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Dreamy Photos Of Women Reading Celebrate The Incredible Legacy Of Female Authors

Carrie Schneider's portraits will inspire you to cuddle up with a book — written by a woman.

09/07/2016 09:52 am ET | Updated Sep 14, 2016 | By Maddie Crum



CARRIE SCHNEIDER

Nearly 90 years ago, Virginia Woolf published *To the Lighthouse*, a novel that, among other things, could be read as an exploration of "feminine" habits and goals as serious pursuits worthy of literary analysis.

Today, the book is regularly listed among the best English-language novels of the 20th century (both Time and Modern Library rank it beside *Ulysses*, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Great Gatsby*). But the messages implicit in Woolf's work haven't quite made their way to a few national book review publications, which still regularly eschew women's literary works.

The 2015 VIDA Count — a comprehensive look at the gender and racial breakdown of major book reviews — found that the New York Review of Books covered 75 percent male writers. And it's not the only one disregarding gender equity. To comment on this troubling trend, photographer Carrie Schneider endeavored to create a photo series full of women subjects reading women authors.

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In the resulting series, “*Reading Women*,” a woman lounges leisurely at her desk, Gwendolyn Brooks’ *Blacks* in hand. Another woman curls up barefoot in a leather chair, immersed in *To the Lighthouse*, a text as influential today as it was upon publication.

“I began making this project to reconcile something I felt was under-recognized: the incredible legacy of the influence of women artists and writers on my generation of creative peers,” Schneider wrote in an email to The Huffington Post. “Inspired, in part, by Linda Nochlin’s 1971 text, ‘*Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*’ the work was also inspired by more recent advocacy by folks like the literary group VIDA, and even critic Jerry Saltz, whose *tallying* reveals some of the mechanisms that determine what art and culture become canonized. Representing women reading women sought to subvert this dominant narrative.”

Although Schneider’s photos show women deep in thought, exploring worlds and perspectives outside their own, she says that the social nature of reading was an integral part of the project.

“I don’t necessarily see reading as a solitary act,” Schneider said. “On a primary level, being engrossed in a text is experiencing the creative or intellectual output of another person. Beyond that, what we read shapes who we are as we encounter others in the world.”

It makes sense, then, that she chose to photograph her friends in their own private spaces, rather than strangers reading in public.

“Showing a friend doing something of her own volition in her own self-defined space was an important starting point of the work,” Schneider said. “I hope it will provoke people to think about what they would read if asked to sit for a portrait like this — maybe considering which books have influenced their lives. My hope is that it will also in some small way give increased recognition to the influence of women authors, among my creative cohort and beyond.”