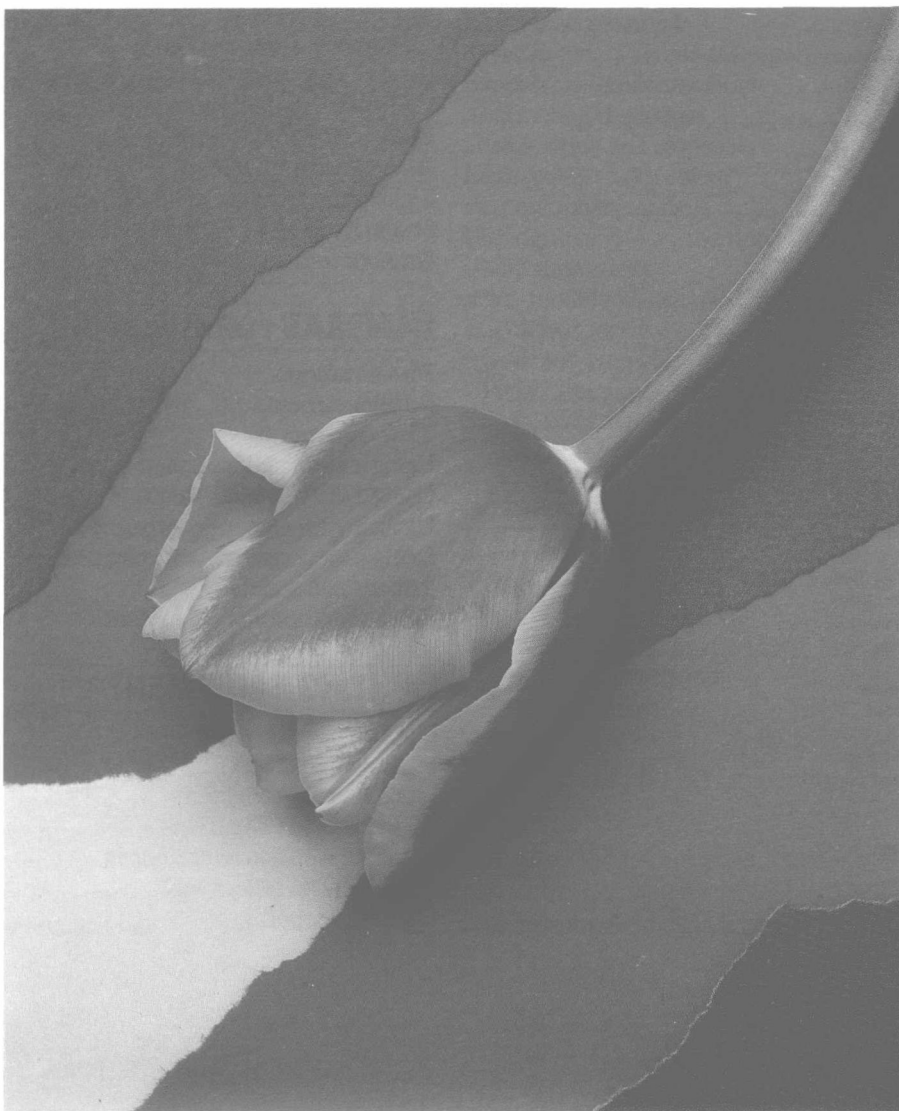


THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S
STUDIO
MANUAL
MICHAEL FREEMAN



AMPHOTO

An Imprint of Watson-Guption Publications/New York.

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First published in 1991 in the United
States by Amphoto, an imprint
of Watson-Guitt Publications, a
division of BPI Communications, Inc.,
1515 Broadway, New York,
New York, 10036

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Freeman, Michael, 1945—
The photographer's studio manual/Michael Freeman.—Rev. ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-8174-5463-2 (hc.)—ISBN 0-8174-5464-0 (pbk.)
1. Photography, Indoor. 2. Still-life photography. I. Title.
TR550.F74 1991

778.7'2—dc20

91—11431
CIP

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Editorial Director Claire Howell
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Phototypeset by Dorchester
Typesetting Group Limited,
Dorchester
Illustrations originated by East
Anglian Engraving Limited, Norwich

Printed in Italy
by Eurograph Spa · Milan

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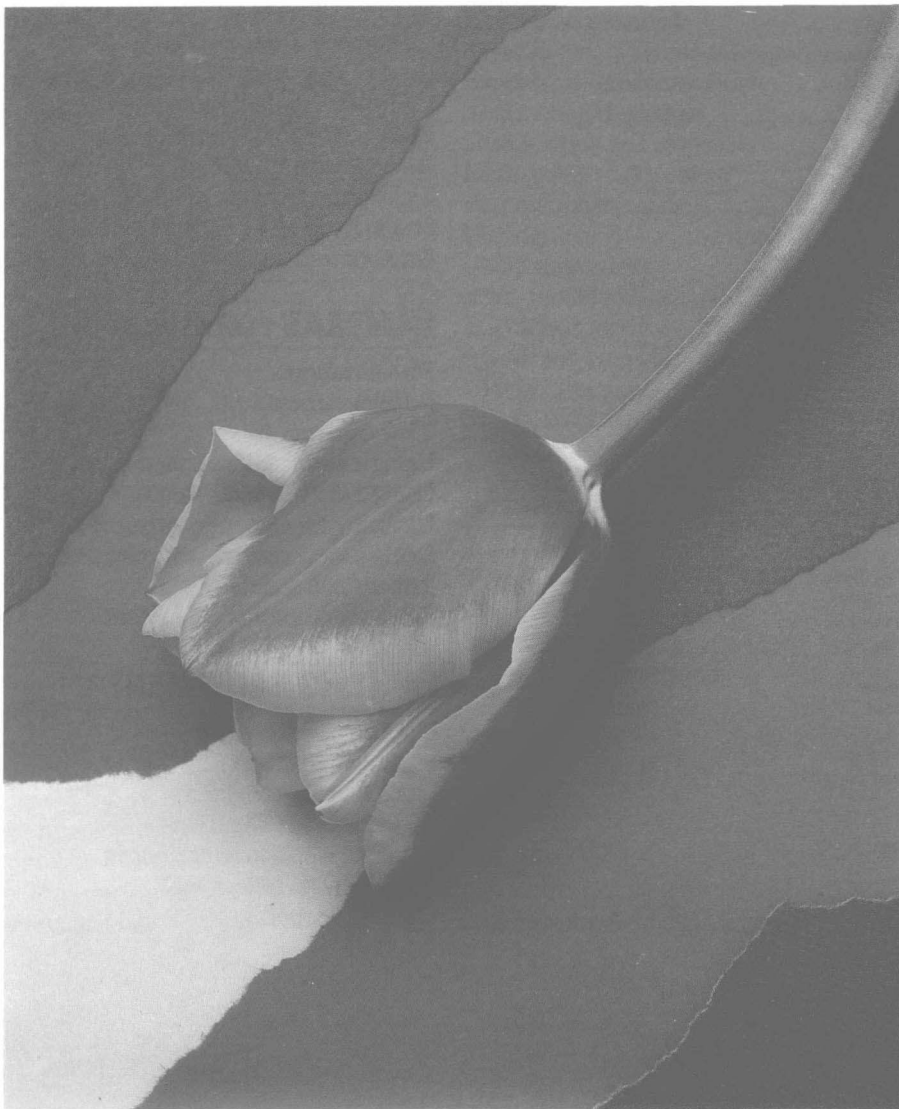
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Introduction

It is virtually an axiom of photography that the studio is the site of the controlled planned picture. Studio photography stands in contrast to all the work in which the camera principally observes – photo-journalism and all kinds of documentary photography, where the important skills are in the area of capturing something of an event or a situation. In the studio, the camera is not a passive witness; it is part of the deliberate creation of an image that begins in the mind of the photographer. Consequently, all that happens within the setting of the studio is purely for the purpose of making a photograph.

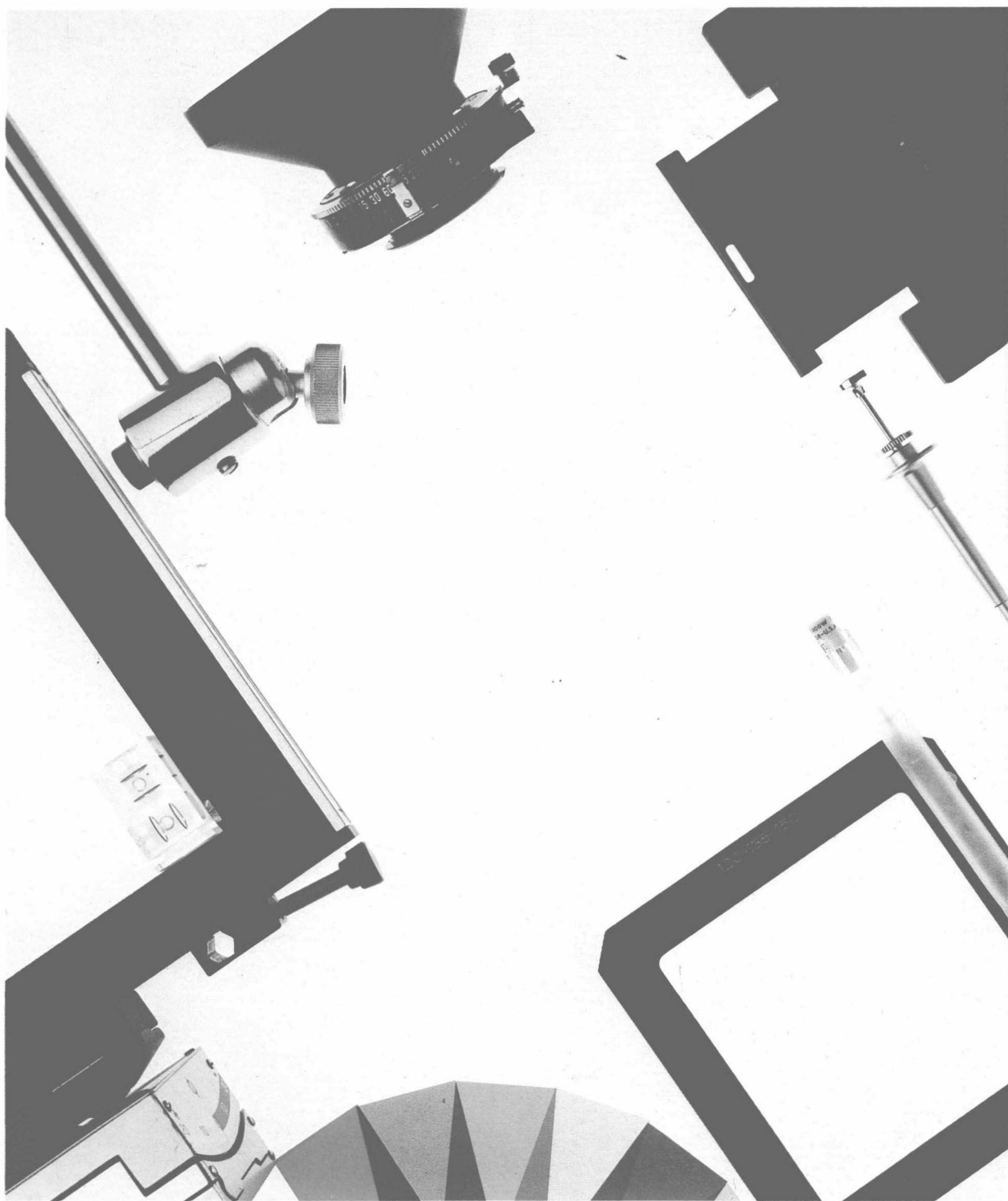
As a result, studio photography is not only performed in quite different ways from other kinds, it is judged on quite different criteria. The technical resources that are now commercially available are impressive – if at times costly – and studio photographers have the means to put onto film almost any deliberate vision they care to have. What can be imagined can generally be photographed, from the refined simplicity of a still-life in the classic tradition to a complex tableau with models or a technically sophisticated piece of surrealism.

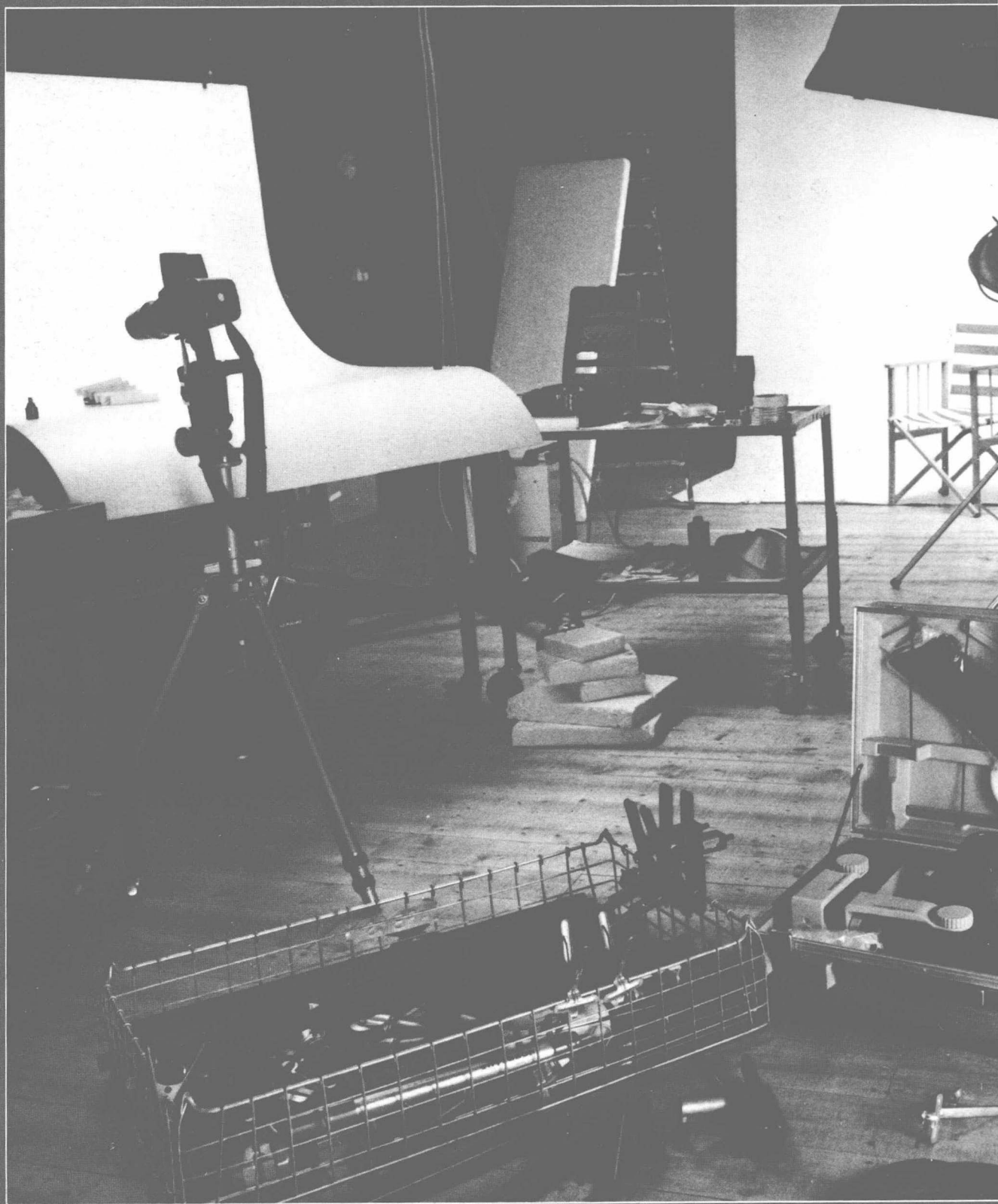
With this technical and creative freedom, however, comes a certain amount of responsibility. The results are the photographer's alone, for better or worse. The street photographer displays his ability to cope with an uncontrollable situation and to snatch from it something elusive, but the studio photographer is responsible for everything that appears in the picture. If there is anything lacking, in acuteness of observation, or in

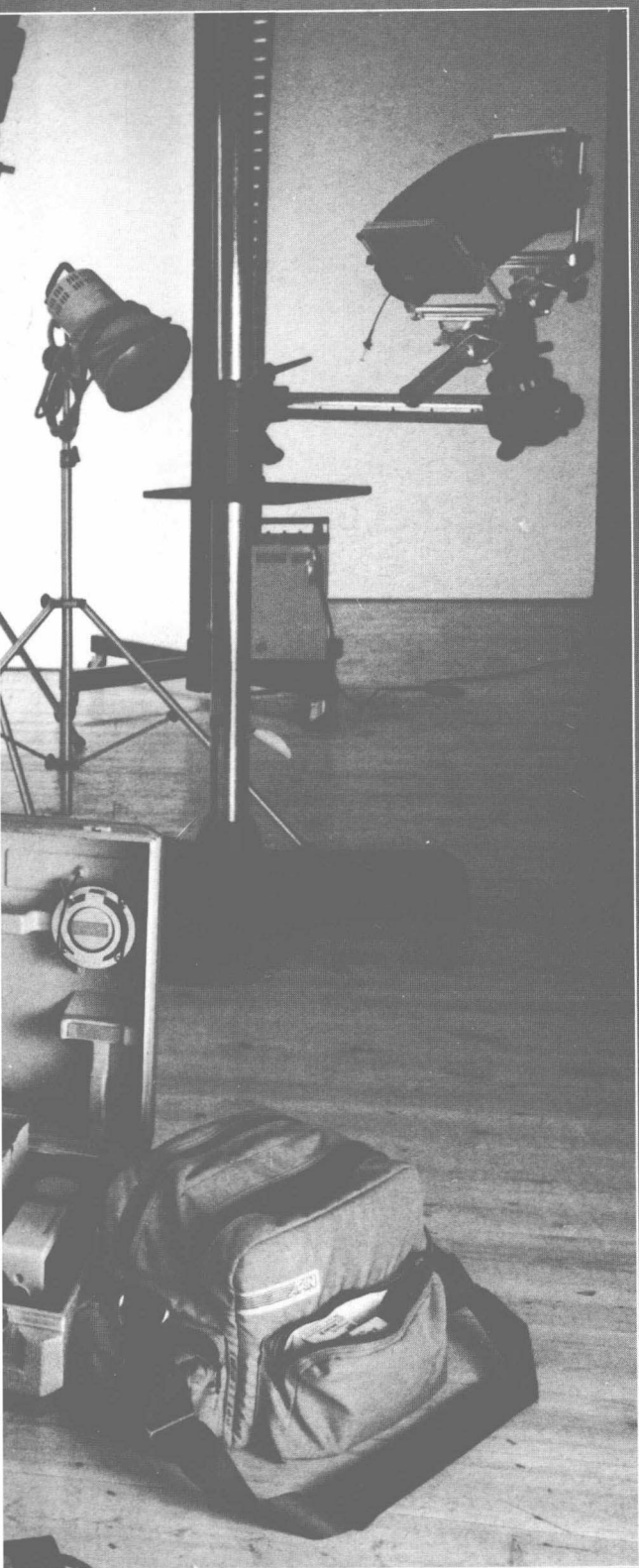
content, there are no excuses. This fundamental fact creates a different attitude among studio photographers. They tend to be careful, to plan, and to concern themselves with the quality of the image – the production values of photography. Serendipity plays less part in the studio than in the street, and although some photographers create for themselves situations in which chance can play a part – in portraiture, especially – even these conditions must be set up deliberately. This element of control is so important in studio photography that it can count for more than the physical location. Not every studio needs to be of the type commonly imagined – a large, open interior space with batteries of lighting and background fixtures. A set temporarily built on location is, for the day, every bit as much a studio. If sufficient technical control is exercised, even outdoors, then similar problems and methods also apply. Defining a studio by its appearance is as imperfect as describing a cuisine by the state of its kitchens. It is the style of the results that is the framework of this book.

Studio photography also spreads beyond its physical setting in an internal way. A large amount of modern studio work relies on certain darkroom and post-production techniques. Particularly with special effects pictures, the shooting is often planned to take advantage of retouching and image combination, and there is no point at which it can be said that the studio photography has finished and the post-production starts. These, too, are a part of the necessary repertoire of skills.

Michael Freeman







THE STUDIO

Organizing the physical space for studio photography can be a major undertaking, and the basic facilities of floor area, ceiling height and light-proofing determine the scale and type of photography that can be tackled. Because the rental and conversion of a studio are often costly, the ideal conditions may be out of reach, or at least difficult to justify on economic grounds. As a result, some of the more physically demanding subjects, such as room sets and vehicles, remain extremely specialized fields for practical rather than creative reasons; for the general run of studio subjects, mainly portraits and still-life sets, the requirements are easier to meet.

The nature of studio photography, with its emphasis on precision and deliberation, encourages the search of perfection in its images.

The same standards, however, are not always necessary in the construction of the studio itself. Certainly, the better fitted, better equipped and neater the studio is, the easier and more enjoyable it is to work in, but if this principle is followed to excess many photographers would be discouraged from ever starting. Making do with the space and material at hand is a valuable ability, and can, as all the techniques in this section show, make it possible to work even in temporary surroundings.

The basic studio

In as much as there is such a thing as a basic studio, there are a number of standard features common to most. The cutaway illustration is slightly idealized, but typical in its way.

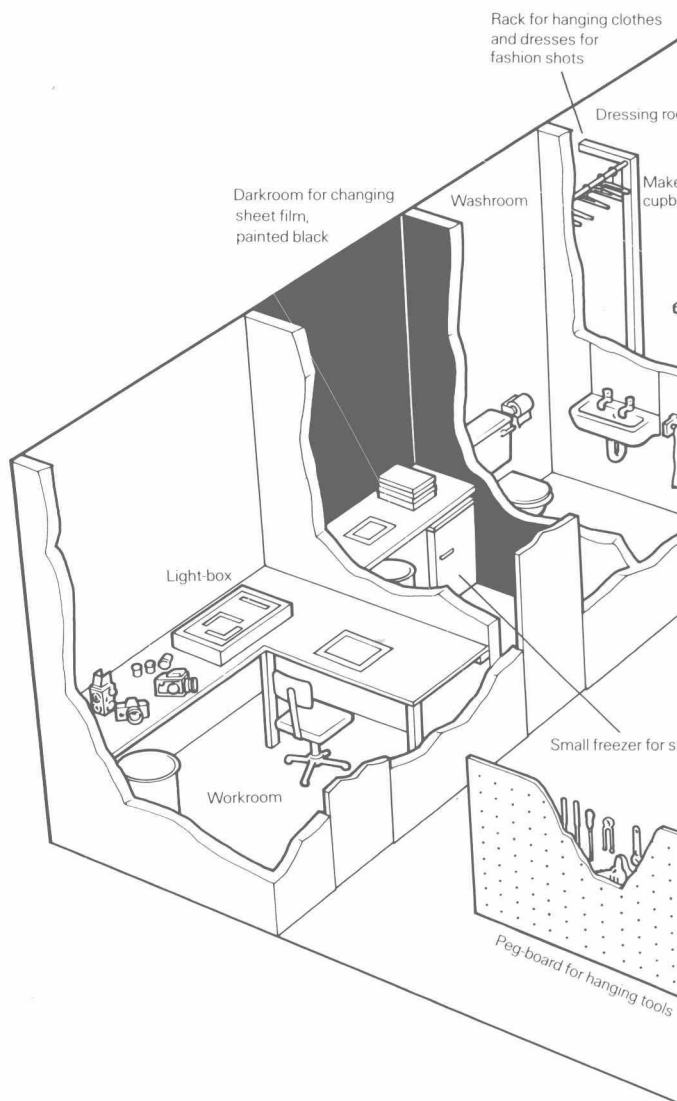
In practice, studio photography tends to fall into subject categories. Two of these – still-life and people – are so much more common than any other that they have strongly influenced studio design. A general purpose studio is one that can handle these two types of subject, and the size of those shown here reflects this.

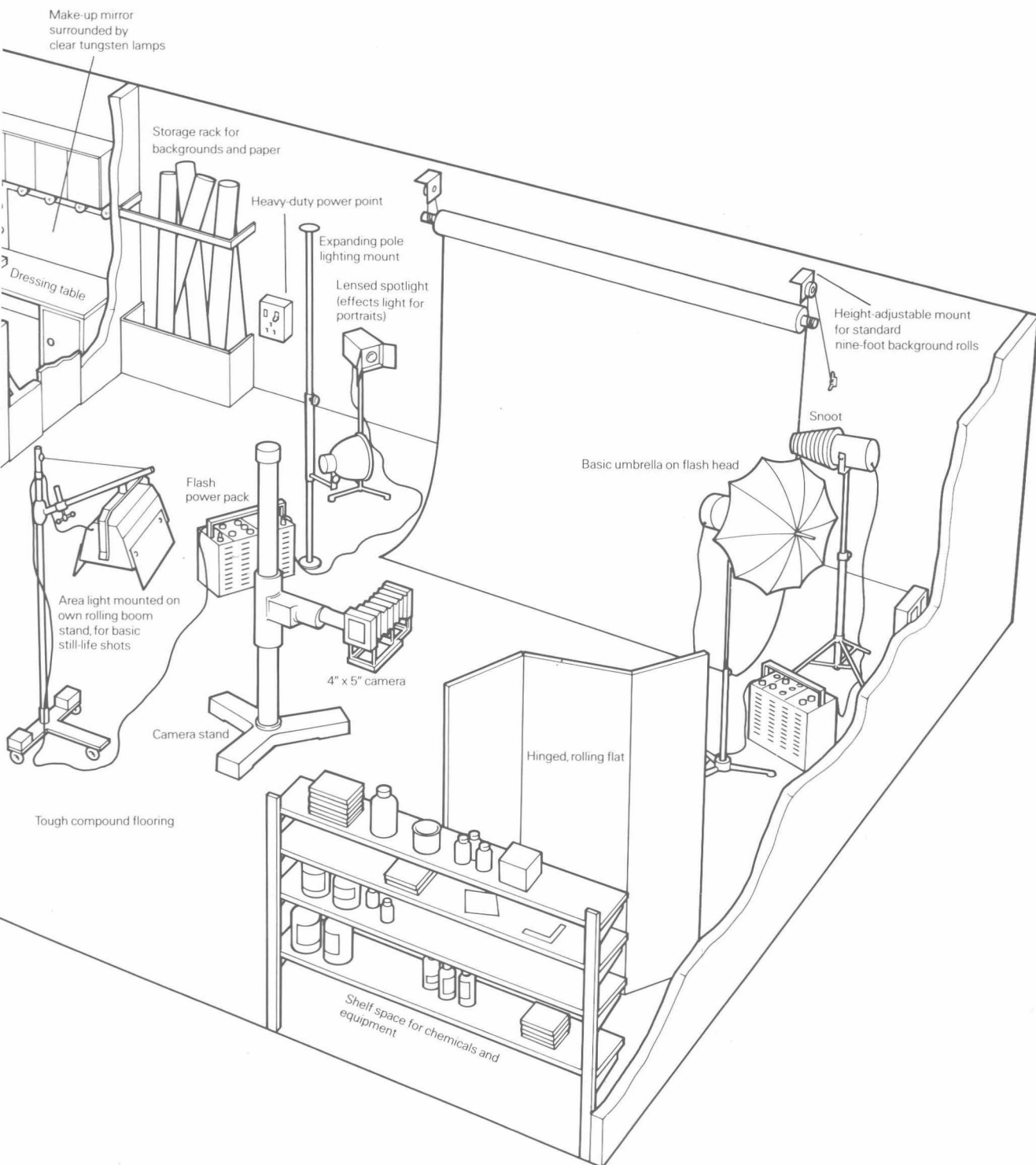
The main function of a studio is to provide control, and the way of doing this is by isolating the subject. This calls for an empty area considerably larger than the set in front of the camera, and the means to vary the background and the lighting. In very few photographs does the actual studio ever appear, and most are essentially an anonymous framework in which sets are constructed for single shots and specific lighting erected. In a way, the more anonymous and adaptable, the more useful a studio is.

Because of this, most of the fittings and supporting equipment are collapsible or can be moved easily. Sets rarely stay up for much longer than a day and need to be put up and down quickly. System supports, which can be assembled in a number of different configurations are common. Heavy equipment, including power packs and camera stands, is often fitted with wheels or castors, and a smooth, tough flooring is essential.

However, the major control that any studio offers is overlighting. On the one hand, it excludes extraneous light and on the other provides the means for building up a fresh design from scratch. Daylight is usually blocked out by painting or boarding over windows, or by installing shutters or special light-proof blinds of the type made for darkrooms. In addition, neutral surroundings are important to avoid the unintentional reflections from studio lighting that can ruin a still-life shot; walls and ceiling are usually painted black, white, or a neutral grey. Black is the most efficient because it adds nothing to the lighting, but can be claustrophobic to work in regularly; white helps to fill in shadows whether this is wanted or not.

The effect of all these preparations is to create a kind of blank sheet for the lighting. The extremely varied types available for a studio light then allow, in theory at least, any conceivable lighting effect to be created. The range of lighting equipment is detailed on pages 60-79.





The daylight studio

A large area light is one of the most attractive, and efficient, styles of illumination, and many photographers go to considerable effort and expense to build one. However, the largest of all area lights, the sky, may be a much cheaper, and even more attractive alternative. It has severe limitations, certainly, but for some methods of working it may be better than artificial lighting, and some notable photographers of people – Snowdon, for instance – use it by choice.

Only a room with a skylight is worth considering for a permanent daylight studio. In many ways, an angled skylight, of the type found in lofts, is ideal, giving some direction to the top-light effect. For some specific shots, such as full-length portraits, full floor-to-ceiling windows give good, broad, side lighting, but this has rather limited uses.

The great difficulty with daylight as a studio light source is control. In one way – direction and position – it cannot be altered, while in another – intensity and colour – it varies too much.

The time of day and weather both control intensity and quality of the light. If the skylight is so angled that the sun strikes it for part of the day, then there will be a massive variation from time to time – with some unwelcome shadows included for good measure. Many rooms with skylights, however, were built as artists'

studios and face north to avoid this problem; the lighting quality is often more consistent – in everything except colour. The standard for colour temperature is 5500K Mean Noon Sunlight, and all other weather conditions are variable. The worst case is bright blue sky through a north facing skylight needing considerable colour correction with filters. There are two types of control possible. One is a system of blinds and diffusing material that can be hauled in front of or below windows in different combinations. Depending on the window area, black cloth blinds can alter the direction and brightness of the light, while thin white cloth can soften direct sunlight and increase consistency (fading, or the nature of the material, may alter the colour). The other control is to filter, an essential precaution with colour film (transparencies especially). A colour temperature meter and a full set of light-balancing filters are necessary equipment, except for black and white photography.

The great advantage, for which some photographers are prepared to put up with these inconveniences, is simple and general illumination at a reasonable cost. As the light source is, in effect, set in the ceiling, a daylight studio does not actually have to be as high as other types. Large hinged reflectors are useful for modifying shadows.

Adjustable window area with a strong overhead component is the basic requirement for a daylight studio. In the diagram opposite, a series of adjustable blinds give control over the lighting quality, while an ample selection of reflectors control shadows.

If the windows unavoidably face south, a second, underlying set of translucent blinds will be necessary in order to diffuse direct sunlight.

