

INTRODUCTION

For this assignment, I have chosen to develop exercise 4.4. This decision was based on my historical lack of success with studio lights. During my research, I was particularly drawn to low key portraiture – the results are edgy, giving a wonderfully artistic slant to what could otherwise be a run-of-the-mill portrait. This type of lighting captures something quite unique about the person, which is especially interesting when the subject is so well known to you. I wanted to shoot the most important beings in my life; my husband and my dog. The aim was to see what is highly familiar, in a new light.

PROCESS

Low key lighting is achieved by using one carefully placed light source. Although I have a continuous lighting set, I opted to use a Knog Qudos Action light that I exclusively use with my GoPro. This light is bright yet small and gives a more directional beam; perfect for what I wanted to achieve.

It took a few attempts to find the perfect combination of settings that resulted in the right amount of light illuminating the isolated sections of the subject, yet keeping the rest in the dark. I had to increase the ISO quite significantly when using $f/5-f/11$ to keep the shutter speed up.

I wanted to achieve a selection of lighting variations within the boundaries of low key, from an extreme version where the light literally picks up the very edges of the subject, to split lighting. The former required the light to be slightly behind the subject, allowing the light to flood slightly around the side of the body and face, as if creating a line drawing. The latter required the light to be side on to the subject to avoid any light pollution to the dark side. All images are captured with the subject slightly forward from the black backdrop.

For this assignment, my goal was to show as little of the subjects as possible, yet still convey mood and personality.

PHOTOGRAPHER INFLUENCE

Jean-Baptist Huynh's portraiture was the initial starting point on my research. I particularly liked his use of black clothing to isolate the head and face of his subjects (fig 1).



Fig 1



Fig 2



Fig 3

I looked at the low-key photography of Yousef Karsh. His portrait work is often of a wider composition (fig 2), allowing a little more in the way of context to the subject. Karsh also uses more light than I wanted in my images (fig 3). I was aiming for some of my images to be higher-contrast and less defined subjects. Perhaps with more of a nod towards abstract at times.

From there my research guided me, more often, to individual images rather than to specific photographers.



Fig 4

I was most heavily influenced by George Wheelhouse, a fine art photographer who shoots wild animals in both high and low key. His images of highland cattle (fig 4) contain exactly the style of lighting I wanted to set up. I knew I wanted to use both my husband (an easy and willing model) and my dog (not so) as subjects for this shoot, so I drew confidence from his success with his 'wild' subjects.

SELF ANALYSIS

I am extremely happy with the outcome of this assignment; I have previously never worked with this type of lighting, so I feel a sense of achievement.

I especially like the simplicity of fig 5 and fig 6, where only the smallest amount of detail has been 'painted by the light'.

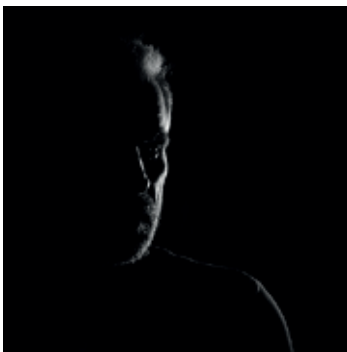


Fig 5

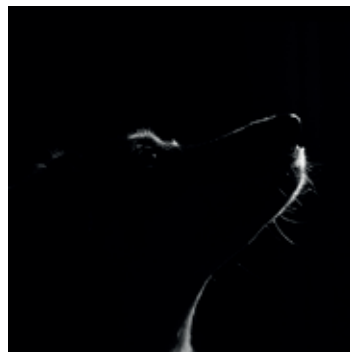


Fig 6

I recognise that I have perhaps not achieved much in the way of invention; I have succeeded in creating a lighting effect that has been used by many before me. However, experimentation was key on this assignment, as I had never worked with this type of lighting before. The greatest experimental factor was in the amount of light, the outcome of which has a huge impact on the images.

One very important detail is the inclusion of the catch-light in the subject's eyes. This really helps to lift the eyes from any potential dullness and creates a connection with the viewer. *"Photographers who use catch lights know their importance in creating dimension and depth, and in adding life to a portrait."* (Gabriel, 2015).

The simplicity of the content means that increased importance is placed on composition and framing, ensuring that balance is achieved and there is sufficient breathing space.

I challenged myself to work in both landscape and portrait format for this assignment, however when I was reviewing the set, I couldn't help but notice that images 3, 5 and 8 have a distinct air of 'album cover' artwork about them. So I experimented with a square format – and much preferred the outcome.

I shot everything in colour, but converted all the images to black and white in post production to achieve a greater visual contrast between the light and shade. My goal on the more extreme versions of this style of lighting (fig 5 + 6), was for the images to appear as if someone had painted white lines on a black background.

The effect of low key lighting is an intimacy that can not be achieved if the subject is well lit. An abundance of shadows creates mystery and intrigue. This is truly a case of less is more.

Word count: 896

Reference:

Michael Gabriel. 2015. 8 crucial things you need to know about capturing catchlights. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://contrastly.com/catchlight-tutorial/>. [Accessed 28 November 2017].

Bibliography:

Jean-Baptist Huynh. 2017. Jean-Baptist Huynh. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.jeanbaptistehuynh.com>. [Accessed 3 November 2017].

Yousuf Karsh. 2017. Yousuf Karsh Master Photographer of the 20th Century. [ONLINE] Available at: <https://karsh.org>. [Accessed 5 November 2017].

George Wheelhouse. 2017. George Wheelhouse. [ONLINE] Available at: <http://www.georgewheelhouse.com>. [Accessed 5 November 2017].

Image Reference:

Fig 1: Jean-Baptist Huynh, (2017), untitled [ONLINE]. Available at: http://www.jeanbaptistehuynh.com/oeuvres_9_portraits_.html#PhotoSwipe1509706273492 [Accessed 3 November 2017].

Fig 2: Yousuf Karsh, (1956), Walt Disney, 1956 [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://karsh.org/overview/#28> [Accessed 28 November 2017].

Fig 3: Yusef Karsh, (1956), Mother Teresa, 1988 [ONLINE]. Available at: <https://karsh.org/overview/#26> [Accessed 28 November 2017].

Fig 4: George Wheelhouse, (2017), Highland Cattle – Bull on Black [ONLINE]. Available at: <http://www.georgewheelhouse.com/galleries/on-black> [Accessed 28 November 2017].

Fig 5: Author's own

Fig 6: Author's own