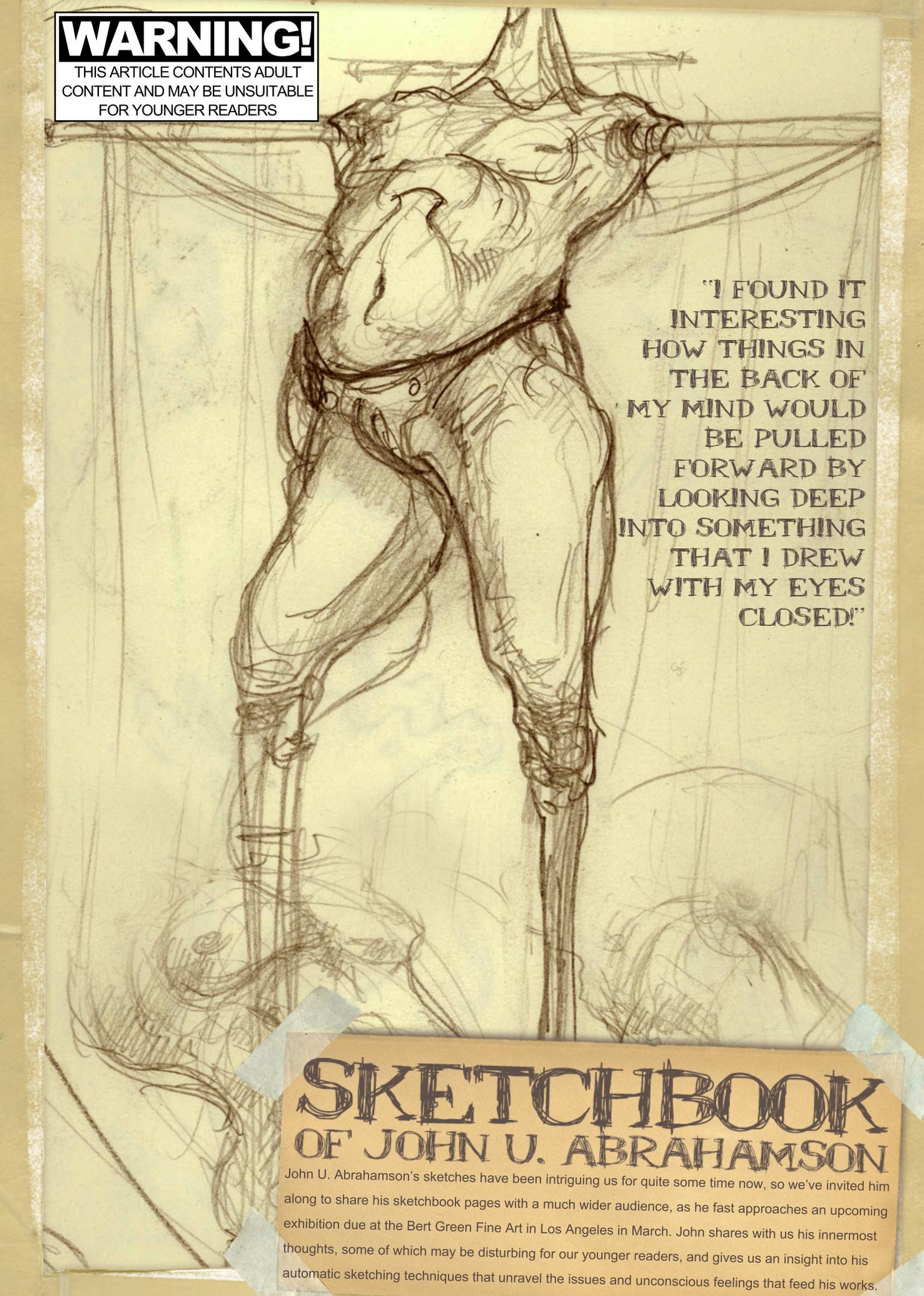


WARNING!

THIS ARTICLE CONTENTS ADULT
CONTENT AND MAY BE UNSUITABLE
FOR YOUNGER READERS



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SKETCHBOOK OF JOHN U. ABRAHAMSON

John U. Abrahamson's sketches have been intriguing us for quite some time now, so we've invited him along to share his sketchbook pages with a much wider audience, as he fast approaches an upcoming exhibition due at the Bert Green Fine Art in Los Angeles in March. John shares with us his innermost thoughts, some of which may be disturbing for our younger readers, and gives us an insight into his automatic sketching techniques that unravel the issues and unconscious feelings that feed his works.

But I can tell you, exactly, How it will End.

SKETCHBOOK OF JOHN U. ABRAHAMSON

PROCESS

This article is based on sketches created for a series of works which have come to be collectively known as "Flesh and Blood".

In my previous work I've used limited sketching as a way to flesh out what I had already envisioned in my head. I had thought out every detail of the painting ahead of sketching, primarily working from source material such as photographs from books, magazines, and ads that I would gather before I began a new series. I would pour over the images until a direction presented itself; I would do rough sketches to work out composition and other visual problems, doing the finished sketch on the canvas itself...

from this primordial soup of lines and scratches were laced with the aforementioned encounters.

The entire series is built upon what I was able to pull from automatism exercises filtered through my emotions and life experiences. Once a figure was developed in this manner, I would push and pull the concept in as many directions as possible. At the end of a session I would find the images that spoke with the loudest and most precise voice. The end result was a more liberated and more successful series.

This process of using nothing but sketches as the basis for the work allowed for a more freeform association, resulting in a world populated with creatures that carried with them the very essence of myself.

SKETCHES

Cigarette Burns

This started with a scribbled circle which developed into a stomach and breasts (Fig.01). A quick curved slash to show gesture turned into the tube emanating from the crotch. Shading scratches developed into the spikes in the arms, or the "cigarette burns" when I translated to paint. The automatic drawing base suggested to me

a painful period in my life when I was going through a divorce and had a lot of inner guilt which I turned to self-mutilation, such as cigarette burning.

For the "Flesh and Blood" series I chose to take a whole new approach to the process of creating. I started with some base parameters that formed the framework that I would build upon. This framework was a product of several experiences that happened as I began Flesh and Blood.

The first happened at the De Young Art Museum in Golden Gate Park of San Francisco. The place was packed with people. I was hoping to get some spark of inspiration from their collection. When passing by all the patrons buying tickets, I saw a stunningly beautiful woman; both her arms had been amputated mid bicep with exposed bone protruding from the end of the tapered muscle. She was in a wheelchair and having a seemingly wonderful time with her friends. I found her to be both perfect and transcendent.

The other defining visual was at Filoli, a marvelous mansion from the 1800s which is now a museum in the San Francisco area. In the gardens of Filoli we came across some apple and pear trees that had been trellised when they were mere saplings. Throughout the many years they stood as the flesh of the trees grew around the armature. Metal polls protruded from the flesh of the trees like arms; this, to me, was reminiscent of the woman at the De Young.

The sketches for Flesh and Blood began with automatic drawing. I filled page after page with nothing but automatic drawings. The figures that slowly began to emerge

Angels of Death

Angels of Death

With the birth of my son and my ever aging body, my own mortality is always very close to the surface. In one session of automatism exercises, these two figures came out of the chaos of scribbles (**Fig.02**); the lower representing cancer, and the top figure liver damage (the latter developed into the painting now known as "Damage"). I suppose these are two possible ways that I will meet my demise. I found it interesting how things in the back of my mind would be pulled forward by looking deep into something that I drew with my eyes closed!

Ghost of a

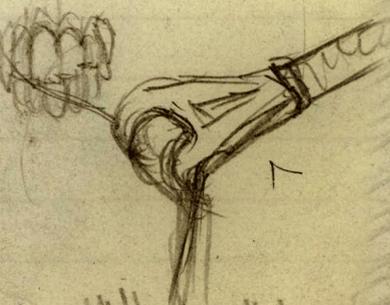


Fig.02

Mother Issues

My mother disappeared when I was seven and my sister was five; we didn't know if she was alive or dead. No one said anything about her and she faded from memory. I found her when I was 18. This issue is repeated through every series I have ever done. I will say that this sketch was more intentioned than the others; I did set out to do a portrait of dear old mom. The body head and spikes were well established vocabulary by the time I did this sketch. This is probably the most from-the-gut-and-accurate portrait I have done of her (Fig.03).

"I OFTEN FEEL THAT THE DRAWING LEADS ME, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND."

Portrait of my Ex wife

This was a more freeform drawing – automatic drawing developed out and elaborated upon. The first image was my ex-wife. She was disabled and addicted to Morphine. The head started as a pincer like head, but it developed to have more sexual connotations. The most important thing about this sketch is the flow of the development of an idea, as shown when read from left to right (Fig.04).

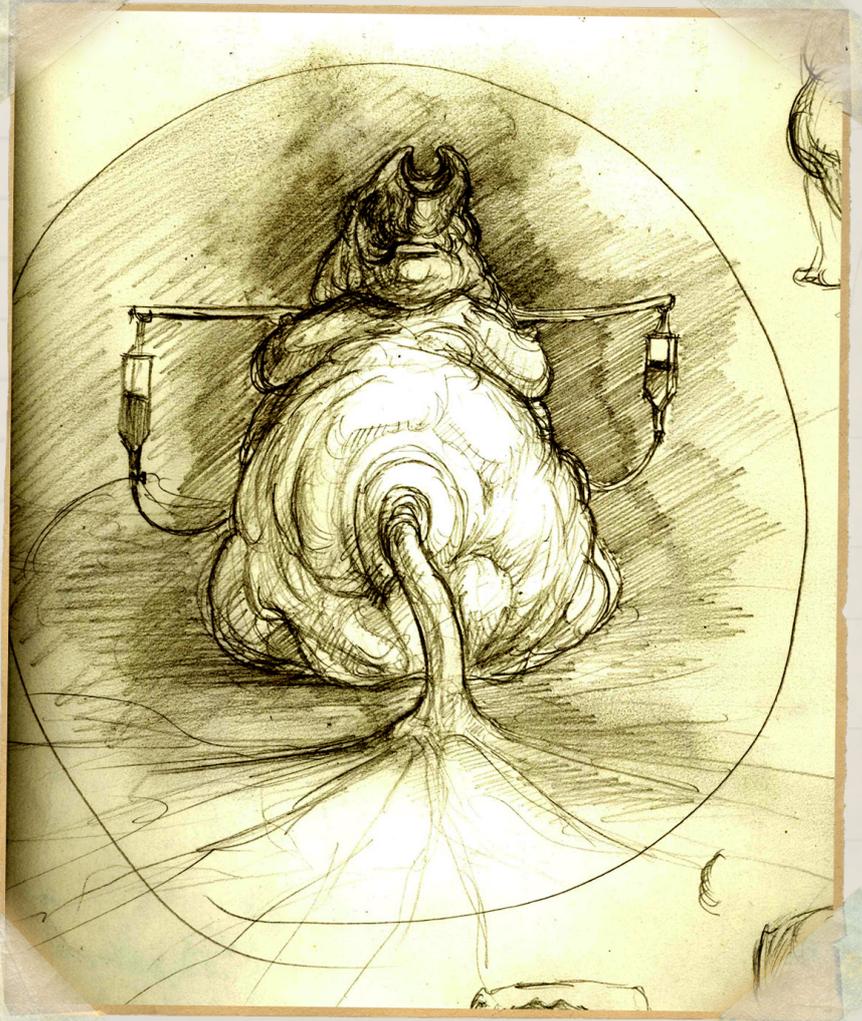


Fig.03

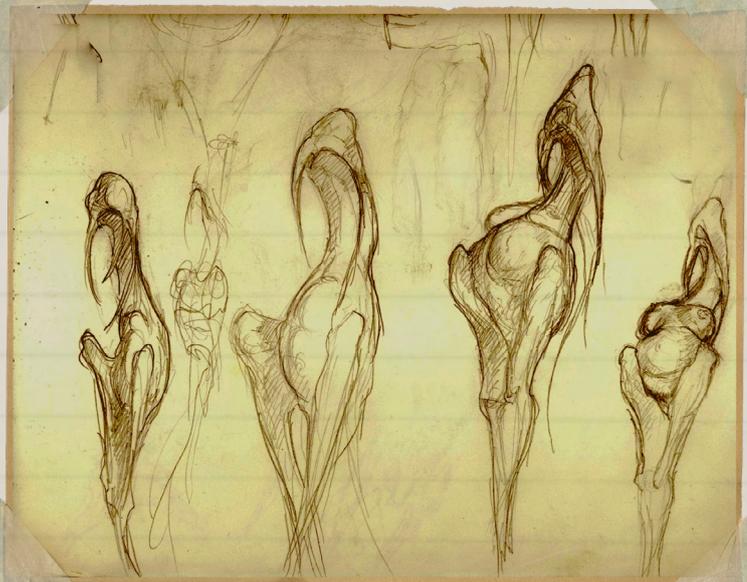
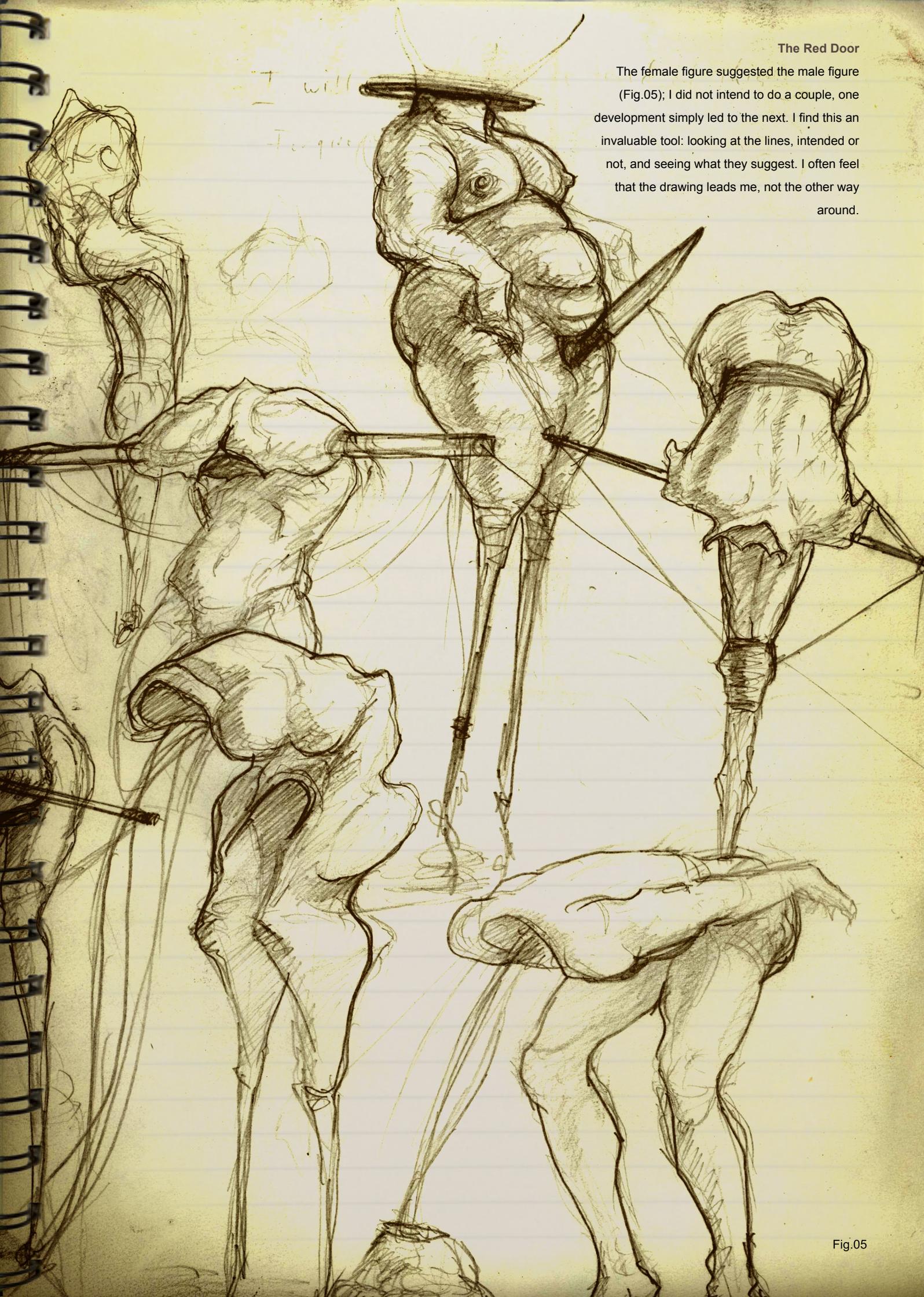


Fig.04

The Red Door

The female figure suggested the male figure (Fig.05); I did not intend to do a couple, one development simply led to the next. I find this an invaluable tool: looking at the lines, intended or not, and seeing what they suggest. I often feel that the drawing leads me, not the other way around.



At the Altar of Needles

This is an interesting sketch for me because the finished painting varied more from the sketch than any other painting I did (**Fig.06**); usually the painting was an exact reproduction of the sketch. An entire birthing apparatus was added after I painted the sketch as it appeared in my sketchbook. I don't know this for fact but I believe my subconscious was pushing dear old mom in front again.

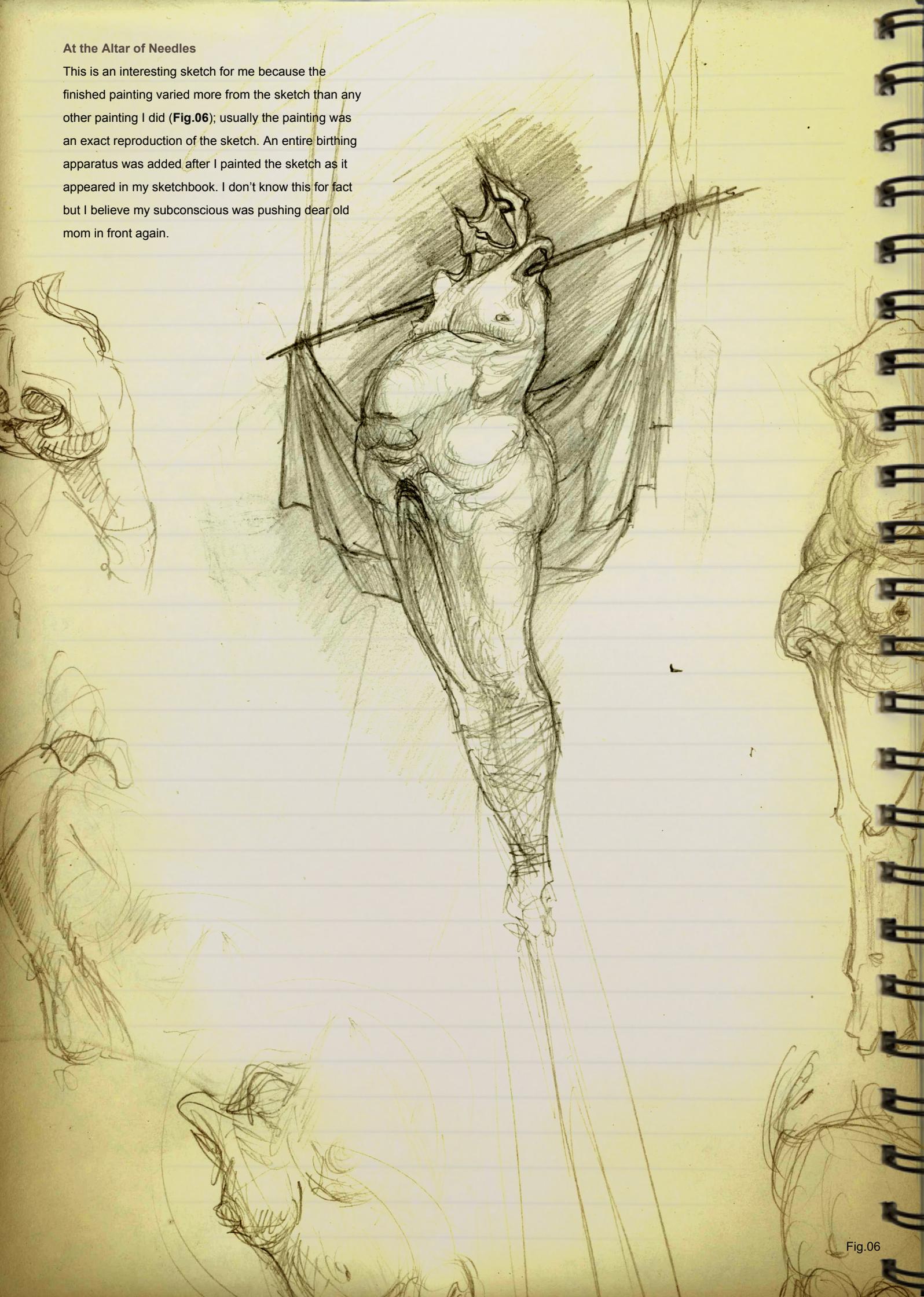


Fig.06

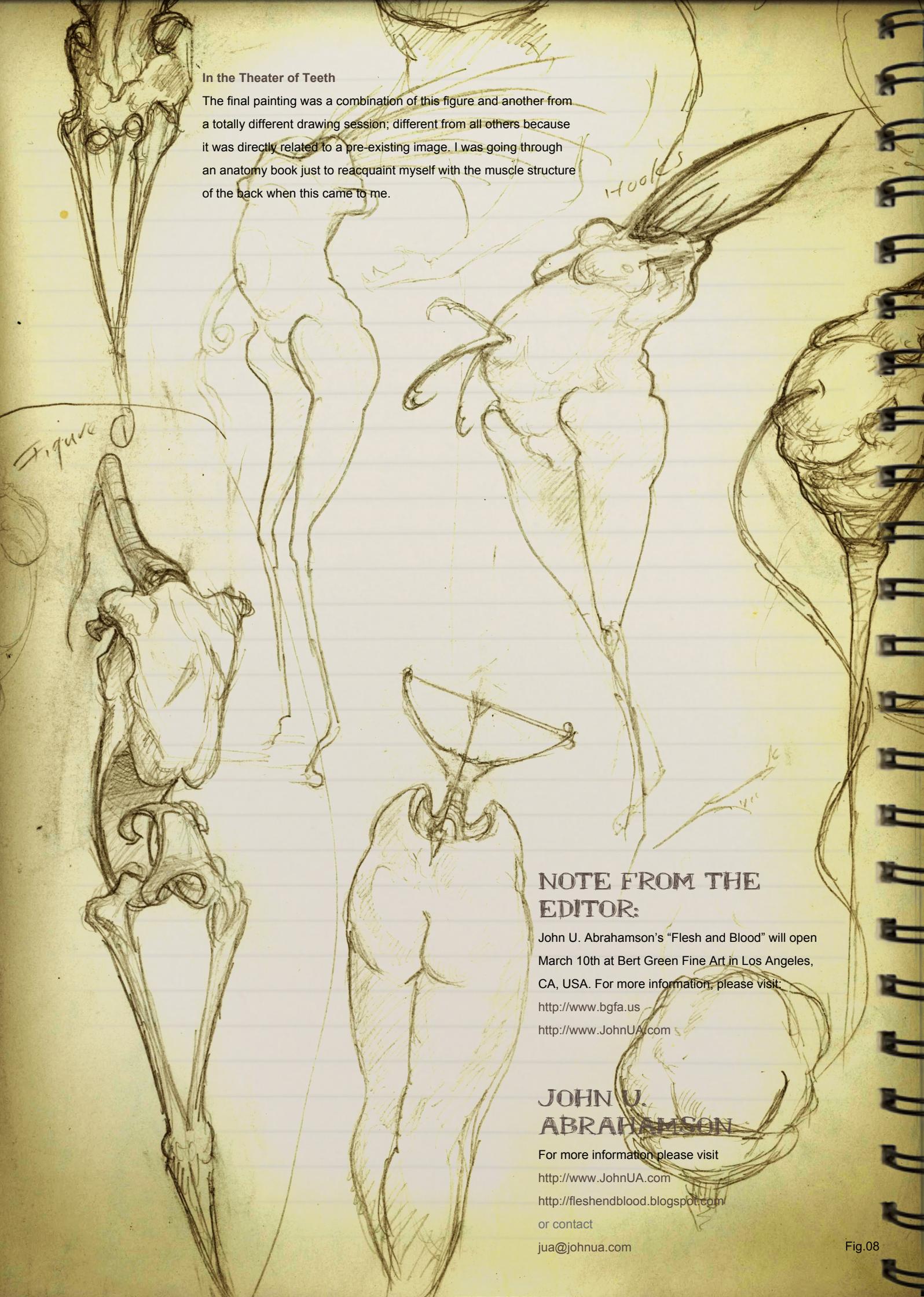
Untitled

This sketch was never used as a painting, but it's important in so far as it was the first time a prevalent image came into the work (Fig.07).

The legs transforming into stilt-like apparatus was, I believe, born out of my natural tendency to make cruciform. The image continued to show up in the work even when this was not the effect the stilts had. I associate with an idea or image and sometimes it can be years after the fact that I will look at a drawing or painting and see the intent behind it – something I was not consciously aware of at the time of creation!



Fig.07



In the Theater of Teeth

The final painting was a combination of this figure and another from a totally different drawing session; different from all others because it was directly related to a pre-existing image. I was going through an anatomy book just to reacquaint myself with the muscle structure of the back when this came to me.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:

John U. Abrahamson's "Flesh and Blood" will open March 10th at Bert Green Fine Art in Los Angeles, CA, USA. For more information, please visit:

<http://www.bgfa.us>

<http://www.JohnUA.com>

**JOHN U.
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