Origins, Methods and Genres of Studio Photography
Origins

Artists such as the Dutch painter Rembrandt (1606-1669) where effectively using controlled lighting (by using groups of candles in the studio) as early as the 17th Century. These lighting techniques were an influence on photographers from about the middle of the 19th century.

The division between a flood of light—an overwhelming clarity—and a brooding duskiness.

‘Danae’ (Rembrandt, 1636) using lighting in a similar way to how photographers would later.

Origins

A good example of this approach was Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-1879): Born Julia Margaret Pattle in Calcutta, India; died in Kalutara, Sri Lanka Jan. 26, 1879. She was a pioneering portrait photographer who applied principle of fine art to photography using controlled available light in a studio in a similar way to a painter. This was ground breaking at the time.

1865; portrait of Julia Jackson; Devotion, 1865
Beatrice, 1866: Albumin print from glass negative, National Museum of Photography, Film, and Television, Bradford, UK.
J.F.W. Herschel, foto: J.M. Cameron, 1867
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Rembrandt van Rijn - "Self-Portrait" (1660)
J.F.W. Herschel, foto: J.M. Cameron, 1867
Claude Monet (1840 – 1926) in his studio, Giverny
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Water Lilies, 1919 Oil on canvas
The earliest studio photography made use of painters lighting techniques to create photographic portraits. The primary source of light for painters was a large window or skylight facing north, usually above and to one side of the subject.
Flash powder was the first means of artificially illuminating photography sufficiently brightly to freeze the action. However it was messy and not very safe so as electricity and the vacuum tungsten light became available this was gradually adopted for studio photography.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mxosIz8678
Advances in camera lenses and the development of faster film speeds and better lighting meant that studio photography became easier to achieve. Glass plates were replaced by celluloid film in the 30s and the quality became better and better and the ISO increased progressively over the next 20 years.

To give an idea of the ultimate quality of 35mm film remember that, until recently, what you saw filling a cinema screen was a projection of a 35mm frame. It is only now that digital cameras are achieving similar quality levels.
Origins artificial lighting

Typical studio set up of the 40s, with large “hot lights” and cumbersome plate camera.
Electric studio flashes became available in the 40s but were extremely expensive and dangerous (they could explode). By the 60s they were in common use in professional studios, but small time portrait photographers would of still been using tungsten lights (or hot lights).

It was until as late as the late 70s that flashes (sometimes called strobes) were affordable by the small studio.
The impact of studio lighting

The difference separating studio photography from other types is that the photographer has to create and manage EVERYTHING eventually appearing in front of the camera. Usually your starting point is an empty studio. This gives significant creative potential but usually means considerable planning, sets, props and pre-visualisation are required.

What follows are examples of controlled lighting from the 1930s through to today.
Man Ray (1890-1976). Innovative surliest and fashion photographer
Edward Weston (March 24, 1886 - January 1, 1958) mid 20th-century American still life photographer.
Richard Avedon:
Gloria Vanderbilt, December 17, 1953
Richard Avedon:
Veruschka, dress by Kimberly,
New York, January 4, 1967
Richard Avedon: Ronald Fischer, beekeeper, Davis, California, May 9, 1981
David Bailey (1938 -to date) English fashion and portrait photographer.
David Bailey (1938 - to date) English fashion and portrait photographer.
David LaChapelle (1963 to date) American commercial and fine-art photographer.
Annie Leibovitz (1949 to date). American portrait photographer.
Annie Leibovitz (1949 to date). American portrait photographer.
Joseph Lawrence (1989 to date) known as Joey L. American photographer using controlled lighting often on location.
Artificial lighting

In the last ten years digital studio photography has come of age. Although in some instances film is still used.
Method

Even if you have a subject (person, object etc) what environment or context do you want to put them in? This will depend on what you want to communicate - it could be a simple background or a complex ‘set’.
Method

You will need to learn to pre-visualise and create an environment for the shots - this usually means sketching studio plans. You may need to think about props, wardrobe, make up but most importantly light.

During this module I will help you with some of this but you will need to be creative and solve some of the above problems yourselves.
There is a range of genres within studio photography that we need to examine. These are:

- Advertising (eg food, product, corporate, architecture, film library etc)
- Still Life
- Portraiture
- Fashion (which is really a sub-set of advertising)
- Fine Art
Genres

What do they have in common?

COMMUNICATION

This could be the style, power, function, merits and advantages - or the lifestyle it fits with.

For the portrait photographer it may be about glamorising the ordinary.

Or for the fine artist communicating a feeling, message or notions of beauty.