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Spring 2009

Key Learnings #9 – Unit 3 – Light

Flash Photography

Flash photography presents its own inherent problems. It can be a useful tool, but you have to learn how to master it, how to reign it back if necessary. Here are some issues I have with flash:

- Flash is ***very harsh***. It is a small, bright light source and therefore produces harsh shadows, and two-dimensional compositions.
- Flash clearly exhibits the physical phenomenon of what is called ***Light Falloff***. The physical property of light that we deal with here is called the ***Inverse-Square Law.*** That is, the strength or quantity of light is inversely proportional to the distance from the source of the light. In plain english – *an object that is twice the distance from a point source of light will receive a quarter of the illumination*. So what it means to we photographers is that if you move your subject from 3 yards away to 6 yards away (double), you will need four times the amount of light for the same exposure.
- ***Red–Eye Effect.*** This troublesome effect comes as a result of the flash traveling through a dilated pupil and bouncing off the *fundus* of the eye and back out to the camera, thereby revealing the red of blood vessels in the eye.

There are some things you can do to mitigate the negative effects of flash:

- Use ***Light Modifiers.*** These are flash/camera add-ons that you can purchase or make yourself to ***diffuse*** the light emitted from the flash. Light Modifiers also help with ***bounce flash***.
- Use ***Bounce Flash*** whenever possible. This is where you can position a flash unit in such a way that it bounces the light up to a ceiling (or sideways to a wall) and back to the subject. This results in a softer, diffused light and a more pleasant result. ***If you use a point-and-shoot compact camera, there is unfortunately not much you can do to bounce the flash or use other light modifiers short of placing some diffusion material (handkerchief, for example) in front of the flash.***
- Some flash units and other light modifiers incorporate the use of "bounce cards." In addition to light being pointed towards the ceiling, a small amount of light is diverted directly to the subject in order to provide a little "kicker" light and eye "catchlights."
- If you can move your flash ***Off-Camera***, you should do so! By using either flash/camera brackets or wireless flash, you can get nicer light sculpting and more depth/dimension to your photos.
- Reduce the angle of flash bouncing off subject to the lens. This will reduce red-eye. Move flash higher or off-camera. Using tele-photo lenses with flash diminish this angle, making things worse.
- ***Avoid Red-eye Reduction Flash Mode!*** It doesn't work, and is annoying!
- Watch for ***possible reflections*** off glass/mirrors in front of you.

NOTES

A Great Photograph ...

- *Has a central theme or idea.*
- *Focuses attention to a single point-of-interest*
- *Simplifies*

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