

FLUX ACADEMY · A SCHOOL FOR SEEING

MODULE 6 · LIGHT & BLACK-AND-WHITE

Light & Shadow (Chiaroscuro)

BY DANTE SISOFO

LESSON 032



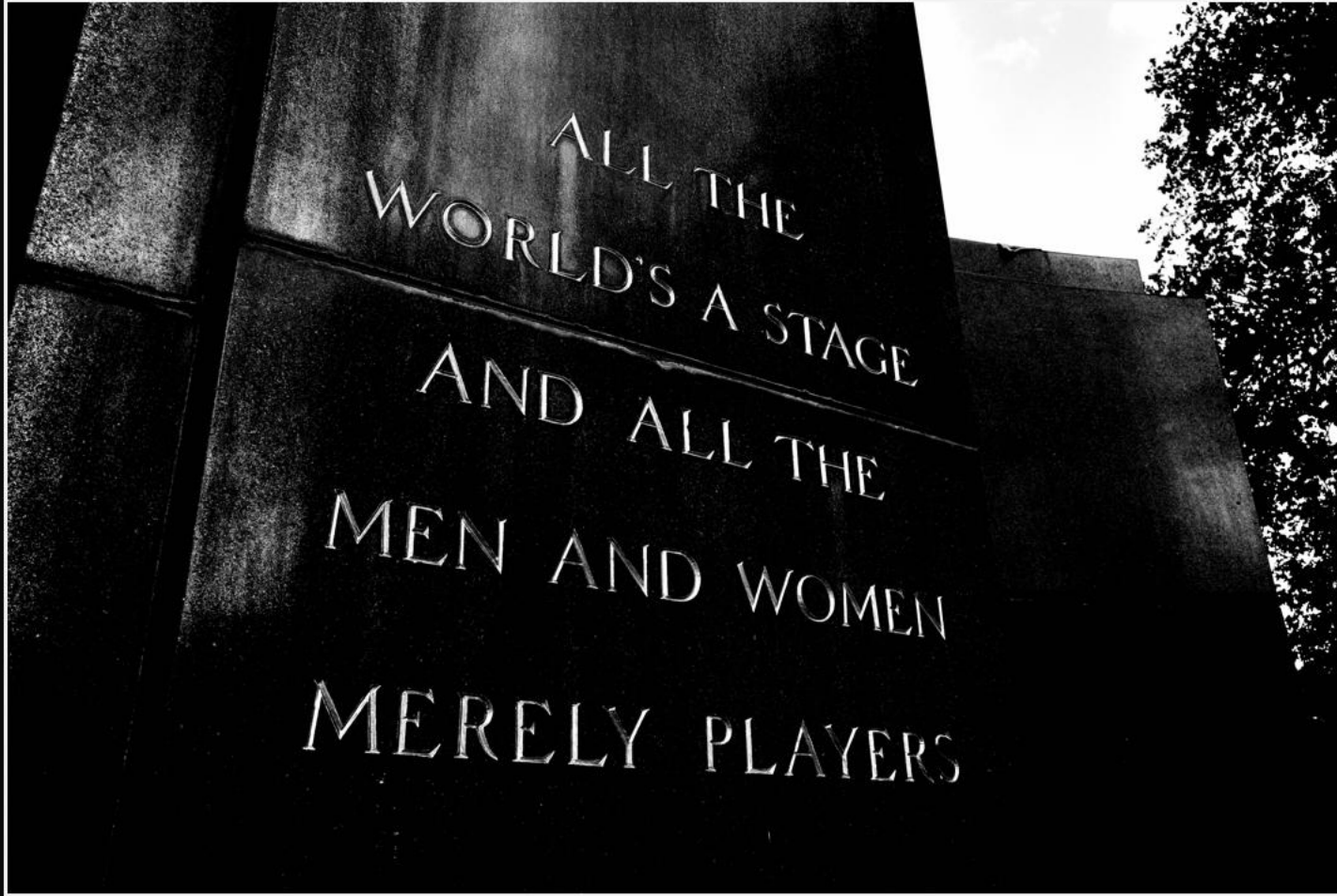
Shadows Are as Powerful as Light

- Shadows are not the absence of light — they're a tool
- Chiaroscuro: high contrast as storytelling
- The dark half of the frame carries as much meaning as the bright half



What You'll Walk Away With

- Understand chiaroscuro as a compositional strategy
- Learn to expose for highlights and crush shadows intentionally
- Use darkness to guide the eye and elevate emotion



Elevating the Mundane to Transcendent

- Light and shadow can lift a mundane moment to a transcendental height
- Photography doesn't just capture reality — it creates a new world
- Contrast is one of the fastest ways to transform the ordinary



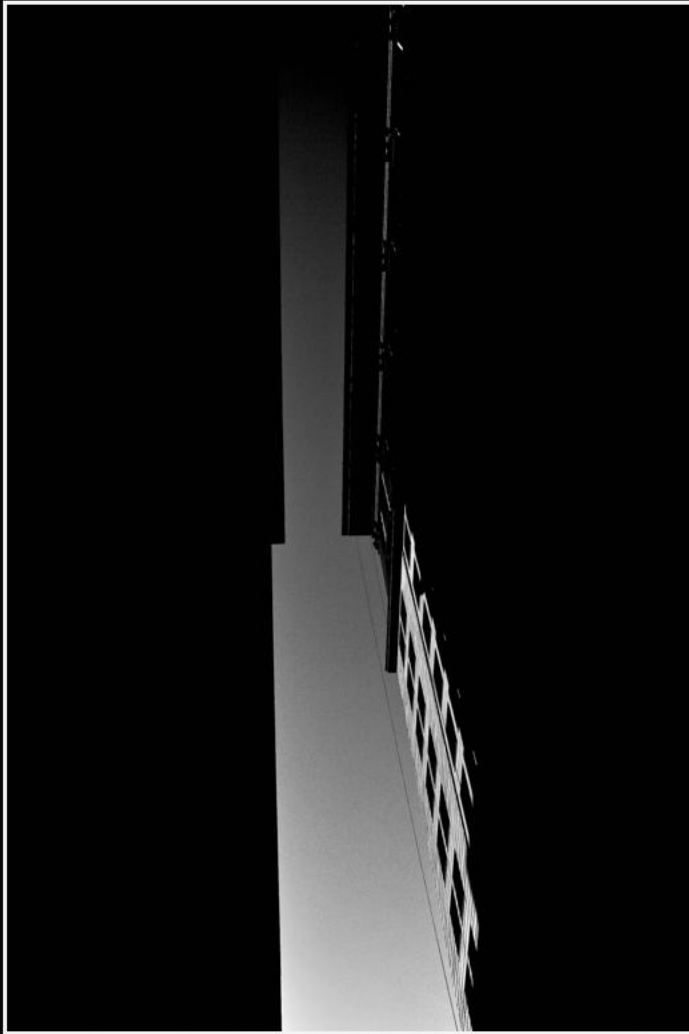
The Painters Knew First

- Caravaggio's The Calling of Matthew: light isolates the subject
- High contrast creates depth and emotion
 - painters discovered this first
- Photographers inherit this entire tradition



Expose for the Highlights, Crush the Shadows

- Expose for the brightest element; let everything else go dark
- Underexpose by one stop to deepen shadows
- Crush unnecessary detail — simplify the frame



Shadows as Negative Space

- Shadows create negative space that emphasizes the subject
- What's not seen can make the image stronger
- Dark areas guide the eye by removing distraction



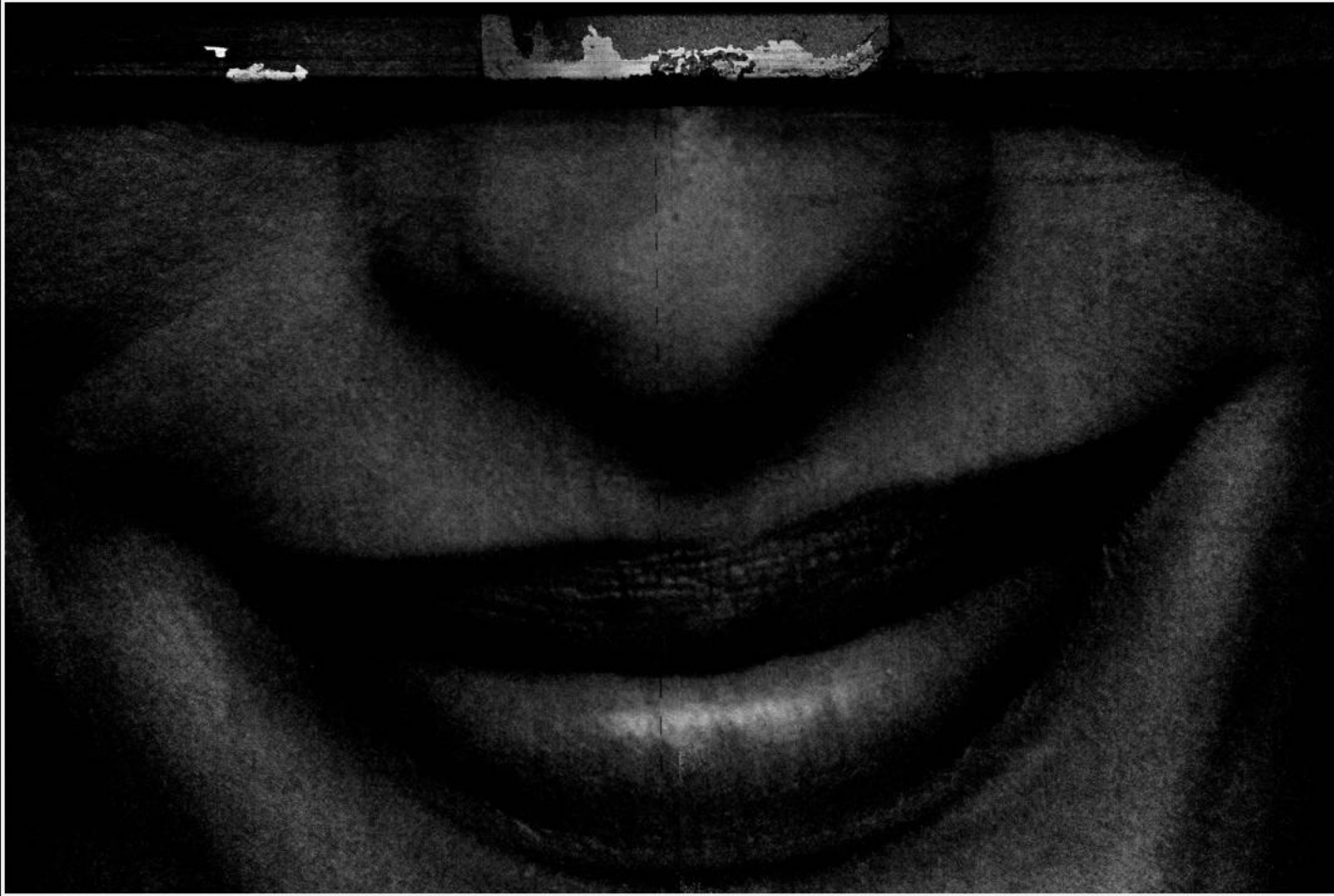
Shadows as Leading Lines

- Shadows can guide the eye through a frame
- Long shadows at golden hour become compositional lines
- Use shadow geometry to structure the image



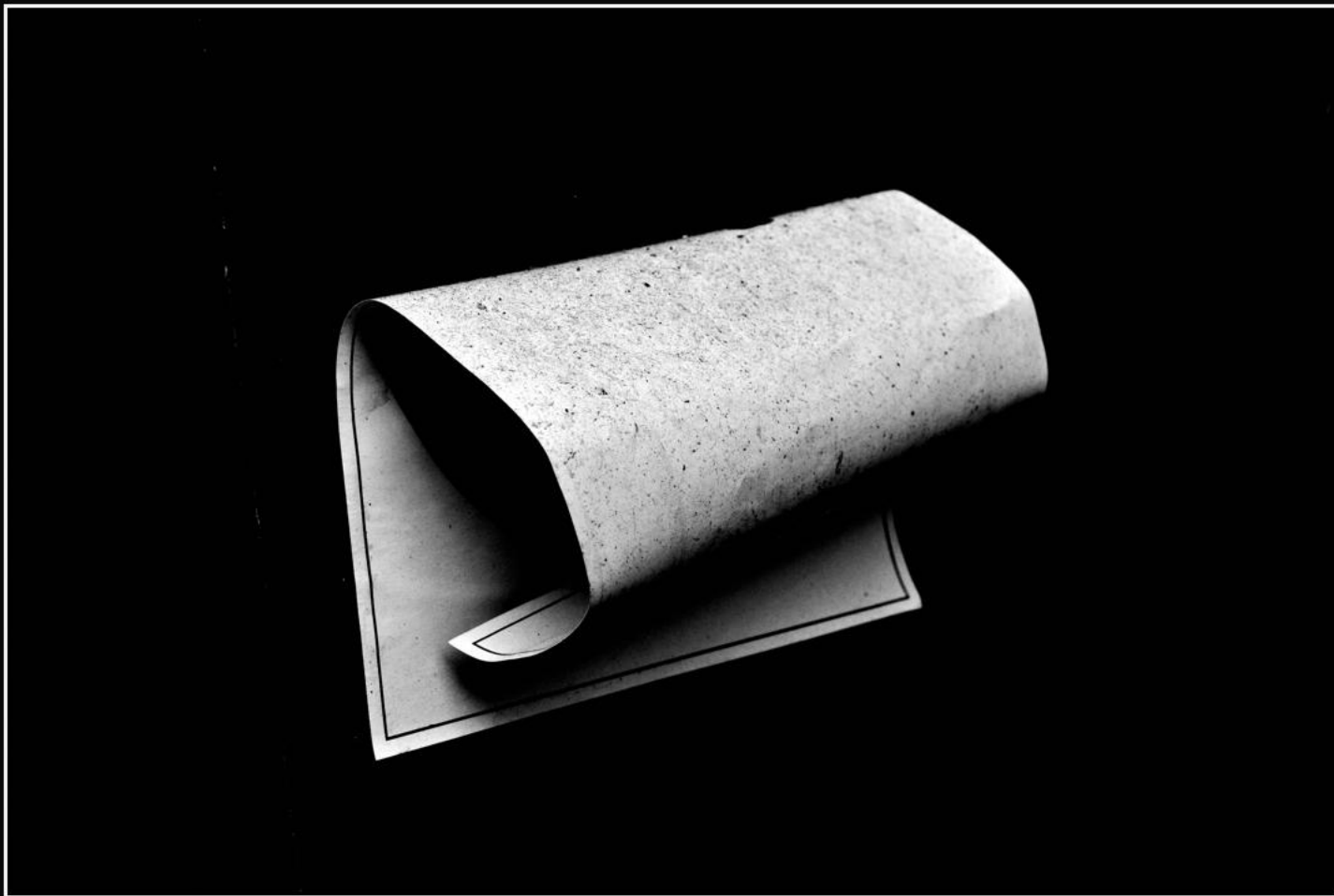
Architecture Sets the Stage

- Shafts of light through columns make a ready-made chiaroscuro stage
- People and birds constantly enter and exit the light
- Patience: wait for the right figure to step into the beam



A Sliver of Light Reveals the Fragment

- A subject steps into a beam — light slices across just part of the face
- The rest stays in shadow: mystery over legibility
- Light reveals things we don't consciously see



Tell the Story in Shadows Alone

- Golden hour, long shadows, a busy scene full of life
- Let the shadows of the figures carry the moment, not their faces
- The story told mysteriously through shadow play alone



Layering Light and Shadow for Depth

- Foreground in shadow / midground lit / background bright = three-layer depth
- Layers come from positioning, not complexity
- Stand in the right place and they appear on their own



High-Key vs. Low-Key Light

- High-key: bright, vibrant, warm — evokes joy and innocence
- Low-key: deep shadows, cinematic — adds mystery and drama
- Neither is better; each tells a different emotional story



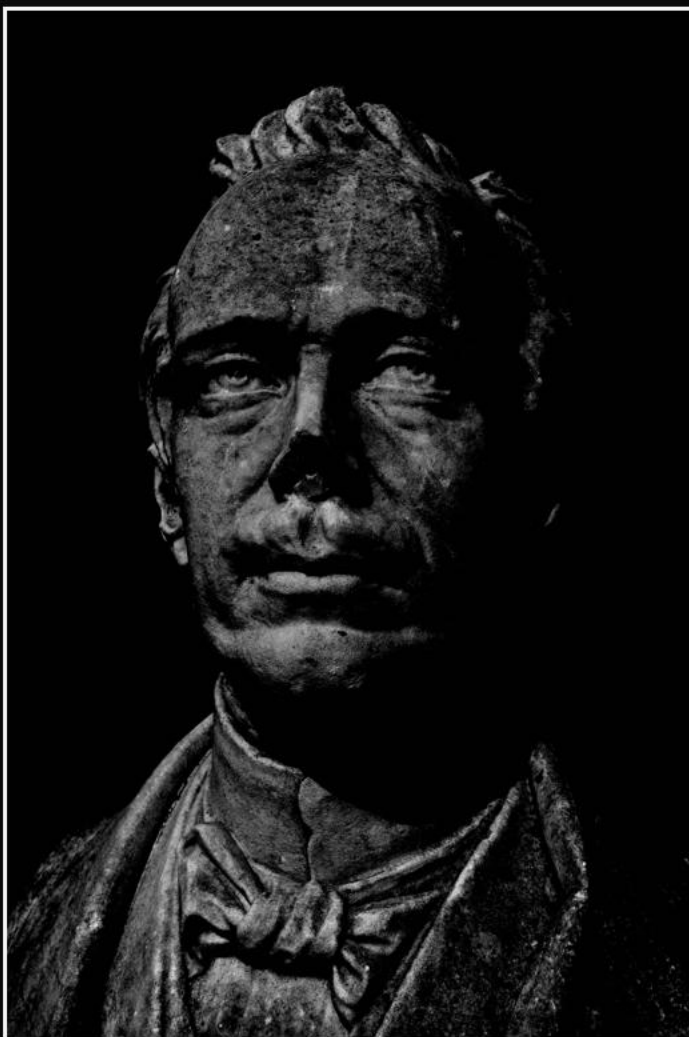
The Choke Point + Shadow Trap Method

- Find a choke point with a defined beam of light
- Let subjects walk into the light — don't chase them
- Position yourself; let the world move through the frame



Movement Unlocks New Shadow Angles

- "Through movement is improvement"
- Shifting angles changes how shadows fall and what they reveal
- Walk around the light source, not just toward it



Facing Toward vs. Away from the Light

- Facing the sun: backlit subjects glow, become silhouettes
- Sun behind you: subjects fully illuminated in the beam, faces readable
- Each direction tells a different story — use both intentionally



Light Reveals Mood; Shadow Shapes It

- Light creates mood; shadow defines it
- A face half in shadow becomes more ambiguous, more universal
- Obscuring with shadow opens interpretation



Find Your Choke Point and Set the Trap

- Identify one location in your city with a defined light beam
- Set your exposure for the highlights; crush everything else
- Stand still, let subjects walk into the frame, and wait



Underexpose and Review

- Underexpose by one stop deliberately
- Review on your camera or phone immediately after
- Look at what the shadows removed — did they simplify or obscure too much?



Return at Different Times of Day

- Same location, three different times of day
- Golden hour: long shadows, warm drama
- Midday: harsh, tense, graphic contrast



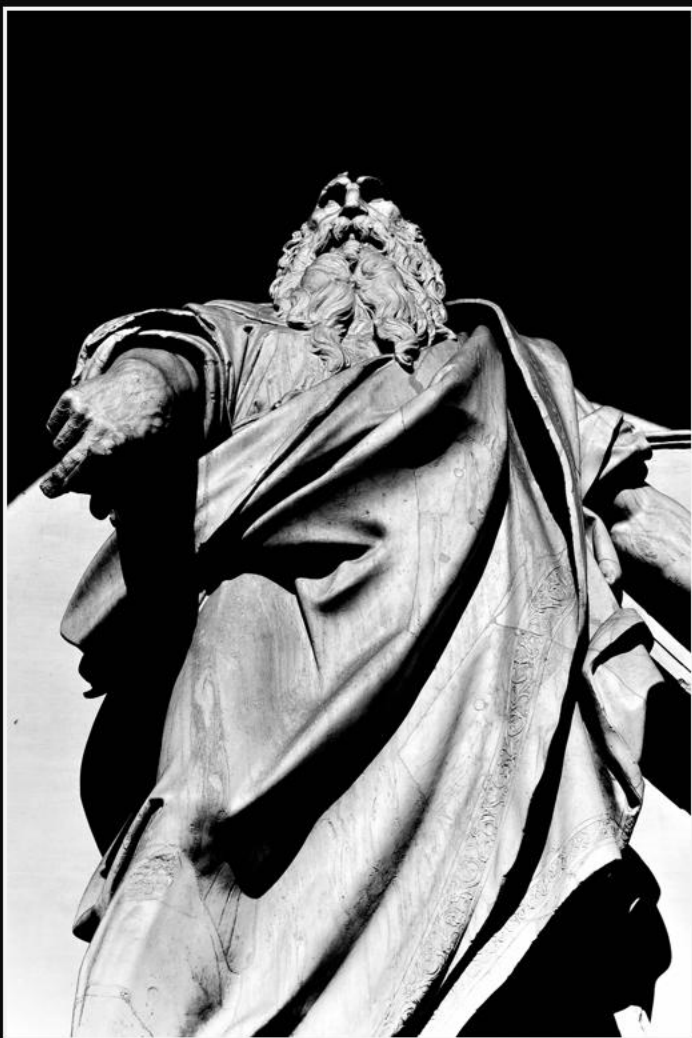
Using Contrast as a Gimmick

- Contrast without purpose is a gimmick
- Crushing shadows must serve the emotion and story
- Ask: does this shadow add depth, or just drama for drama's sake?



Staying Still and Missing the Angles

- Staying in one spot limits what shadows can reveal
- Light and shadow relationships change constantly
- Move, adjust, reposition — always



Building on Seeing the Light

- Lesson 031 established how to read and find light
- This lesson weaponizes shadow alongside that light
- The full spectrum: from soft and open to dark and dramatic



Expose the Light. Trust the Dark.

- Shadows are as important as light — use both deliberately
- Expose for highlights, crush the shadows, let mystery do the work
- Chiaroscuro: see in contrast, compose in layers, shoot with patience