Monroe Community College (3 credits)
PHO 106 Fall 2010 Lecture 381, Lab 385 & 386
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Qualities of Light.

1. "Chiaroscuro Light" or Light and Shadow: This lighting should reveal the 3-D quality of the subject. Generally, the light source should be in front of, and to the side of the main subject. It works better if the light is a bit low to the subject and there is a dark space or black fill opposite the main light. There should be an emphasis on volume and form, as well as a heightened sense of space from foreground to background. This should be true whether your image is still-life or as a landscape or anything in between. With this image you have a greater freedom (to the use of light) to make a subtle or sensational statement. Lighting isn't so much graphic as it is depth enhancing. Remember, with this classification of light, the use of light enhances the shape and three dimensional quality of the subject being photographed.

Kunzgami Coast, Okinawa, Japan. (20060721-A)

2. Radiant Light: This particular light quality becomes experimental and at time very unpredictable. A spectral light source, is used as the main light source and is placed behind the main subject and is included in the original photograph. Creating a back lit situation with the potential for random lens flare in the final photograph. Think of this as an "X -File" use of light to create a mood to the scene or subject being photographed. You should have a black background in conjunction with the radiant light. An example would be light filtering through tree leaves. Or a structure where only the sun is going through a hole in a roof and it is surrounded by the dark ceiling.

Cape Zampa Coast, Okinawa, Japan. (20060625-Q)

3. Dramatic Shadows: This is where the shadow becomes the subject as well as the object you photograph. Side lighting is useful for gaining this effect. You will find that a hard focused light, as both the morning and evenings will be conducive to this dramatic light/shadow effect. The correct orientation to the object being photographed is also very important and should depend on your interpretation of the object. In general, the more perpendicular and high you are to the shadow being cast, the more dramatic those shadows will become a strong visual design element within the context of your image. Remember, with this classification of light, the shadows being cast by a subject are an important elements to this photograph.

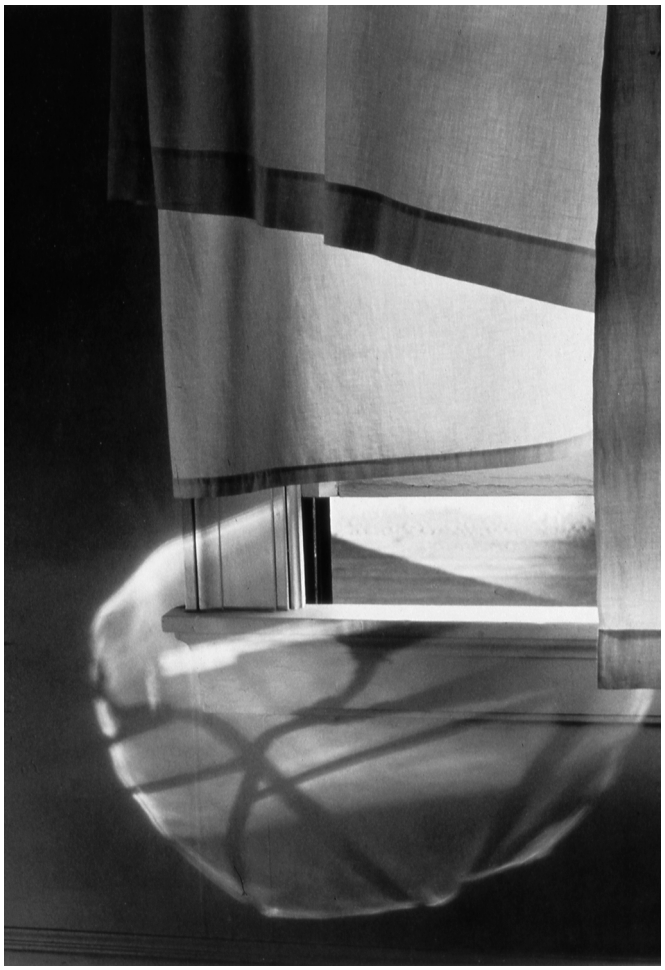
Cape Zanpa, Okinawa, Japan. (20060625-N)

4. Silhouette Light: This light quality should render the important information /object 2-D. This requires that the subject be heavily backlit. with a broad white background. To a large degree the final effect will depend on how you meter the scene and therefore what detail is rendered where. A more dramatic effect will be achieved by darkening the object being silhouetted and lightening the background, thereby heightening that sense of 2-D. Remember, the main subject of this assignment should be black or minimal shadow detail and the background should be light compared to the subject.

Metering suggestions for Silhouette Light: Use gray card on subject then close down 2-3 stops and have the background at least 5 stops more exposure from the subject.
It would be advised to bracket your exposures!

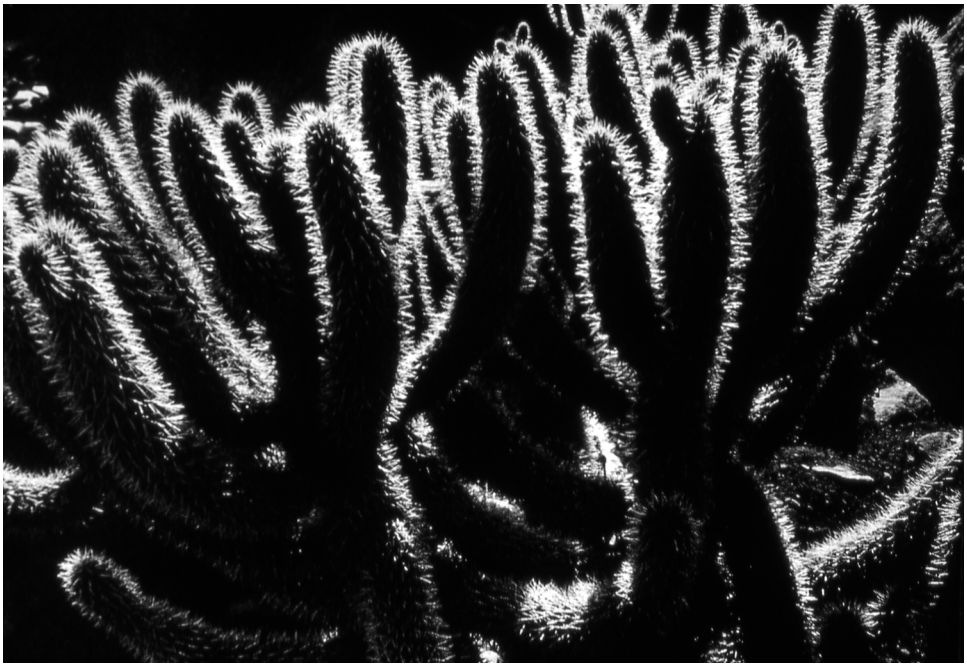
Oodo Komesu Beach, Okinawa, Japan. (20071226-O)

5. Accent Light: This particular light quality offers a great deal of latitude in the use of its effect. It can be the "finishing touch" in a well lit image and is usually in use with other light. This can be achieved with additional light on the subject with an artificial light or light bouncing off of a reflective surface (light colored wall). Remember with this example, you are to show that their is a secondary light source to the main light source that is obvious.



Windowsill Daydreaming Minor White © 1958

6. Rim Light: This particular light source will tend to form a "halo" effect around the object from which the light source emanates. A soft box light or spectral light should be positioned behind the subject and out of camera angle. A subject that has some texture to it will help accent the shape and surface. A dark background and/or subject will intensify this effect. Whatever the object, this light quality will usually make that object the focal point of the image by separating it from the background. Make sure you have a lens shade or "Flag" between the light source and camera lens to eliminate lens flare. Remember, the main use of this light is to accentuate a subject and the shape of that subject from the back side.



Unknown Artist

Some Visual Characteristics used to Defining Light:

1. Brightness: The intensity of the light falling on the subject.

2. Color: The color cast of the light falling on the subject.

3. Contrast: The high contrast or low contrast of a scene as depicted by the main light.
   - A sunny day produces a high contrast scene.
   - A small intense light source produces a high contrast scene.
   - An overcast day produces a low contrast scene.
   - A soft box light, diffusion material, or bounce light produces a low contrast scene.

4. Specular: How the light might be bouncing off certain areas of a scene.
   - Light dancing off a shinny surface or a pool of water back towards the camera can have a specular quality of light in the final photograph.

5. Diffuse: The intensity of the light through a softening material can have an effect on the final subject.

6. Direction: The direction of the light can dramatically change the characteristics of the subject or scene in how it is depicted.