

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 curiosity 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)

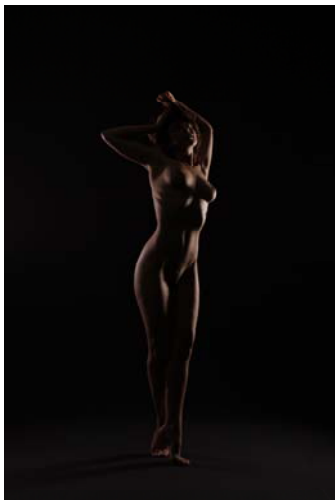
Lights



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



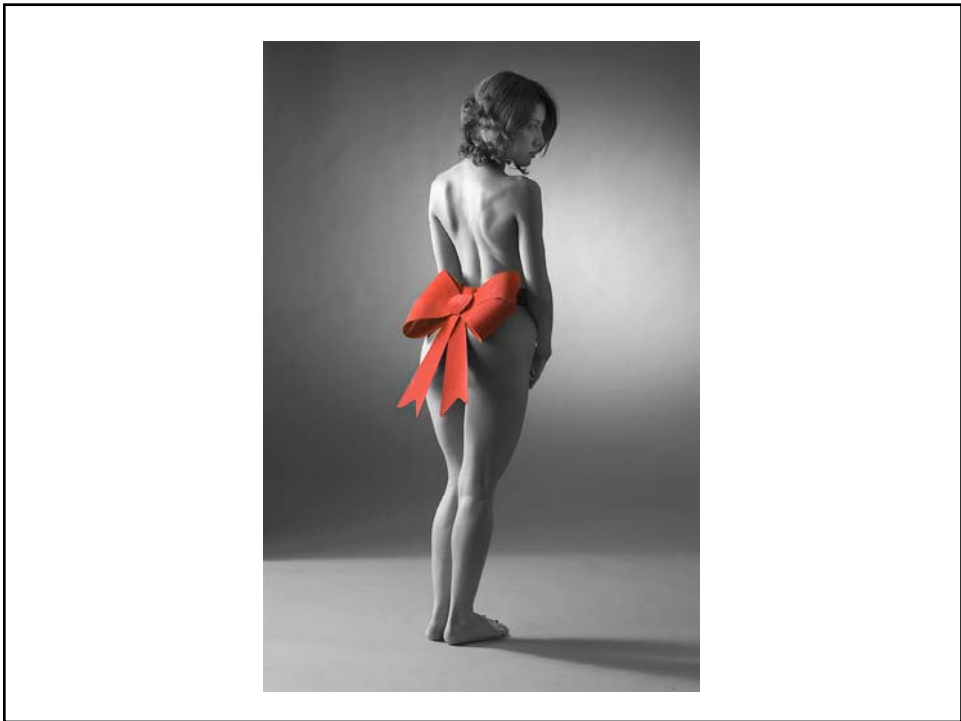
Black Background:

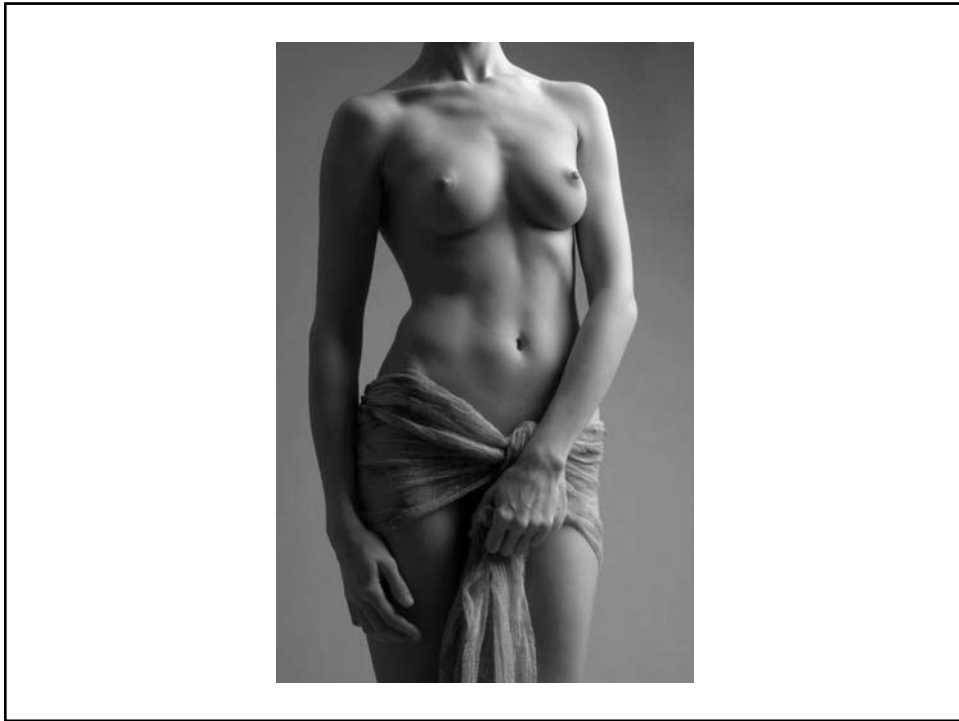
- Objects against a black background can send surprising fake depth cues because our brains have so little to work with they “amplify” what’s there

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!

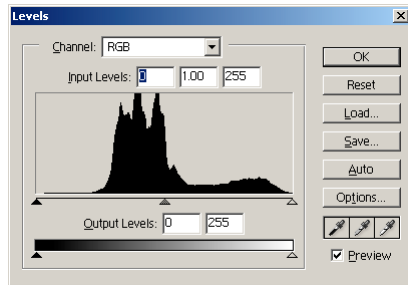




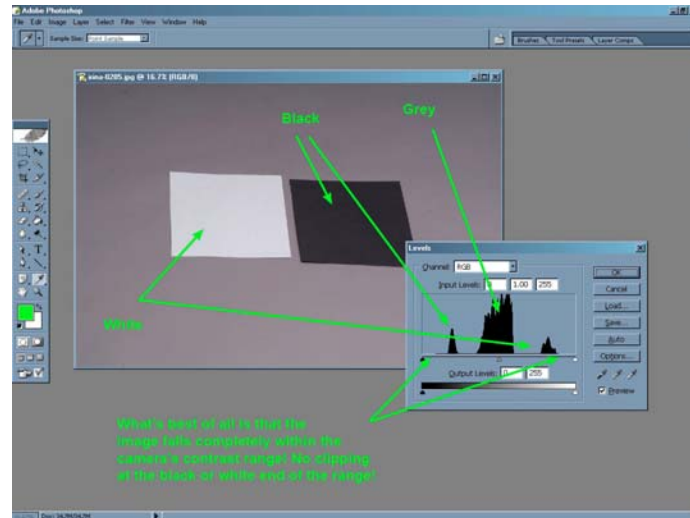


Exposure

- 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

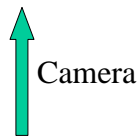
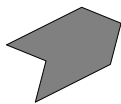
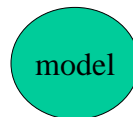
Point Light



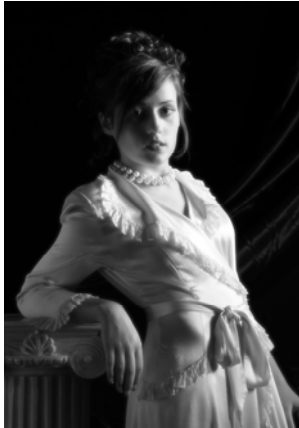
A single light:

- 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 daylight scenes look (the sun is far away) if there is no natural diffusion

Point Light



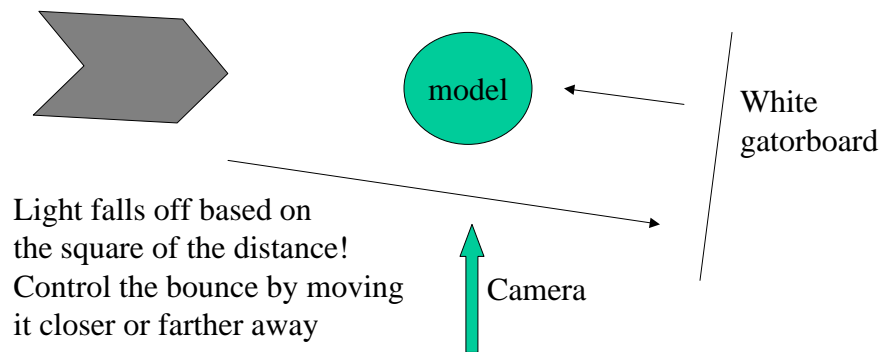
One Light With a Bounce



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



Chiaroscuro

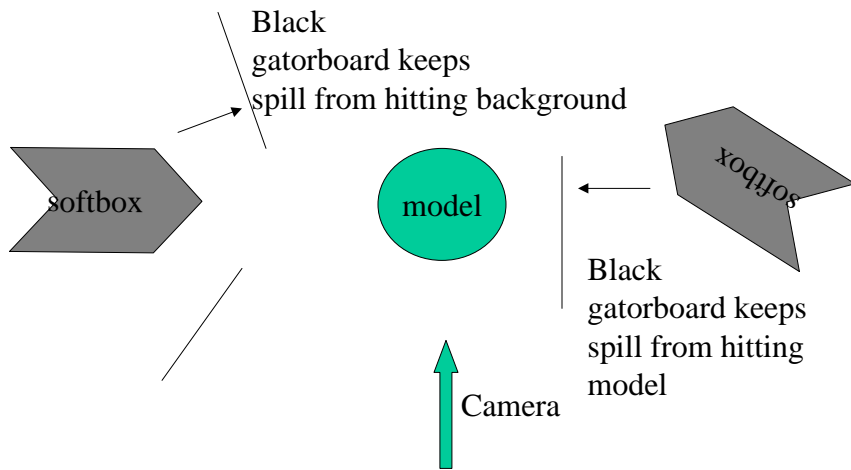


Easiest with 2 lights:

- 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



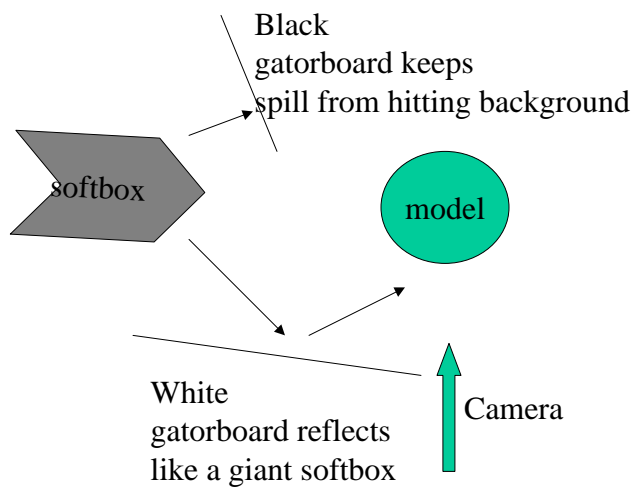
Wrap-Around Light



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



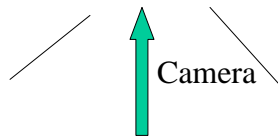
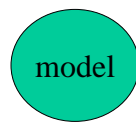
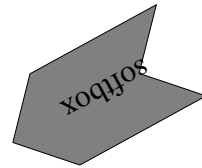
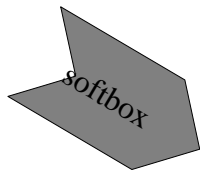
Y-light



Two lights:

- You can play games with the angles and ratios if you want

Y-light



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