

Assignment: light and shadow

One of the very first photographs ever created – Henry Fox Talbot's picture of a broom leaning against a door, which dates from 1844—features a distorted shadow whose strong lines almost steal the show. While all photographs are, by definition, a record of light and shadow, photographers ever since Fox Talbot's day have sought to exploit these intrinsic components of photography as subjects in their own right. In this sense, to photograph light and shadow is to aim for the most abstract kind of image.

thebrief

Photograph the interplay of the built environment with lighting effects from natural or artificial sources or a combination of both, indoors or outdoors. Look for close detail, an unusual angle, an intriguing composition, or a combination of colors for their own sake.

Points to remember

- use high-contrast and high saturation if it is available on your camera
- keeping your zoom lens at one focal length will help you to concentrate on composition
- a low ISO setting will ensure the best color quality and clean blacks
- keep the camera square on to the subject to eliminate converging parallels—unless you particularly want them
- for minimal distortion, the middle of a zoom range is usually advisable
- use apertures in the middle of the range for the best image quality

must-see masters

Ray Metzker (1931–)

Metzker is one of the most inventive observers of the environment, his innovative work exploring every formal possibility of the monochrome image. He has been an unacknowledged influence on generations of photographers.

Alex Webb (1952–)

Although his concern is not primarily with the formal qualities of light and shade, Webb's humanistically motivated photography—much of it created in the

harshest tropical light—displays a virtuoso command of highlight, shadow, and color.

László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946)

Perhaps the most brilliant of a generation of brilliant artists and photographers, Moholy-Nagy was an innovative polymath. He was a versatile artist, but it's his photography that has left a lasting influence—one that's far out of proportion in relation to his comparatively small output.



ISO 200 Focal length 100mm 1/400 sec at f/9



ISO 100 Focal length 32mm 1/250 sec at f/8



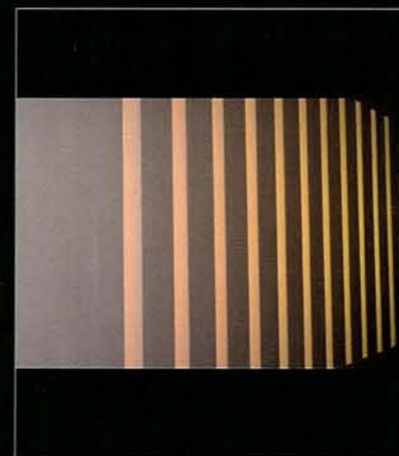
ISO 500 Focal length 20mm 1/25 sec at f/5.6



ISO 100 Focal length 32mm 1/250 sec at f/8



ISO 160 Focal length 46mm 1/720 sec at f/8



ISO 200 Focal length 7.2mm 1/60 sec at f/4



ISO 200 Focal length 7.2mm 1/400 sec at f/4



ISO 250 Focal length 24mm 1/25 sec at f/2.8



ISO 200 Focal length 7.2mm 1/400 sec at f/4

1 2 3
4 5 6
7 8 9

lightbox

toptips

1 2 shadows | constant change
One of the challenges of daylight shadows is that they move with the sun. Their quality also varies considerably according to latitude and atmospheric conditions, so you need to watch and follow.

3 texture | and contrasts
Man-made objects present very hard shadows and clean-cut textures, but to ensure that they stand out from the background, use a large aperture so that distractions are minimized. Here, even the second ring of the gear teeth is soft and the background is heavily blurred.

4 5 light | and water
The key to photographing the effect of light with water is to use the shortest possible exposure times to cut movement blur to a minimum. In 4 there is perhaps too much blur compared with the clean lines of 5.

6 indoor | lighting effects
Many possibilities are offered by domestic lamps and shades. The lighting effect may not be obvious unless you deliberately under-expose the image by half a stop or more.

7 perspective | in shadows
A prosaic subject, such as the shadow of this lantern against a blind, can be turned into a haunting abstract by exaggerated perspective.

8 shadows | oblique meanings
Shadows are a sign of a presence, so, while they can be used for their abstract qualities in a composition, they also carry some meaning, no matter how oblique that meaning may be.

9 depth | of seeing
Where the thrust of an image is abstract, out-of-focus blur is often a hindrance. For images with receding patterns, it's important that depth of field extends to the very end.

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