

INTERVIEW ([HTTPS://BOMBMAGAZINE.ORG/FORMAT/INTERVIEW/](https://bombmagazine.org/format/interview/))

## Charlotte Schulz by Louis Bury

Exploring the potential of drawing.

MAY 22, 2024



([https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/\\_hiresolution/You-Floats-Above-Charlotte-Schulz1.jpg](https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/You-Floats-Above-Charlotte-Schulz1.jpg))

Charlotte Schulz, *You Floats Above*, 2022, charcoal on paper. Courtesy of ArtYard/Pierre Le Hors.

Charlotte Schulz's exquisite charcoal drawings stand out for both their form and content. Their imagery has been rendered onto torn and distressed pieces of paper, then arranged into hallucinatory landscapes that defy single-point perspective. In *Path of the Heart* (2021), for example, a military trench bifurcates terrain whose hills allow cross-sectional views of what lies beneath them and whose trees culminate in fantastical dandelion plumage. The composition's overlapping torn-paper fragments give the drawing's support irregular borders and visible fault lines. These material effects, prevalent throughout Schulz's shadowy ArtYard exhibition, [A Constellation of Small Events \(https://artyard.org/exhibitions/charlotte-schulz-a-constellation-of-small-events/\)](https://artyard.org/exhibitions/charlotte-schulz-a-constellation-of-small-events/), demonstrate the artist's commitment to exploring drawing's affordances.

Drawing is typically perceived as a sidekick to other artistic media, yet Schulz pursues it as an end unto itself. Like other contemporaries whose drawing practices teem with ambition and ingenuity—Nayland Blake, Colter Jacobsen, Hannah Chalew, and more—Schulz finds major possibilities within a supposedly minor medium.

### **Louis Bury**

How and why did you start manipulating the papers themselves in your charcoal drawings?

### **Charlotte Schulz**

I was thinking about art historian David Summers's distinction between real space and illusionistic space, and how I could create real space with paper. It was a gradual progression over the course of years. I started by folding and bending the paper for my drawings, which then led to tearing and distressing the paper. Tearing and distressing the paper disrupts my intentions for the image, allowing me to see possibilities I might not have otherwise recognized.

### **LB**

The density of imagery that results is almost archaeological. Where do your works' initial intentions come from?

### **CS**

The initial ideas derive from my reading. I make sketches based on what I read, which become seeds for the larger work. I build out the imagery from there, and it develops multiple layers: geological, cultural, psychological. Before I started manipulating the paper itself, my drawing's illusionistic imagery conveyed all the work's content. I wanted to emphasize that the picture plane is not neutral by allowing the paper itself to convey part of the content. Gilles Deleuze's book *The Fold*, in which he talks about minute perceptions on the edges of things, motivated me to work with teeny-tiny pieces of paper.

### **LB**

What does smallness mean to you as an aesthetic or philosophical value?

### **CS**

Smallness for me is tied to intimacy, and the personal, and a sense of safety. Susan Stewart's book *On Longing* was important to me in this regard. She writes, "The miniature does not attach itself to lived historical time. The reduction in scale skews time and space relationships of everyday life and

transforms it into an infinite time of reverie." In my own work, the proliferation of small details creates an intense interiority.

## LB

Your landscape drawings exude psychological drama, but their personal connection to you, the artist, isn't readily discernible to a stranger. I wonder if there's safety or comfort in having parts of oneself hidden or not readily available for others' scrutiny.

## CS

What you're saying reminds me of when I was a kid building pillow forts out of sheets and sofa cushions to create a space to play in. I loved being in this scaled-down "room." In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard says that this type of space is where the dreamer can dream. I hadn't quite thought of my work in these terms before, but in order to create or dream, individuals have to feel secure. As a kid, you're escaping parental authority; I'm of a generation where parents could exert pretty severe punishment and control. In my young adulthood, my work was a place where I had some sense of control. It was a place of safety.



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Charlotte Schulz, *Path of the Heart*, 2021, charcoal on paper. Courtesy of ArtYard/Pierre Le Hors.

**LB**

Your thoughts about security are interesting because the atmosphere of your drawings, which are devoid of color, can be disquieting.

**CS**

My understanding of home as a place of comfort and safety was punctured with very troubling events in my early twenties. These conflicting feelings compelled me to grapple with my uncertainty through painting. I think that initial disquiet continues to seep into my work, although in other ways too, such as climate anxiety. I make work by letting things in, like a conduit, and getting myself out of the way. This felt even clearer to me after September 11, which marked a shift in my work from personal material to larger events. I was in downtown Brooklyn that morning, and it felt like the moment when I could no longer pretend that history was something outside myself.

**LB**

It occurs to me that literature also functions as an outside force that you allow to act on your work.

**CS**

When it comes to literature and art, I'm like a magpie building a nest out of all the different twigs I find. The cool thing about art is that you can play with ideas in whatever way you want. I'm not invested in claiming a particular intellectual territory; I grab whatever interests me and see what it can help me build. The title of my ArtYard exhibition, *A Constellation of Small Events*, comes from Polish writer Olga Tokarczuk's 2018 Nobel Prize Lecture, where she talks about vantages from which everything can be seen. That resonated with me because my drawings don't utilize single-point perspective. Instead, they contain scenes rendered from many different perspectives, yet the viewer's vantage onto any given scene is never blocked.



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Charlotte Schulz, *Parachute Cove*, 2023, charcoal on paper. Courtesy of ArtYard/Pierre Le Hors.

**LB**

At the same time, you're not presenting a god's-eye vantage of a unified landscape. Your drawings have a visual resemblance to actual nests.

**CS**

Nesting is a way of making a home, of creating comfort and protection.

**LB**

What you've been saying about comfort makes me realize that drawing as a medium lends itself to intimacy. Artists can make large drawings, of course; but typically, drawing is done at tinier, more modest scales.

**CS**

I'd like to change the way people think about drawing. Perhaps works on paper is a better way of describing them. My drawings are slow, quiet, and contemplative, both in terms of how I make them and how audiences receive them. They aren't loud or flashy; they resist the attention

economy. Like literature, they facilitate depth. I couldn't do what I do in paint or another medium. The dryness of charcoal allows me to blend lines seamlessly, as well as to tear and reconfigure the paper itself.

**“I'd like to change the way people think about drawing.”**

— Charlotte Schulz

**LB**

How might biases against drawing have played out so far in the arc of your own career? You've received prestigious recognitions, such as a Guggenheim award, but *A Small Constellation* is your first solo show in ten years.

**CS**

Biases about drawing may have played a role in my professional career, which can be fickle for anyone! I studied at the University of South Florida (USF) with Mernet Larsen, who was an exceptional teacher and who had a huge influence on my life. Mernet recently had her fourth exhibition at James Cohan gallery in New York City. But the success she's enjoying in recent years came late in her life. Maybe that's because she gave so much to her students. Maybe it's because she's based in Florida. Some things you can plan, and others happen by accident. I'm originally from Ohio and happened to go to school in the Tampa Bay area for family reasons. In the midwestern environment where I grew up, not much was expected of me in terms of my career ambitions, but when I attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture and met artists who attended places like Yale and the Art Institute of Chicago, I discovered just how great an education I got from Mernet and others at USF.



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Installation view of *Charlotte Schulz: A Constellation of Small Events*, 2024. ArtYard, Frenchtown, New Jersey. Courtesy of ArtYard/Peter Jacobs.

## LB

You spoke earlier about the relationship between safety and dreaming. There's a class dimension to that relationship in that it's easier to dream big when pursuing a risky career path knowing you have a financial safety net.

## CS

I gravitated toward drawing at a time when I didn't have a studio. I've always loved drawing, but it's a practice that can be done under constrained circumstances. There's a strange freedom for me in that—a freedom, too, from the history of painting, which people consider the more elevated art form. I'm invested in making drawings that are works in themselves, not just sketches for a work to come. I love the kinds of world that you can build in drawing. It's a world in black and white, analogous to the real world but also with room for otherworldliness. It's a world where you can use space as something other than just a container. I think of space as something that unfolds, a fabric upon which outside forces act. I love the idea of compressing, expanding, distorting, bending, and molding space. I love all that stuff and its artistic potential, and I think the potential of drawing is still underexplored.

[Charlotte Schulz: A Constellation of Small Events \(https://artyard.org/exhibitions/charlotte-schulz-a-constellation-of-small-events/\)](https://artyard.org/exhibitions/charlotte-schulz-a-constellation-of-small-events/) is on view at ArtYard in Frenchtown, New Jersey, until June 2.

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