

LightWriting

The photographer shares quick pointers on lights-n-shade for narrative captures.

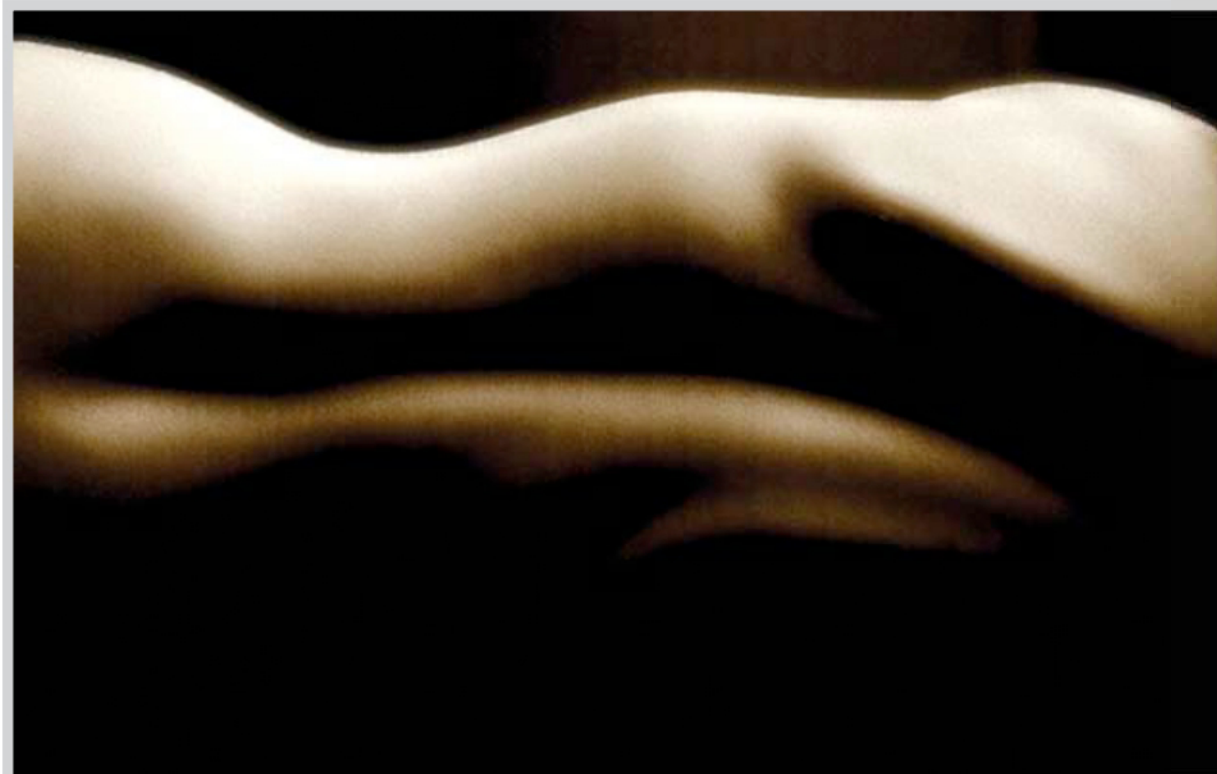


Bhavpreet Ghai

After working in the graphics and photography industry in Delhi, she moved to Mumbai to join the 3D animation film industry. After spending some time in Australia at The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, she took up photography full time. Currently she is based in Mumbai, working with FX School as HOD-Photography and CG Lighting.

Tools used

A good camera
An observing mind.



Within the 4 corners of a viewfinder lies the canvas of a photographer. The moment one looks through, lights-n-shade splash the canvas with colours and character. To convert this to a gripping tale, one needs a thorough understanding of the lights-n-shades to make the frame narrate. Photographer Bhavpreet Ghai puts light on the key types, qualities and characteristics of lights and shade.

Always start in darkness. Whenever light is in your control like in a studio, always start without them. Before even getting into lights, observe your subject,

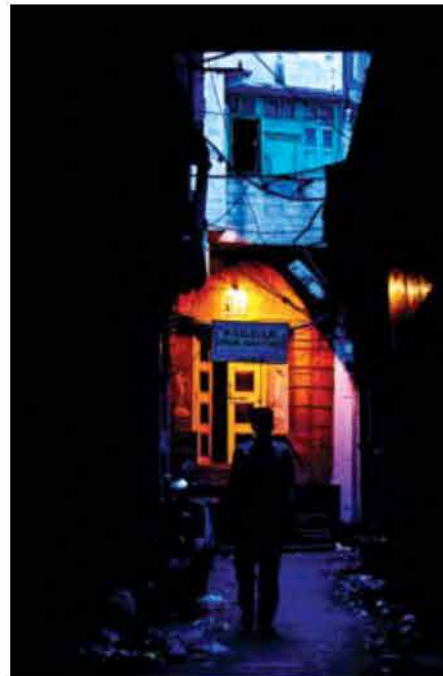
its shape, form, surface and feel. Light for photographers is what colour is for painters. So, before you start, there has to be some visualization of what is that you want on the canvas or the frame. Once you are clear in your head about what you want to get in the final frame, start with lights, one by one. Put them at a position opposite to where you want the shadow to fall. This creates the form. You are now ready to manipulate and create the necessary mood.



Knowing lights is only half the job done. Playing with shadows and darkness is as important a technique to learn as lighting. Just to know how much to reveal and how much to keep in darkness needs good control over light. Many a times one single light is just enough to achieve your vision. It can create mystery and abstract pictures. Proper use of light and shadow together creates depth and brings out the shape and form. Without shadow there is no depth and form.



Silhouette is all about the form. When the form is more important than showing the detailed subject, many times a silhouette does the trick. The shape becomes clearly notable against a brightly lit background. Also, there is no light in front to illuminate the subject. However, silhouette fails to reveal the depth of an object. The subject becomes a black cutout since it lacks dimension. If this play around the form is what you are looking for, silhouette should be your pick.



Rim light creates distinct shapes. Backlight that creates an outline along the edges of the subject is called Rim light. It generally serves two purposes. It adds drama to the subject and makes it look aesthetically beautiful. It also provides a clear separation between the foreground subject and the background. By using rim light you can make the subject stand out in contrast, with its shape beautifully revealed.



Backlight travels with the subject. When your subject has translucency, a backlight can do wonders. When you need to show light penetration into your subject, go for backlight. This not only gives a soft outline to the subject but also creates the contrast with the background in order to highlight the form.



Front light kills shadows and dimensions. Since it throws all the shadows behind the subject, away from the viewer's eye, subject looks clean and innocent. But at the same time it lacks dimension, minimizes any texture detail, thus making the subject look flat. It can help to conceal wrinkles.



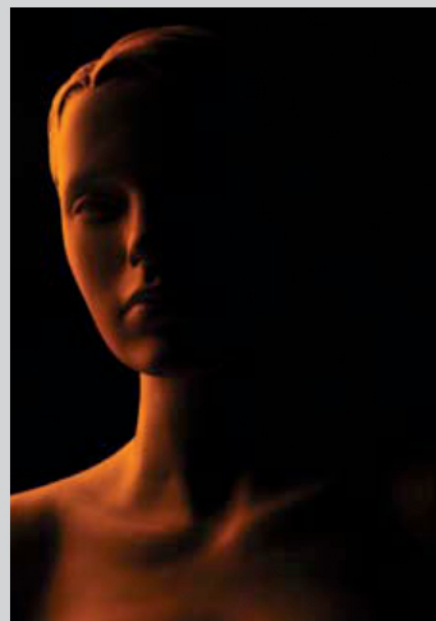
Top lights create character. Hard top light can give a negative look to the character with dark shadows under the eye. Soft top light was often used by Renaissance painters to depict divinity and spirituality and to give an angelic effect. It is also used to add a soft glow to the top of the hair and depth under the cheek bones (thus highlighting the cheeks) making the face look narrow and sleek.

Bottom light adds heightened drama. Bottom light is usually used to give a supernatural and spooky look. At the same time very soft bottom light can look very sensual and give a romantic feel.



Side light reveals dimensions. It is good for showing form and texture and lends a three-dimensional quality to objects. Shadows are prominent, making the contrast high. It also creates mystery and pensive mood by revealing only one side of the character.

Manipulate shadows by altering the light source. Besides direction of the light, what is also very important is the size and the distance of the light source. Smaller the source of light, sharper is the shadow. Similarly, bigger the source of light, softer is the shadow. When the light is closer to the subject, bigger should be the light source, so that the shadow is softer. Further away light goes from the subject, smaller it becomes, thus harder the shadow becomes.



Lights determine the subject's character. Hard shadows falling on face can be a great trick to show hard or dominating characters. Soft lighting smoothens the form giving the character a soft feel. Take a note of the catchlight in the eye of a subject. The white reflection of light in the eye is called catch light. It helps making the person look alive. You can see the world in their eyes!

Feel the light to determine the time of click. There are no rules regarding the perfect time for a click. It all depends on what you are looking for. Hard shadows are brought about by hard lights and vice versa. The best way to find it out is to observe the nature. How sunlight behaves across the day helps you gauge what to expect at what time. It is also important to feel the light. It's not only about what you see visually but also how you respond emotionally to a particular kind of lighting and environment that makes the picture complete.



Morning Sun is for glory. Like the purity of the light, it brings out every subject in its full glory. The light is essentially soft creating soft shadows. The additional elements of rays or mist may also add to the drama.



Evening light evokes emotions. Evening light creates soft and warm glow around the subject. Many a times, light falling in the background makes for a beautiful bokeh. Together, they evoke certain emotions in the onlooker ←