Photo Silly Advanced

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

#2
Quality of Light

Throughout your day, think about the light source in all the places you go. How big is the light source? What is the direction the shadows are cast? Is it hard or soft?

The quality of light in any scene affects the shape and texture of the subject as well as the mood and how we feel about the subject. And photography is all about that effect. However, we can't really control the light around us. Sun and clouds and obstacles are all beyond our manipulation. And for that reason, photography involves observing, moving around and often waiting.

Today we are going to talk specifically about backlighting. This is the situation when your subject is between your camera and the main light source. Sort of like squinting into the sun but in a controlled way.
Backlight is an amazing and useful "tool" for photographers for several reasons:

1) separates the subject from the background by creating a bright edge around it;
2) tends to simplify a scene by hiding detail in shadows;
3) creates depth by throwing shadows toward the camera;
4) brings out textures;
5) creates brilliant highlights on normally dull surfaces.

For this assignment I want you to find a backlit scene. This could be the sun when it is low in the sky, or a street light at night, or just after sunset. On a cloudy day it could be light coming into an enclosed space through a door or reflected off of a building into an alley. It's best if the light source isn't shining straight into the lens. Ideally you and your

camera are in a shady spot looking out into a back lit scene.

You may have to do a bit of planning and scouting. The idea is to find a scene and not create one. This should be a large outdoor shot if possible. You know you have found it when flat surfaces like pavement or puddles are the brightest thing in the scene. Look for or wait for interesting subject matter and start shooting.

Exposure for this situation can be tricky. In general, you need to underexpose a stop or two; however, if the light is shining into the lens it may require the opposite. Take several test shots using exposure compensation to determine the best setting. Also, make sure your flash is turned off. You may also find your auto-focus freaking out, in which case, point your camera down and away from the light to get something to focus on and then move back to your original framing to take the shot. (Almost all cameras will hold focus if you push the shutter release part way down.)

Oh yeah, one more thing: shoot only in B+W. Almost all camera's have a built in setting for B+W. Check your owners manual for instructions. Your camera may even have multiple b+w settings like: sepia, high-contrast, grain etc. For our work today, just go with the standard or medium contrast setting. If your camera doesn't have a b+w mode you will have to con-vert it in your computer. Let me know if this is the case or if you have any other issues and I will try to help you figure it out.

Here are a couple of shots I did today in downtown Seattle about an hour before sunset.