# High Key

One very effective way of creating mood in a photograph is to control the lightness or darkness of the tones. In high-key pictures, such as the ones shown here, light and medium tones predominate. The mood they convey is one of airiness and delicacy, softness and spaciousness.

In creating a high-key picture, your choice of subject matter is crucial. Generally, both the main subject and the background should be light in tone, such as a white horse against sand or a light-haired model bathed in sunlight from an open window or door. It is not essential that every part of the scene be completely light toned, however. A small area of darkness can point up the prevalent lightness of the image by contrast, as the ballet dancer's leotard does in the scene at right.

For a successful high-key picture, the lighting should be diffused and even, producing a minimum of dark, shadowed areas. You can heighten the dreamy atmosphere of a high-key picture by strong backlighting, provided the exposure on your camera is set for the important parts of the scene. Such an exposure will turn the backlighting into a diffused, overexposed area, like the windows in the dance studio. A high-key effect is also increased by any factor that causes light to spread and diffuse, such as fog or mist (see page 114) and soft-focus attachments (see page 186).

A high-key photograph must be exposed with care. The light meter on a camera is designed to respond to a scene with an average range of tones. A scene with only light tones will make the camera indicate a smaller aperture or a faster shutter speed than is actually needed, resulting in an underexposed image. A solution is to use an 18 percent grey card to determine exposure (see page 34). Some, but by no means all, high-key photographs benefit from increasing the exposure from a grey-card reading to create an overexposure. Experiment by making two or three exposures with different settings. If you are using an automatic camera, you should compensate for the effect of the light tones by adjusting the meter (see page 36).

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