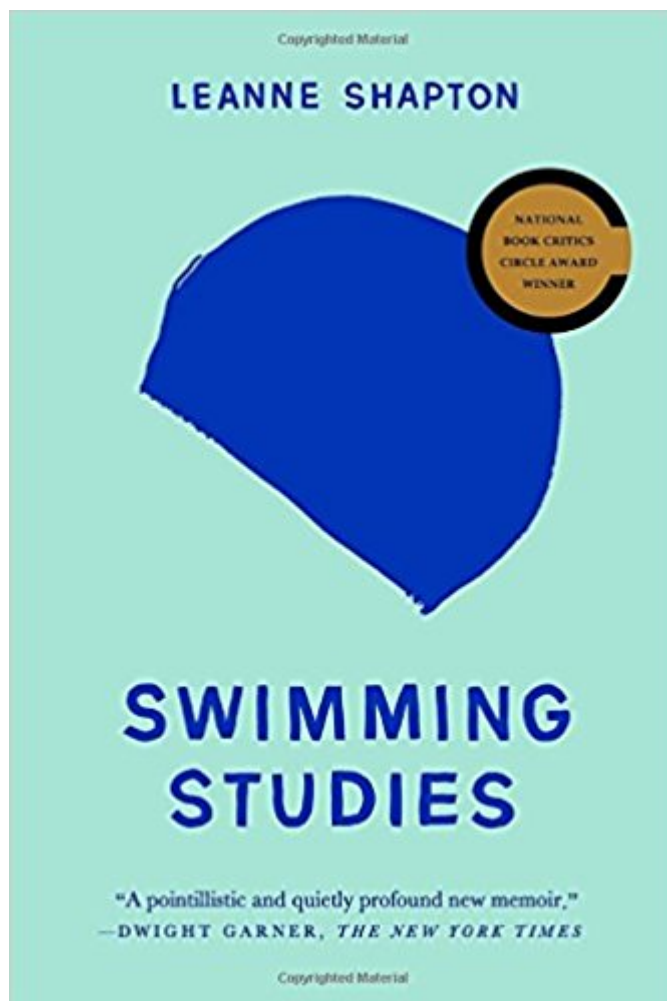


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Swimming Studies



Synopsis

Swimming Studies is a collection of autobiographical sketches that explore the worlds of competitive and recreational swimming. From her training for the Olympic trials as a teenager, to meditative swims in pools and oceans as an adult, Leanne Shapton contemplates the sport that has shaped her life. Her spare and elegant writing reveals an intimate narrative of suburban adolescence, spent underwater in a discipline that continues to inspire Shapton's work as an artist and author, while her illustrations offer a new perspective on the landscapes and imagery of swimming. Shapton emphasizes the private, often solitary moments of athletic pursuit rather than its triumphs. This remarkable work of written and visual pieces propels the reader through a beautifully personal exercise in reflection.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Swimming Studies sets out, through a fusion of words and pictures, to capture a bittersweet part of the writer's past as completely as a scent trapped in a bottle. The book is beautiful as both a story and an object. It's about being very, very good at something, when you want to be great. I was moved by it in ways both expected and unexpected.” —John Jeremiah Sullivan, author of Pulphead “If there is a more beautifully observed examination of weightlessness, silence, rigor, and delight of what it means to swim, I've never read it. Leanne Shapton is one of the most broadly creative and gifted people at work today; a true artist, both visual and verbal. There seems to be nothing she cannot write or paint about: adolescence, Canada, yearning, dawn - even cake, for heaven's sake! - with a precision both

surgical and poetic. The joys of Swimming Studies are in being in the care of someone of a prodigious and protean mind. My talent crush is official and deep. —David Rakoff, author of *Half Empty* “I’m so happy this book exists. Swimming Studies expresses what it’s like to be haunted by the person one used to be, and the search for how that person exists in the present. Leanne Shapton writes with such curiosity, ruefulness, intelligence, and grace. Here we see how the discipline of being an athlete can condition one’s way of making art, and how the patience necessary to make art teaches other types of patience. Like the patience required to be a spouse and to love a person always. This book is a rare treat for anyone who cares about any of these things. —Sheila Heti, author of *How Should a Person Be?* “A fusion of cool, clear-eyed prose and watercolors, photographs and painted portraits...[and] a curiously arresting study of the transition from a world of rigor and routine to one of reflection and recreation....The brilliance of Swimming Studies lies in its delicate exploration of how the identities we’ve carved out for ourselves in the present are both haunted and shaped by the people we used to be. —Time Out New York “[W]hat makes this book astounding....[is] any dedicated swimmer knows exactly what Shapton means; we sense and control our movements, from the tips of our fingers to the flutter of our feet, breathing very specifically, detecting any shifts in conditions, from the presence of other swimmers to the tug of a current....Shapton pares down her experiences as a swimmer and grafts the core lessons to other parts of her life, allowing them to bloom in ways that have everything and nothing to do with swimming. —Buzz Poole, *TheMillions.com* “A cool memoir about competitive swimming that might as well be called *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*....Shapton, never self-pitying, offers an original, mythical elixir of life in the water. —Newsweek “[A] thoughtful, exquisitely written book...ostensibly about [Shapton’s] lifelong relationship to the sport, complete with photos of her various bathing suits and meditations on the difference between swimming (i.e., competitive swimming) and bathing (i.e., swimming for fun)....She even includes some haunting, cobalt blue illustrations of pools she frequents as an adult, as well as a color guide to different swimming smells, such as “coach: fresh laundry, Windbreaker nylon, Mennen Speed Stick, Magic Marker, and bologna.” These extra visual elements dazzle, but the specifics of this world and her insightful take on her own far-from-ordinary life are what makes any reader wonder if Shapton’s gold medal might have already been won —in writing. —Oprah.com, *Book of the Week* “Shapton draws on her experience training for the Olympic trials in a refreshing and thoughtful memoir about swimming as competition and way of life. Her ode to the water is not only

philosophical but incredibly moving. •Entertainment Weekly•“The talented illustrator Leanne Shapton, in her pointillistic and quietly profound new memoir, *Swimming Studies*...writes as confidently as she draws, and memorably conjures swimming’s intense, primordial and isolating pleasures....Shapton’s prose frequently has the density of poetry....[she] is so smart and so likable that you will pass her book along to the swimmers in your life. •Dwight Garner, *The New York Times*•“In this small, lovely book, [Shapton] combines words and images in an exquisitely observed meditation on swimming and memory....What’s thrilling about this book is its author’s careful attention to detail and unlikely beauty. More impressionistic than a traditional memoir, the book nonetheless sketches an arc that brings the author back to competitive swimming, in masters races in the United States. •Kate Tuttle, *The Boston Globe*•“Painter and illustrator Leanne Shapton relates with poignancy the details of a competitive swimmer’s life...beautifully written, beautifully constructed, and thoughtful. •Huffington Post•“[*Swimming Studies*] is brilliant, eccentric and moving...an immersion in a life....Shapton has a novelist’s instinct for the nostalgic charge of the inconsequential....Her language is as crisp as the autumn day she describes. •Kate Kellaway, *The Observer (UK)*•“Acknowledging the ultimate incomprehensibility of athletic greatness, [Shapton] nonetheless brings us closer to its essence....If those countless practice laps and those not-quite-Olympian results were what it took to produce *Swimming Studies*, it was worth it: Shapton has bottled the elusive meaning of having tried and failed at a sport better than any book I’ve read since Pat Jordan’s classic *A False Spring*. •Read *Swimming Studies* and enjoy the incomprehensible greatness of the world’s best all the more. •Ian McGillis, *The Montreal Gazette (Canada)*•“[Shapton’s] eye for detail [is] amazingly shrewd...gaspingly beautiful in its insight, proving her project actually has very little to do with swimming...*Swimming Studies* is an intimate and beautiful meditation on human fallibility and the embarrassing, often unstated anxiety of success. •Stacey May Fowles, *The National Post (Canada)*•“In her illustrated memoir, Shapton, a writer, artist, and former contender for the Canadian Olympic team, grapples with the habits she learned as a teen-age competitive swimmer....and her honed attention to detail gives the reader the sensation of watching a meticulous mind watching itself, down to the hundredth of a second. •The New Yorker•“It looks like Shapton can succeed at whatever she puts her mind to; swimming is where that started....As few people can, Shapton draws a connection between making art and being an athlete, focusing on the unending effort it takes to do well....She is, no doubt, a creative powerhouse, one who puts words and pictures together with a

quiet force that comes only from solid, dedicated practice. — Carolyn Kellogg, Los Angeles Times — “I was a competitive swimmer, and I have never read anything that captured the sport so well. Shapton knows just the details to include...Her sparse, satisfying prose is your guide, and you’re glad to get to swim beside her. — Carolyn Kormann, TheNewYorker.com — “Through immaculate observation and evocative recollection, Leanne Shapton’s autobiographical *Swimming Studies* achieves the seemingly impossible. In a series of sharp snapshots of life as a competitive swimmer and beyond, she has managed to find “the language of belonging, giving a voice to silent hours spent submerged in water....beautifully written and gorgeous to look at, too....Ultimately, *Swimming Studies* is about more than swimming. It’s about how the discipline of competitive sport teaches routine, perseverance and good habits. It’s about how the diligence of athletic practice can translate into art, communication and even love. — Nicola Joyce, The Washington Post

Leanne Shapton is an illustrator and author of several books, including *Important Artifacts* and *A Personal Property* from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris. She is also the cofounder of J&L Books, a nonprofit publisher of art and photography books.

I don’t disagree with the criticism of this book, there are moments when one wonders why someone wrote it and why someone (especially if that someone is oneself) is reading it. The entire concept seems not only a bit arrogant, but the sort of pet project only a writer who’s not exactly worried about making ends meet gets to take on, like a Carly Simon children’s book. So this review is about what makes a book which fails the usual metrics great anyway, at least to me. Here we go; 1) It’s physically beautiful to look at inside and out (take that Kindle users - ha!). The cover construction and design is not only nice, it hints at aquatics in its color, and that subtlety matches the writing, it makes sense the author is an illustrator because there is a cohesion among otherwise separate concepts - the color of experiences, emotions in the form of surroundings. 2) The spare writing is deceptively complex. Novels-in-Three-Lines comes to mind as these 5 and 6 word sentences shake entire scenarios from the reader’s subconscious. The book starts with a couple shocking lines about our relationship with water - no more questions about the reason for a swimming book after that! 3) Those girls in high school, whether they’re athletes or musicians or drag-racers, who lived outside teenage life were the ones we were all really fascinated by, right? They seemed inaccessible, maybe even absent, but we knew their worlds were full of SOMETHING and never really stopped

wondering what it was - here's the answer at last. 4) It's self indulgent and disjointed because the thoughts and lives of teenagers are self indulgent and disjointed. They have so little control over their lives and schedules they couldn't create any experiential flow even if their thoughts were arranged in any sort of order, which their changing minds and bodies prevent. Teenage years are a mystery and, while this book won't resolve that, it will give the reader another chance to try for himself by gently holding the essence of those moments for us to see and feel again. It is not a good ordinary book; it's not an ordinary book. But it is the best example of the Swimming Studies genre I've ever seen, even if it's alone in the category. Consider it a work of expressive art and give it a try. Even if you don't end up liking it, just having it to leave out and see is worth the money.

Amazing. I also was a competitive swimmer. She captures the experience perfectly. It is incredibly satisfying to read the really unique and complex experiences of being a swimmer, but also the feelings of returning to the water after retirement from competitive swimming. As someone like I did, it is hard to get back in the water once your skills no longer match your previous levels, yet the water is a draw and a part of who we are as swimmers. Really great read. It was a quick, easy read - more a vacation read, but still really enjoyable.

"Swimming Studies" is Shapton's memoir of her life as young swimmer training for Olympic trials, her continued fascination with water and bodies in water, and her eventual turn toward art. She's brave and honest, and her descriptions transport - you feel the squeeze of a bathing cap, the atmosphere in a bus full of young athletes on their way to a competition, the chlorinated air of swimming pools, her elation, and her exhaustion. Her book isn't a sport memoir so much as a meditation on her journey (often a watery one), as Shapton figures out how her former swimming life inspires her life as an artist. I came to this book not as a swimmer, but as an artist, and it resonated when Shapton quoted "The Nuts and Bolts of Psychology for Swimmers," by Keith Bell. He writes about training discipline, the nonnegotiable commitment to practice. Words that apply equally to working on a creative project, once you have set a goal: "It doesn't make much sense to have to decide whether to take each individual step in a trip you have already decided to make." I love Shapton's watercolor portraits of fellow swimmers, rectangles of pool water, and gallery of vintage swimsuits - in both digital and paper forms (our family ended up with both versions, and it was fun to compare the illustrations) - the book is a treasure!

This is now one of my favorite books. Shapton's tone is cool (as in temperature) and her voice is

original. Her literary techniques are engaging. She takes you into the world of competitive swimming in surprising and memorable ways.

As a cellist, artist and swimmer, this book is very appealing! I didn't swim as a child and this gives me a good look into the life of a young, serious swimmer. Maybe next lifetime I'll have the chance. In the meantime, pick up this great book for a college swimmer in your life. Or maybe it's for the swimmer who is just leaving the competitive end of the sport. For those of us further along in life: How do you cope with leaving something that's been such a focus in your life? How do you use that energy and move forward? Lots to think about and enjoy.

As a former synchronized swimmer and competitive swimmer I was quite anxious to read. Ms. Sharpton's descriptive writing brought me right back to the smell of chlorine, sweating in a pool! (non swimmers find this hard to believe) aching muscles and not waiting to get out of bed for practice! Great to know another person "gets it" that I am truly home in the water! I have always felt the water is a calling...it's my calling...true serenity. Thank you Ms. Sharpton:-)

I, too, was a child swimmer but I was not fast; instead I joined the YWCA's synchronized swimming group. Leanne Shapton so aptly conveys the incredible physical and emotional feel of being in water, the fluidity, the weightlessness and the quiet. I liked the vignettes from different times in her life where swimming or water had some role. Even her art work, maybe watercolors, conveys the deep sense of her love of water. A good night time read, a chapter or two at a time to savor and remember days gone by that continue to shape and form current days.

I loved this book - enjoyed seeing the inside of the world of competitive swimming. I also enjoyed her collection of vintage swimsuits and swimming locations. I would have given this 5 stars, but her artwork section was not at the same level as the rest of the book. Perhaps it was better in print (I read on Kindle Fire).

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