HIGH AND LOW KEY IMAGES

Both **High Key** images and **Low Key** images make an intensive use of contrast, but in a very different way. When approaching a shoot of a dramatic portrait, the decision of making it a High Key, Low Key or "just" a regular image has great impact about the mood that this picture will convey. While High Key images are considered happy and will show your subject as a tooth-paste poster; **Low Key** portraits are dramatic and convey a lot of atmosphere and tension. Let's explore those two dramatic lighting alternatives.

When looking at a **High Key** picture, you will probably notice two things right away. (Other than the happy-happy-joy-joy mood of the picture) The first thing is that the picture is bright. Yes – to create a high key image you need to set your exposure levels to high values. You will want to watch out, though not to over expose.

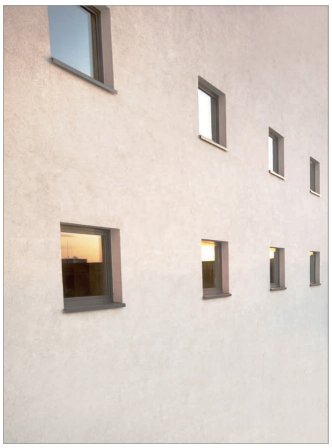
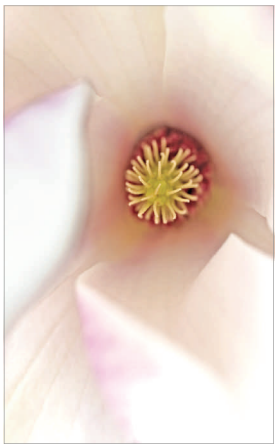
The other noticeable feature of **High Key** images is the *lack* of contrast. In addition to the tone being bright, you will notice that it is almost even across the scene. This is achieved by carefully setting the lighting of the picture.

A third feature, that needs closer attention to notice is the lack of shadows in the picture. The shadows cast by the model (or subject) are suppressed by lighting in the scene.

In a nutshell, hi-key simply means that the majority of tones in your image are above a mid-tone. Most everything is very light in colour and tonality. White-on-white is a popular example.

On the opposite end is **Low Key**. Most tones are darker than mid-tone. Black-on-black is popular. Hi-key tends to evoke happy, carefree images. **Low Key** is more dramatic in nature. For portraiture, it's a matter of taste. I usually prefer the look of low key rather than hi-key, as it tends to draw more attention to the face. I believe, in general, and unknowingly, people are drawn more to low-key images than to hi-key.




Definition:
High Key - where the tonal range of the image is primarily at the light end of the scale.
Low Key - at the low end of the scale.

