# Photography for Couples

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# Agenda

- Introductory thoughts
- Basic Principles
- Some games
- Further work: Some shooting games

# Thoughts

- Getting Stuck in a Rut
- The Scientific Method
- What is fine art?
- Having a style of your own
- Being fearless

# Ruts and De-Rut-ology

- When you're a beginner ruts are especially dangerous
  - Find something that works there is a tendency to stick with that, because it's rewarding
  - Some big-name artists never grew out of their ruts (because they were financially lucrative)
- Get out of a rut by trying something completely off the wall
  - Ideally - the opposite of what you normally do

# The Scientific Method

- The process of studying cause and effect
- 3 important principles:
  - Only change one thing at a time!
  - Do small experiments (they are cheaper than large failures!)
  - A controlled failure is a learning experience!Ask:
    - What went wrong? Why?
    - How *much* did it go wrong?

# Fine art

- What is fine art? GWC's definition:
  - It's "fine art" if it's meaningless, grainy, smudged, or has weird composition
  - It's "art nude" if it's got a nude but it's B&W
  - It's "glamour" if it has a nude and it's color
  - It's "erotic art" if it turns me on a little
  - It's "porn" if it turns you on
  - It's "obscene" if the idea of you jerking off to it makes me feel slightly queasy

# Fine art



Fine art has some kind of emotional disassociation?

I.e.: it puts you to sleep?

# Fine art



Fine art has the eroticism leached out of it by too many chablis-drinking art critics?

I.e.: it puts you to sleep?

# Fine art



Is it just a lighting technique?

This is color.
It's also weird.

# Fine art

Weird fine artists:
        Jackson Pollack
        Henri Matisse
        Pablo Picasso
        William Wegman

# Having a Style of your Own

- One of the most paralyzing things I've noticed in photographers is lack of style
  - Or, rather, *concern* that they lack style
  - If you understand *what you like* about what you're doing, then you will find you have a style
    - Style is not being different from everyone else; everything has already been done before
    - *You*, however, are unique in the history of creation

# Being Fearless

- I do not know what "Fine Art" is
  - But I do know that many great artists did stuff that was "way out there"
    - Approach what you do with a sense of play
    - Always remember the creative curiousity that made you think "yeah… photography…. I'd like to *try* that…" the first time
    - F*ck 'em if they can't take a joke

# Basic Principles

# The Easy Trick

- If you can shoot in a room where your lighting is the only light there is:
  - You are in the land of "what you see is what you get"
  - This makes everything vastly *vastly* easier
  - Proponents of the Easy Trick: Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, Karsh, William Wegman, etc.

# The Second Easiest Trick

- Shoot what's there (don't use artificial light at all)
  - If your exposures are correct your pictures will have an immediacy and realism that is unbeatable
  - Proponents of this: Sally Mann, Helmut Newton

# Size Of Light Source + Reflection

- The "softness" of the light does not change the size of the reflection of the light source
  - The size of the light source changes the size of the reflection
  - The "softness" of the light changes the degree to which small shadows get filled in
- 90% of the time you don't need *a lot* of *very* soft light
  - You need a big light source. Like a wall.

# Perspective

- Unless you want your subject to look like they have a big head and tiny feet:
  - Keep the camera at the height of the middle of their body
  - A short stool or a milk crate is a life-saver for us older guys

# Copy!

- It is nearly impossible to exactly duplicate someone else's work
  - If you try, generally you'll wind up with something unique of your own
  - There is *NO CHANCE* you will invent your very own lighting technique
    - What you can, and will, do is find some that you like and make them your own

# Adding Depth

- Unless you want your pictures to not have depth to them
  - You need to fool the viewer's eye into interpreting depth by messing with their visual cues
    - Depth of field
    - Light
    - Front to back objects/size
    - Cinematics (implied motion)

# Depth of Field/Cinematics



This is not exactly a good
picture!  BUT:
• sharp hand, blurry features fool
    our eye into seeing depth
• hot lights on background make
    her hand stand out more
•modelled shadows on her face
    make the scene look deeper

# Cinematics / Object Scale



Here the light is flat and so is the scene:
- Any sense of depth this happens to have is a result of our brains interpreting the scale of the objects in the foreground
- Most of us know how big a french fry is!

# Lights



Here there is just one side-light:
- Modelling and depth are only sold to your eye by the shadows on her body (hey, it works!)
- If you're using 1 light to shoot and want drama, start with the light 90 degrees off the scene (like this)

# Lights



Here there are two lights:
- One top light on the model
- One gridded spotlight on the
  backdrop
- The backdrop light adds depth
  cues and pops out the edges of
  the model

# Lights



Black Background:
- Objects against a black background can send surprising fake depth cues because our brains have so little to work with they "amplify" what's there

# Lighting Games

- Game #1 - the "deconstruct the light" game
    - Teach yourself to play this and you'll learn something *amazingly* important
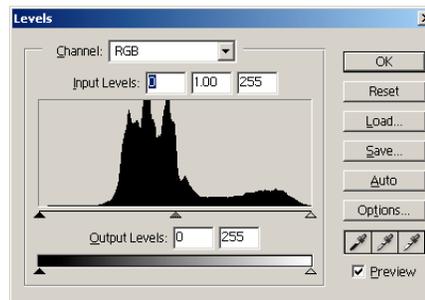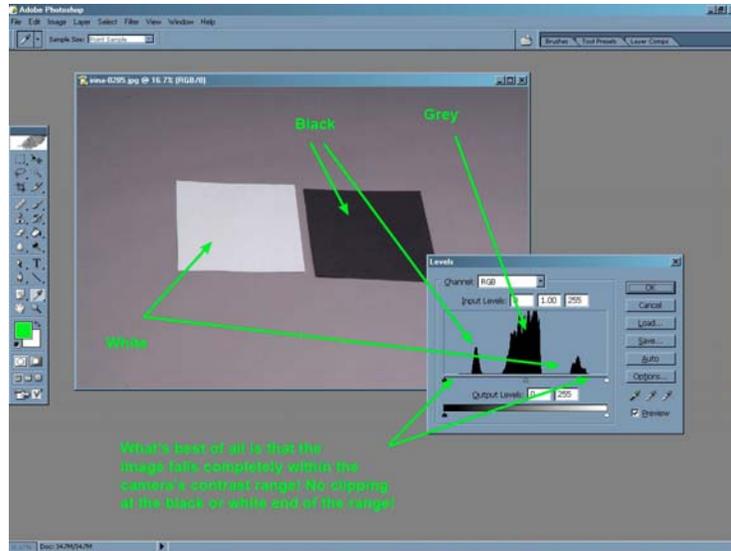    - Goal: look at a studio photo and tell me how it was done!

# Exposure

- If all you have is your histogram, learn to read it!

# Exposure/Histograms

# A Few Lighting Paradigms

- Point Light
- One Light With a Bounce
- Chiaroscuro
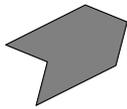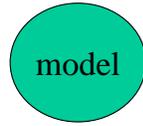- Wrap-Around Light
- Y-Light

# Point Light



A single light:
- Looks "hard" if it is at a distance
- This was a single small softbox
- Why does it look hard? The shadows are sharp!
- This is how most daylit scenes look (the sun is far away) if there is no natural diffusion
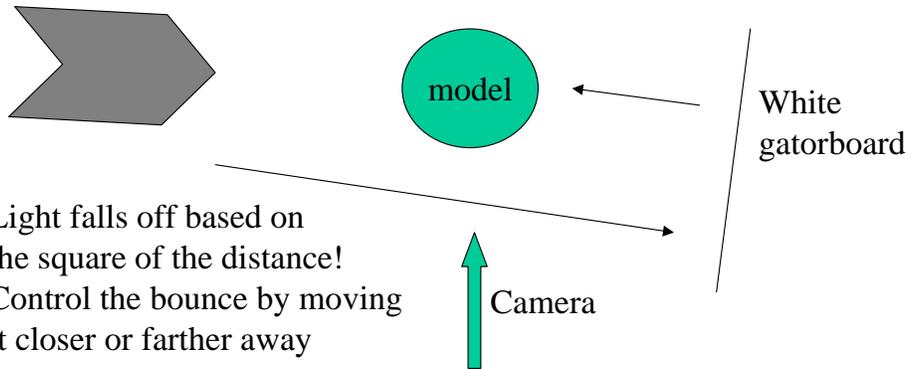
# Point Light

model

Camera

# One Light With a Bounce

A single light:
- The shadow fill is also all from the single light
- No synchronization problem
- Very inexpensive
- If you can do this well you can kick everyone's ass and claim to be "old school"
- The angle of the bounce and the main light are the whole game

# One Light With a Bounce

model

White
gatorboard

Light falls off based on
the square of the distance!
Control the bounce by moving
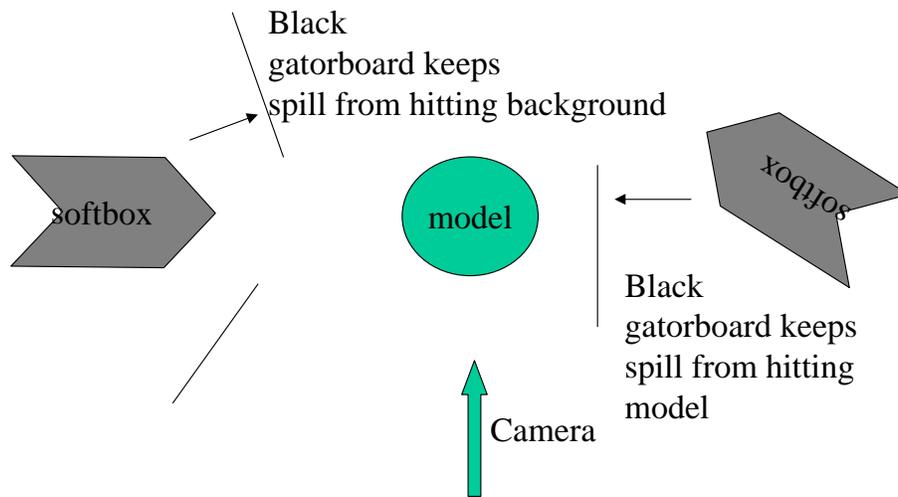it closer or farther away

Camera

# Chiaroscuro



Easiest with 2 lights:
- The background on the dark side of the model* is lit
- The background on the lit side of the model is dark

* there is no dark side of the model; as a matter of fact it's all dark

# Chiaroscuro

Black
gatorboard keeps
spill from hitting background

softbox

model

softbox

Black
gatorboard keeps
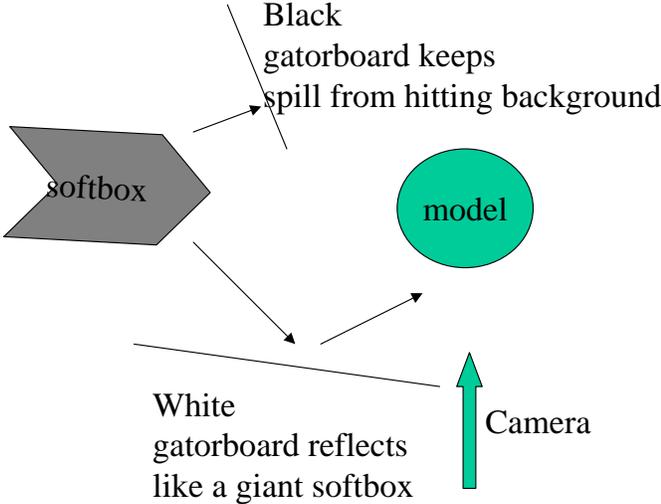spill from hitting
model

Camera

# Wrap-Around Light



A single light:
- The wrap-around look is from a huge bounce-surface
- Vermeer used to use a plaster-painted casement window (basically a 'light tunnel')
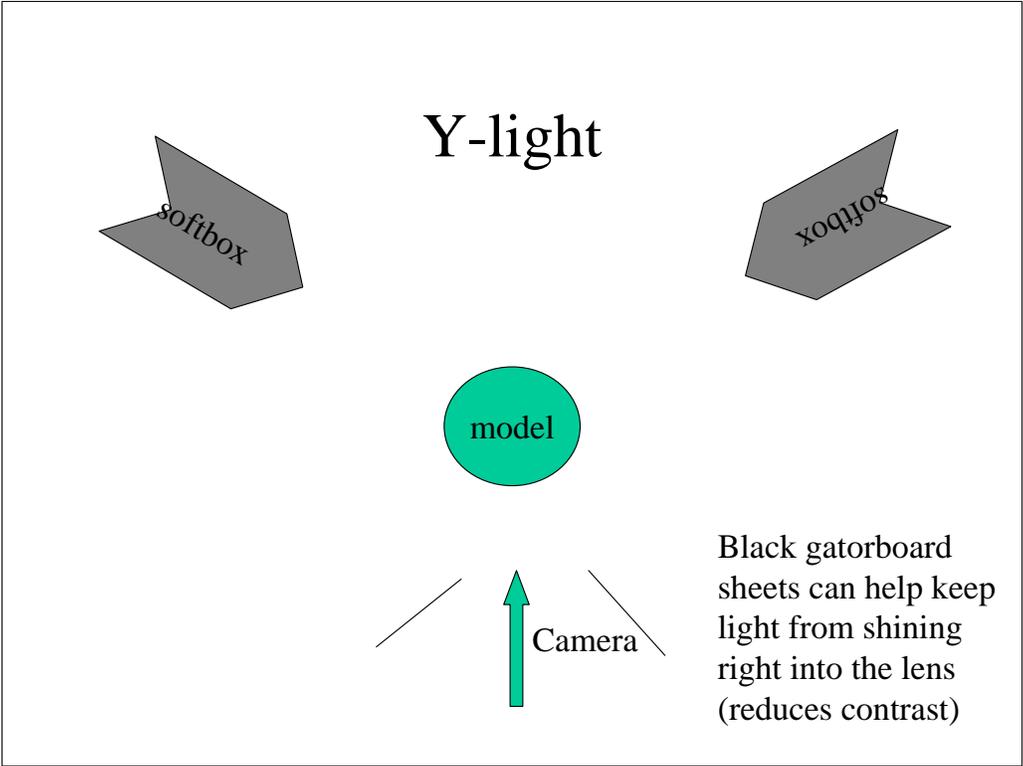
# Wrap-Around Light

Black
gatorboard keeps
spill from hitting background

softbox

model

White
gatorboard reflects
like a giant softbox

Camera

# Y-light



Two lights:
• You can play games
  with the angles and
  ratios if you want

# Y-light

softbox

softbox

model

Camera

Black gatorboard
sheets can help keep
light from shining
right into the lens
(reduces contrast)

# Games

- These are things you can think about later
  - Try them at home or with a photo-buddy
  - You can always play with yourself! :D

# Assignments

- Find someone who is familiar with your work (Your partner, model, or SigO can do this!)
  - Have them assign you stuff to do
  - Ideally it should be stuff that's right at the edge of your comfort zone

# What You Get is What You Shoot

- Your partner goes and picks a place and poses
  - That's all you get to work with
  - Maybe you're allowed to use one light
  - See what you can do with it!

# Round Robin

- The round-robin shooting game
  - Photographer A
    - Sets up the lights (be quick about it!)
    - Poses the model
    - Shoot a quick shot
  - Photographer B
    - Shoots the scene
    - Sets up the lights (be quick about it!)
    - Poses the model … etc...

# Shooting Games

- Objective of the exercise:
  - Learn to cope quickly with other people's lighting
  - Learn to "let go" of your own idea
  - Learn to "let go" of control
  - Learn to adopt/adapt from other people's ideas