graphite on paper  
17 x 14 inches





*Lowing*  
2019  
Graphite on paper  
17 x 14 inches





Photo by Ashley Garrett

## BRIAN WOOD

Brian Wood is a painter working with multiple media in New York City and East Chatham, NY. His paintings, drawings, photographs, prints, films, and books are exhibited internationally and are held in many private and public collections. Wood is in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art; National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC; Ludwig Museum in Cologne; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Houston Museum of Fine Arts; Blanton Museum of Art in Austin, TX; New York Public Library; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Art Gallery of Hamilton, Ontario; Davis Museum, Wellesley; Tampa Museum of Art; Asheville Art Museum, NC; Montreal Museum of Fine Art; Museum of Contemporary Art in Montreal; Concordia Art Gallery, Montreal; Museum of Modern Art in Prague; and many others.

Wood's awards include the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, Rome Prize finalist in 2019, the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, the New York Foundation for the Arts Grant, numerous Canada Council Grants including the "A" Grant, and the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship.

Brian Wood works primarily with painting and graphite drawing. Throughout his career, Wood has been immersed in questions about consciousness and ontology, the mystery of intense images arising to awareness and being, and their complex relationship with and away from time. Pursuing this inquiry into the tensile nature of time and space, he has explored many media and is accomplished in painting, drawing, photography, film, print-making, and cross-bred hybrids. Each medium generates different yet complex relationships to time and radically different experiences of space/form. All Wood's images are connected by the daemon driving their emergence, but his curiosity and extensive investigation into different media, each with its own concrete and metaphorical differences, both perceptual and psychic, have contributed to the particular experience of Wood's current paintings and drawings.

As described by Holland Cotter in his review in *The New York Times* (3/14/14) of Brian Wood's solo exhibition *Enceinte*, "...[Wood] creates a kind of Symbolist world in which emerging into life and being devoured by it are part of the same inexorable process. As in the early work by Georgia O'Keeffe and Arthur Dove, the erotic and the spiritual are of a piece."

Born and raised on the prairies of northern Saskatchewan, Wood's early imaginative experience was formed in harsh land, severe weather, and the life and death cycles of animals, crops, and wilderness. Wood's childhood on the farm, his absorption in nature, books, playing music, and his later studies in physics and mathematics combine with his fascination and close attention to the shifting boundaries of body, sexuality, and awareness itself. From these inquiries, his close and active participation with arising inner images and perception, and his sense that the conventional separation of inner and outer worlds is actually an illusion, come the form and obsessions of his work.



Special thanks to Nick Lawrence and the Arts + Leisure staff, Samir Nedzamar for his insightful preface, Tansy Xiao for the book design, and Jay Grabowski and Zorawar Sidhu for their help in realizing this exhibition. I dedicate this book to my wife Ashley Garrett who is there at every step.

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