

Bridgehampton Artist Explores The Life Of The Suburban Woman In Her New Book

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A lone woman stands facing a window, her shoes discarded at her side, her 4-year-old son lies amongst his toys on the wooden floor beside her. It's a glimpse of everyday life for many moms on the East End, including Bridgehampton-based artist Bastienne Schmidt, whose book "Home Stills" features dozens of photos about motherhood.

"Home Stills," which is Ms. Schmidt's fourth book, is all about depicting women in suburbia in a new light. Ms.

Schmidt, who has had some of her work on display at the Museum of Modern Art in Manhattan, said she hoped to conceptualize women's roles as mothers and homemakers as a "beautiful juggle."

The artist and her family moved to Bridgehampton in 2001. According to Ms. Schmidt, the move spurred the creative process and the eventual collection of photographs that became "Home Stills." Many of the photographs featured in the book were taken in Southampton in the 6-year time span between 2004 and 2010, according to Ms. Schmidt. She added that the majority of her photos are set along the stretch of U.S. Route 27 that spans from Patchogue to Montauk.

Ms. Schmidt said that her family, including sons Max, 11, and Julian, 8, acted as muse for the creative efforts featured in the book. She also added that since she acted as the woman in the photographs, her sons sometimes took the photographs she was in.

"I want to make a clear distinction," said Ms. Schmidt, of her place as the pictured woman in the book. "I use myself as a stand-in for the universal female." To further illustrate this point, many photos of Ms. Schmidt are taken from behind, or do not fully reveal her face.

"Home Stills" contains 60 photographs that set Ms. Schmidt in situations in the home and open landscape. Many of the photographs were taken in and around her home in Bridgehampton.

Although Ms. Schmidt has released three previous books of her photography, she believes that “Home Stills,” is different, solely because it isn’t documentary photography, which she usually practices. The photographs used in “Home Stills” aims to “interpret and conceptualize an idea,” she said.

“It deals with the question of identity and home through different angles and paradigms,” said Ms. Schmidt. She added that alongside the still photographs depicting her in home scenes, the varied patterns and silhouettes she used throughout the book allowed her to express the same message without having to use the human form.

Many of the photographs featured in the book depict Ms. Schmidt standing alone, often almost as if on some kind of introspective journey. According to her, these photographs—such as a photo of her trudging through a field of snow—are meant to signify an “escapist” aspect of motherhood.

“It’s always the man who’s the cowboy, riding out of the picture,” she said, adding that some of the pictures reveal herself poised and heading out of the photograph. This kind of escapist fantasy is one she wanted to express as a parallel to the idea of domestic bliss, she continued.

Becoming a mother also had an impact on the photographer’s creative process, she said, because of the time she has spent raising her two boys. One interesting photograph that reveals this connection is of a backlit curtain, displaying the shadow of hanging action figures.

“I was surrounded by these objects, they’re my kid’s toys,” said Ms. Schmidt. “It opened a whole new imaginary world.”

As for her audience, Ms. Schmidt said that she hopes the book appeals to mothers who can relate to juggling the concept of the self as well as raising a family.

“I think what I really wanted is for women to understand the common thread in all of us,” she said, of the photographs featured in the collection. “We deal with the same feelings of motherhood, careers and artistry.”

“Home Stills” is available at all BookHampton locations.