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Elizabeth Shull
The Weight of it All
Communicating on a Grand Scale
Lowell Ryan Projects
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by Jody Zellen



Elizabeth Shull conjures both real and imagined moments. In her evocative and memorable exhibition, *The Weight of It All*, a frieze of small-scale, colored pencil drawings on black paper (matted and framed in black) encircle the walls. Each carefully rendered image demands scrutiny. Shull's subjects range from images of animals and flowers to sea and sky. Silhouetted figures appear and disappear, sometimes alone, other times in pairs. Peripherally, the works relate to Hilma af Klint, who explored spirituality through combining nature, geometric abstraction and figuration. Shull's drawings are also reminiscent of the atmosphere captured by Vija Celmins, specifically her close-cropped drawings and paintings of commonplace objects that are simultaneously abstract and representational. Like Celmins, Shull isolates a fragment of an ongoing expanse.

One of her most recent pieces, *The Weight of It All* (2025) depicts a silhouetted surfer surrounded by the whitewater of a cascading wave. Is this a moment of triumph or impending doom? Either way, the surfer appears to be off balance in the sea — about to be engulfed by the surf. A similar ambiguity pervades in *The Morning in Between* (2025). Here, a small, sketchily drawn silhouette stands in the foreground. In the distance, a full moon rises above two shadowy trees that appear like hazy ruins, a reminder of the fragile landscape and the recent fires in Los Angeles. In *Light on Light* (2024), three silhouetted figures stand at the lower right edge of the paper, their long shadows angled toward the bottom corner. The rest of the composition is filled with a large, round, yellow-orange, glowing sun — surreal and apocalyptic in its domineering presence.

While Shull's drawings are melancholic and speak to darker times, they are not without humor. *I Just Want to Sit on Saturn* (2022) and *Shine a Light Up to Space* (2023) illustrate the magic and power of light. A lone figure sits on a bluff by the ocean holding a flashlight up toward the sky and illuminating a triangular area. The glow of the light is depicted as a gradient shifting from yellow to gray brightening the most distant stars.

Eyeballs are another recurring element in Shull's drawings. Like the silhouettes, they are clearly human, yet presented as fragments, or in shadow. *When Something Is Wonderful in Front of Your Eyes but Grand Behind Them Too* (2023), is a surreal and mysterious drawing where a triangle of yellow light flows from a dark orange circle that occupies the right side of the composition and contains two white flowers. This circle is surrounded by an aqua-blue-green ground. A beautifully drawn eye sits at its outer edge, extending left into a starburst of yellow rays that are set against a darkened background, bisected by a ray of light and also filled with a white flower. As the title might suggest, what is seen by the eye also fills the mind. In *Looking Closely But Does It See You* (2023), the eyeball looks upward and rests in the center of a white flower, the stamen of the plant functions like eyelashes.

Shull's nuanced and intricate drawings are based on patience, astute observation, and a belief in transcendence. The pieces fuse elements from nature with imagined places and relationships and suggest an awareness of distance and a longing for connection. As inferred in the drawing, *Choosing Where to Stand* (2025), where two figures are separated — each at the edge of a cliff above the ocean — the distance between them and the distance below them is an infinite and ambiguous expanse. Are they moving toward or away from each other? The space between seems too grand and perilous for them to ever connect. Shull's thoughtful and poignant drawings are more than meets the eye. Though small and intimate, they communicate on a grand scale.

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