THE ART WITHIN 19TH CENTURY FOLK ART: WORKSHOP AND HOME TOUR

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WHAT IS FOLK ART?

- Works of art by “naïve and little-trained artists” (Little, 1965).
- Characterized by “shortcomings in perspective or anatomy …compensated for by good color, effective composition, and a refreshing freedom from artistic conventions” (Little, 1965).
- Creations of “ingenious people who know materials well and have the drive, passion, and creative power to produce objects that serve a function and express an idea, a cultural way of communicating meaning, or a ritualized way of being” (Congdon and Hallmark, 2012).

A SHORT HISTORY OF AMERICAN FOLK ART

- An interest in folk art in the U.S. began in the Northeast, in the early 20th century, as the Industrial Revolution took hold.
- There was a fear that the U.S. might lose its identity with the proliferation of mass-produced items.
- There was a fear that ethnic art (seen at that time to come from rural, poor, isolated, and non-literate people) would disappear as immigrants assimilated into American culture.
- Collectors and antique dealers were the first to express interest in folk art, followed by wealthy families (Congdon and Hallmark, 2012).

The Start of Collections

- The first collection, started in 1920 and mostly from Northeast, was eventually housed in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum in Williamsburg, Virginia.
- The Shelburne Museum, Shelburne, Vermont, was founded in 1947 by Electra Havemeyer and J. Watson Webb.
- The New York Historical Association in Cooperstown purchased the Jean Lipman collection in 1950.
- The Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware, is in the Henry F. du Point home.
- Some folk art is included in the Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan (Congdon and Hallmark, 2012).

Collections—More Recently

- More recently, the Smithsonian received the extensive collection of Herbert Hemphill.
- Michael and Julie Hall gifted their collection to the Milwaukee Art Museum in Wisconsin.
- The American Museum of Folk Art in New York City has closed its main museum, but it continues at is secondary location near Lincoln Center. For many years, this museum played a big role in promoting folk art (Congdon and Hallmark, 2012).

Change in Focus

- Originally, the focus of collectors was on the object, not the artist. The object represented the culture and not an individual. Little attention was paid to the context of collected works. Early works were therefore noted as being made by an anonymous person.
- During the middle of the 20th century, folk art enthusiasts began looking beyond New England for folk art, realizing that folk art was alive and well and could come from all parts of the country. Interest in folk art grew because it was less expensive to collect than fine art and because the art/artists were more accessible. Folk art broke its ties to antiques, and new kinds of objects excited collectors and scholars.
- In 1970s and 1980s, a number of states began organizing their own exhibitions, often curated by a folklorist who documented both the individual artists and their culture (Congdon and Hallmark, 2012).

Postmodern Changes in Terms and Thinking

- Many old terms used to describe folk art are no longer used today—e.g., primitive, naïve, childlike, and unsophisticated.
- The term “outsider” is still prevalent but recognized as being “pejorative.”
- Artists today establish their own individual and cultural center.
- Some artists have a cultural way of expressing ideas that is simply unknown to the predominately white elitist establishment.
- The postmodern idea is that art appreciators understand that no one creative center exists for art (Congdon and Hallmark, 2012).

Folk Art Today

- Every single artist has both artistic and psychological roots.
- Understanding the context from which any artist comes has become important to the study of any and every artwork.
- Discovering the psychological makeup of folk artists causes us to ask (1) why someone decides to make something and (2) why the result of that creation turns out as it does (Livingston, 2006, in Congdon and Hallmark, 2012).
- There are several characteristics that help one understand folk artists. These include a psychological understanding of an individual creator as he or she is rooted in a particular place (Ferris, 1982, in Congdon and Hallmark, 2012).

Some Characteristics of Folk Artists Today

- To some degree, folk artists' work illustrates how they see themselves in the world.
- Overwhelmingly, folk artists express respect for elders.
- They envision artwork in their heads before they make it with their hands.
- They have a sense of place partly formed from memories.
- There is often mediation between their private and public worlds.
- Their skills, most often but not always, come from their childhood (Ferris, 1982, in Congdon and Hallmark, 2012).

The Art in American Folk Art: Four Choices for the Artist

1. Is light there? Does it focus on what is there (the subject/object) or what one sees (light effects)?
2. Is it linear (edges emphasized with continuous lines/outlines) or painterly (edges de-emphasized/merged)?
3. Is it planar (one plane or parallel planes) or with depth (spatial recession)? Compositional forms built on vertical/horizontal lines and circles vs. built on diagonals? Fixed/still vs. movement?
4. Is it closed (self-contained) or open (suggests larger reality outside of frame)? Clearly defined, unified composition where everything has equal clarity/emphasis vs. a hierarchy of importance with areas of emphasis?

These "particularly American" characteristics (underlined above) are most clearly seen/emphasized in American folk art. The art in American folk art stems from conscious/deliberate choices, not lack of ability/skill/talent. Artists sometimes moved between their possible choices, using both.

(Joan Brownstein, interview in *Digital Antiques Journal; https://antiquesjournal.com/index.php/2020/10/14/the-art-in-folk-art/)*

What is there? Linear? Planar? Closed?

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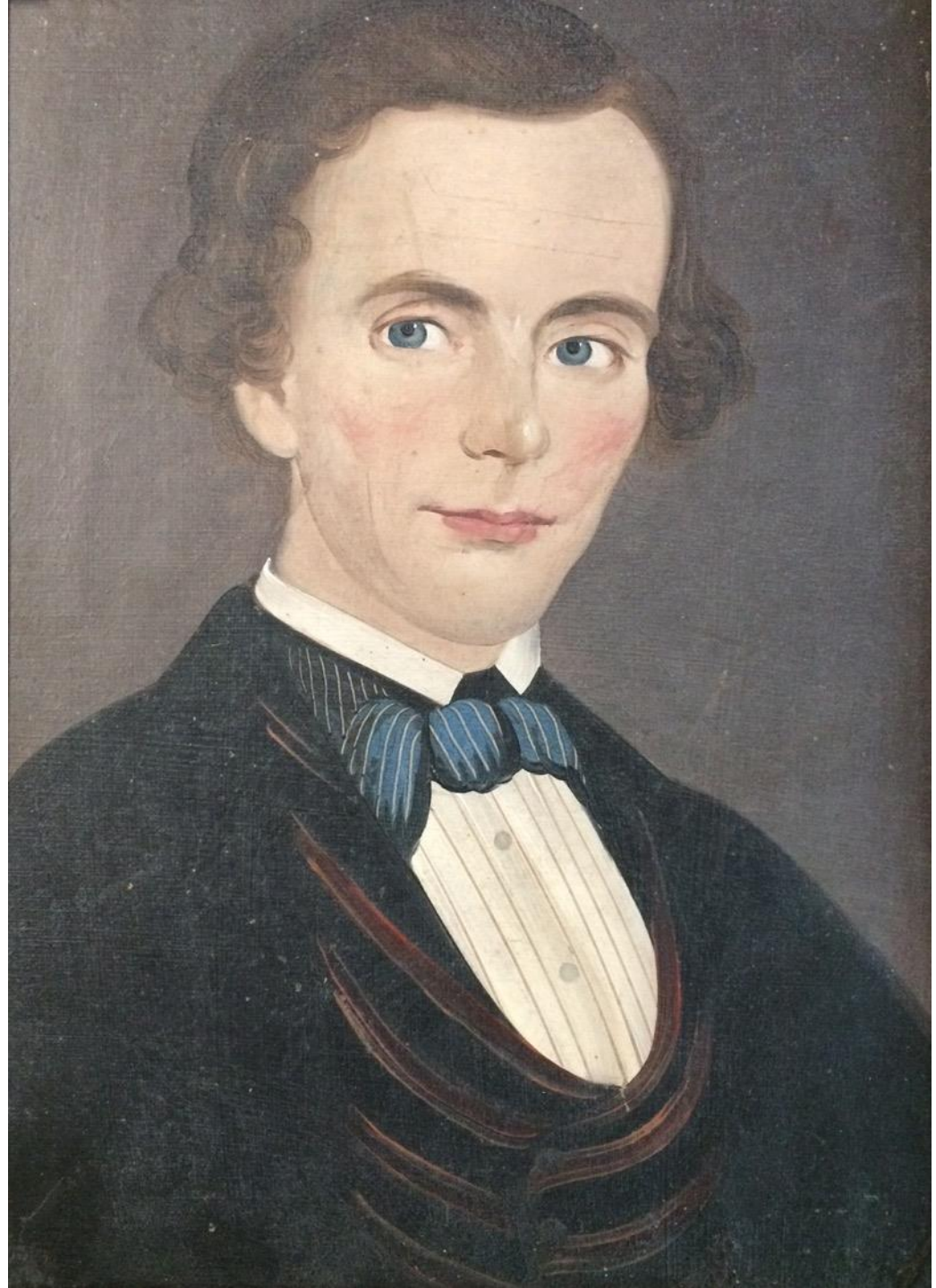
PAINTINGS IN OIL

- Represent the most productive medium.
- Most concern themselves entirely with people.
- Date from 17th century through mid 19th century, when photography (introduced in 1839) took over .
- Characteristics: homogenous native quality; combine fact with pleasing pattern; accent on linear design, flat color areas, concentration on relevant detail.
- Canvas usually employed, but wood panels and bed ticking were also used.
- Were by professional limners, sign/carriage painters, house/furniture stencilers (Cogar, Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1940).

William M. Prior and Sturtevant Hamblen

- W.M. Prior and his brother in-law S. Hamblen painted portraits in the 1840s. These portraits were typically very flat.
- The picture was drawn on academy board in a one-hour sitting.
- Without shade or shadow, it would cost the patron only $2.92, including frame and glass.
- Prior painted many children; pets were frequently included, along with precious possessions.
- Country artists excelled in observation, recording people and events of their time and providing pictorial documentation of customs and crafts of the past; they were proficient at capturing the essence of a personality (Little, Old Sturbridge Village, 1965).



Hudson River School Artists

- The Hudson River School was a mid 19th century American art movement.
- This group of landscape painters were influenced by Romanticism.
- Their paintings depict the Hudson River Valley and surrounding areas—i.e. the Catskill, Adirondack, and White Mountains.
- A second generation of landscape paintings included other locales—i.e. the North East, Maritimes, American West, and South America (https://en.wikipedia.org).

PAINTINGS IN WATERCOLOR

- Watercolor is the least difficult technique to handle; there are extensive folk art paintings in this medium.
- Much of the brilliancy of the colors has been preserved through the use of home-made dyes.
- The subject matter was all-inclusive—portraits, landscapes, interiors, mourning pictures, family records, illustrations (historical, biblical, literary), and a preponderance of still life.
- Most watercolors were the work of young girls in “female seminaries” or at home; embroidery was gradually replaced by the freer medium of paint.
- Many compositions were original in design, but stencils and tracings of engravings were sometimes used; they have a sense of order, precision, and control. Production was furthered by the desire to enhance their lives and decorate their homes. The art of free expression died with the birth of the public school system and popularity of Currier & Ives prints (Cogar, Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1940).

The Limners or Early Illuminators

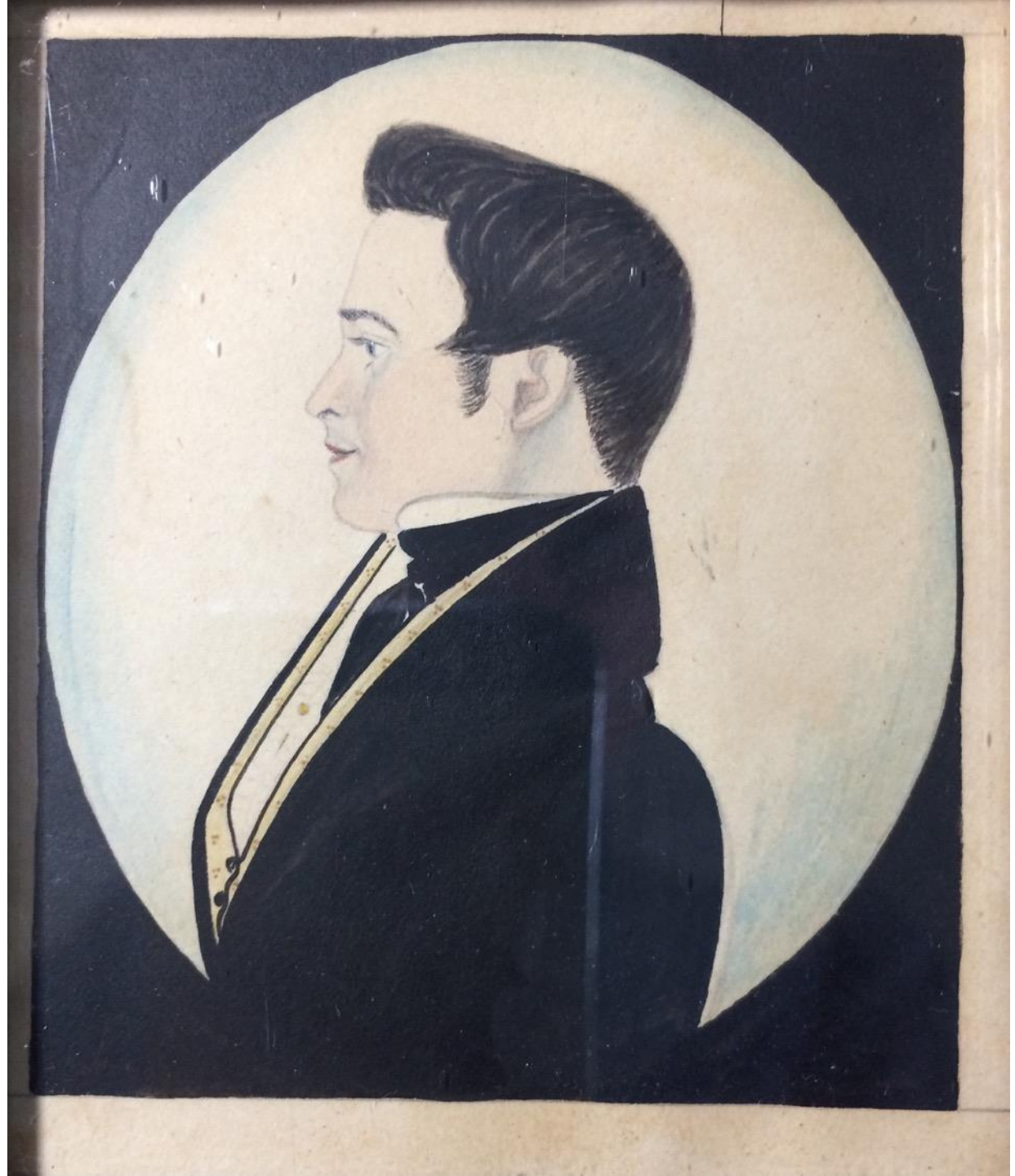
- The limner was an itinerant artist who advertised his trade from town to town each spring, carrying his winter output of partly finished pictures.
- Costumes, hands, and background were prepared, most frequently in matching pairs; the sitter's head was painted in on order at prices ranging from $5 to $50, depending on the reputation of the local artist and affluence of the client.
- The portrayals were direct and honest, with no attempt at flattery; accessories were chosen to suggest the vocation of the sitter. Wives were shown with a flower or brightly colored book. Boys were shown with dog, toy horse, or drum. Girls were shown with a cat, doll, flower, or dainty fruit (Cogar, Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1940).

Typical Notice of Traveling Artists

- “Mr. ___ respectfully informs the ladies and gentleman of ___ that he has commenced the business of his profession in this town and has taken lodgings for a few weeks at Mrs. ___, where a specimen of his painting may be seen. He will gratefully receive and punctually attend any orders with which they may please to honor him, and if any will call, they will be pleased with his striking likenesses, and with the reasonableness of his prices” (Little, Old Sturbridge Village, 1965, p. 12).

The Da Lee Family

- Justus Da Lee has long been recognized as one of the great American folk art portrait artists.
- Information on Justus and his family has only recently been published.
- Portrait painting was a family business—with father Justus, son Amon, and brother Richard.
- Miniature portraits were painstakingly rendered in watercolor, pencil, ink, and gum-arabic glazed highlights (http://peggymcclard.com).



PASTELS

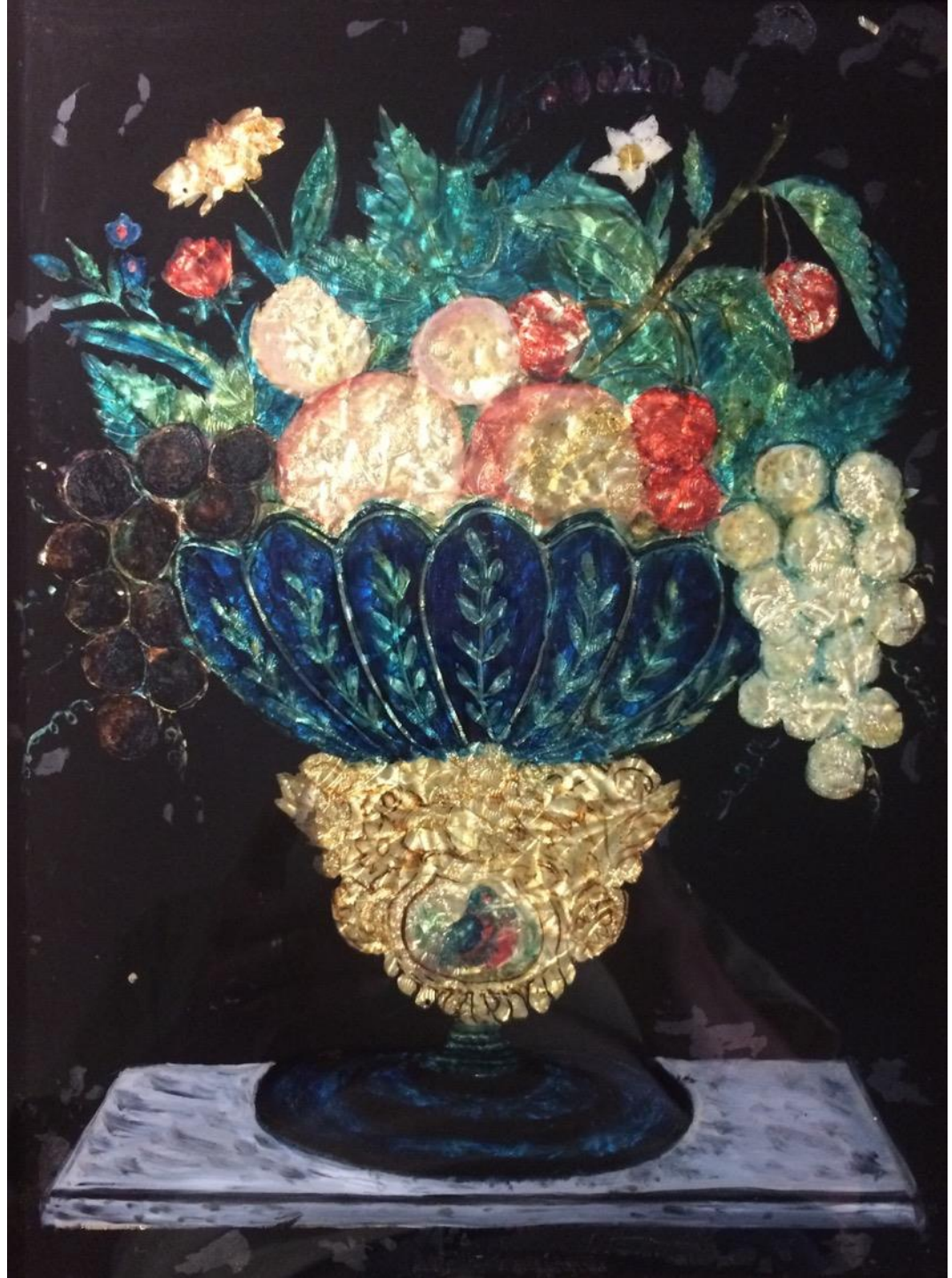
- There are few pastels in the folk art category, probably because pastels are comparatively perishable and because the medium requires professional training.
- Pastel, derived from the Latin “pastilles,” means a small roll or lozenge, descriptive of the shape; it is actually a chalk prepared with vegetable dyes in an assortment of colors. A special paper with a “toothed” surface is used to hold the chalk.
- Pastels were more common in Europe than America. Pastels in full color are rare and usually in the portrait group (Cogar, Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1940).

THEORUMS/PAINTINGS ON VELVET

- The art of painting on velvet was generally practiced by accomplished young ladies from 1800 to 1820 and continued in a minor way until 1840. It was taught in finishing schools throughout New England , in New York, Philadelphia, Maryland, and further south. Several books were published outlining methods. Still life predominates in subject matter.
- White cotton velvet was used, and the color had to be applied carefully to avoid matting the velvet surface and overlapping tones.
- Choice of 3 paint media: oil and turpentine; colored power, tragacanth, and water; home-made dyes with alumina as a binder.
- Stencils or “theorems” were often employed to outline designs; the individuality of the artist is evident in the absence of repetition, varying of color arrangements, and presence of original compositions (Cogar, Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1940).

REVERSE GLASS AND TINSEL PAINTINGS

- Paintings on glass were popular in England and Germany; it came to the colonies in the 18th century and continued through the 19th century.
- It provided decoration for clocks and mirrors, but many were independently framed.
- Subjects included boats, naval battles, still life, genre and landscapes, religious subjects, young women, and heroes of the day.
- They were painted in oil on the reverse side of the glass; often backed with a coat of white paint for greater luminosity.
- Most were based on existing prints. The outline was traced, and color was applied. Or, more frequently, a mezzotint was used.
- A later method involved tinsel with oil paint, resulting in a profusion of still lifes (Cogar, Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1940).



SANDPAPER PAINTINGS

- Sandpaper paintings are drawings in charcoal or pastel on a surface specially treated with marble dust to give in a sandpaper-like sparkle and tooth.
- 19th century artists called it monochromatic painting, but they are not done on sandpaper and are not paintings. The association with paintings gave them an elevated status.
- They were executed on drawing board with a covering of white paint and pulverized marble sifted through fine muslin.
- They were extremely popular in the 1850s and 1860s. They capture “the dark undercurrents of life, redeemed through the artist’s enlightened vision” (The Drawing Center, 1999, https://issuu.com/drawingcenter).

FRACTURS

- Based on the art of calligraphy, “fractur” is the popular name applied to Pennsylvania German manuscripts—quill drawings tinted with home-made dyes applied with a cat’s hair brush.
- Ministers, schoolmasters, professional penmen, and occasionally family members gaily illustrated awards of merit, certificates of birth, baptism, and confirmation, and marriage.
- Boys at school frequently made book plates and school book illustrations.
- Itinerant professionals produced Moral Precepts and House Blessings, decorated and inscribed with long verses.
- The inscriptions were almost always in German (Cogar, Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1940).

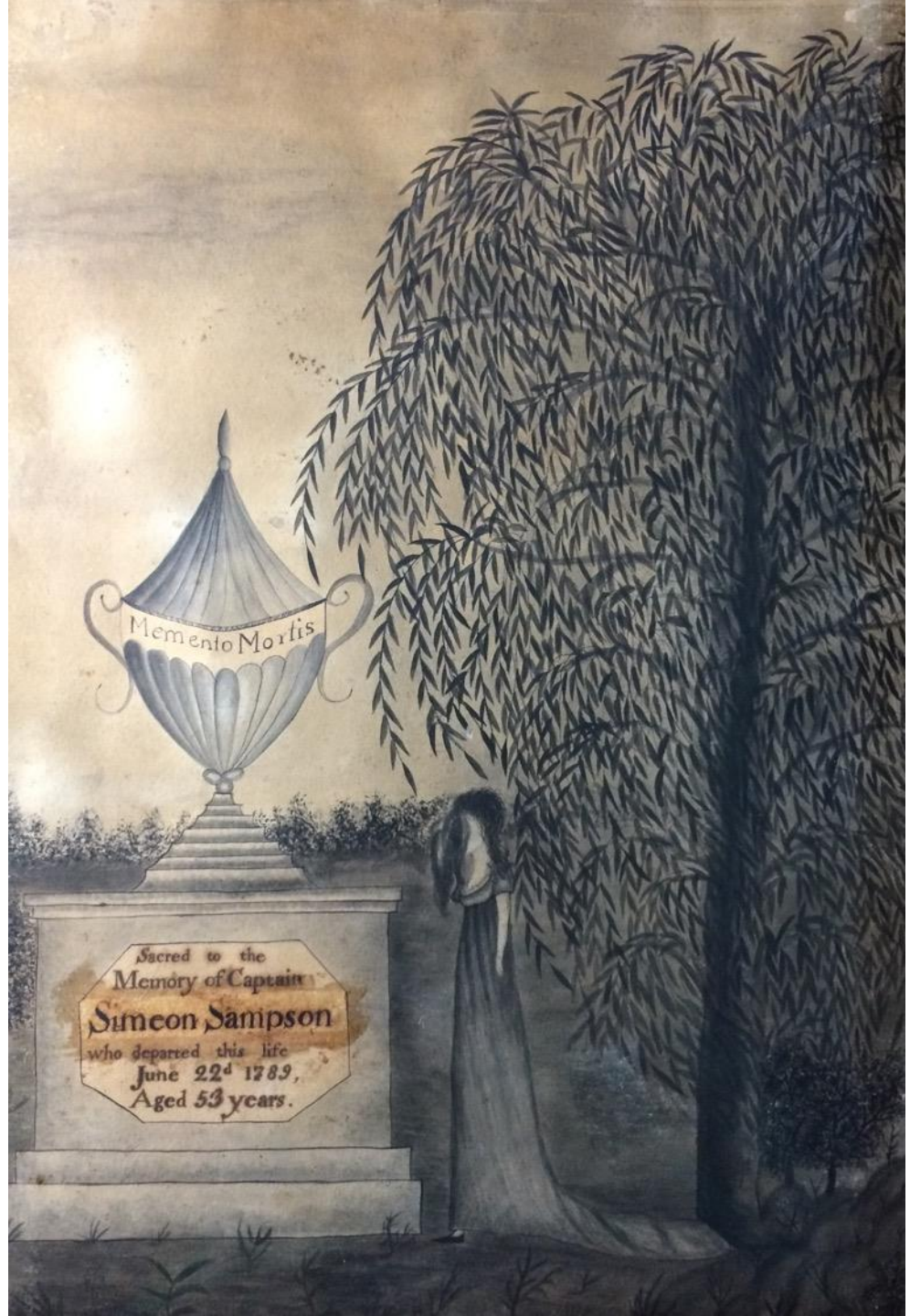
STEEL PEN DRAWINGS

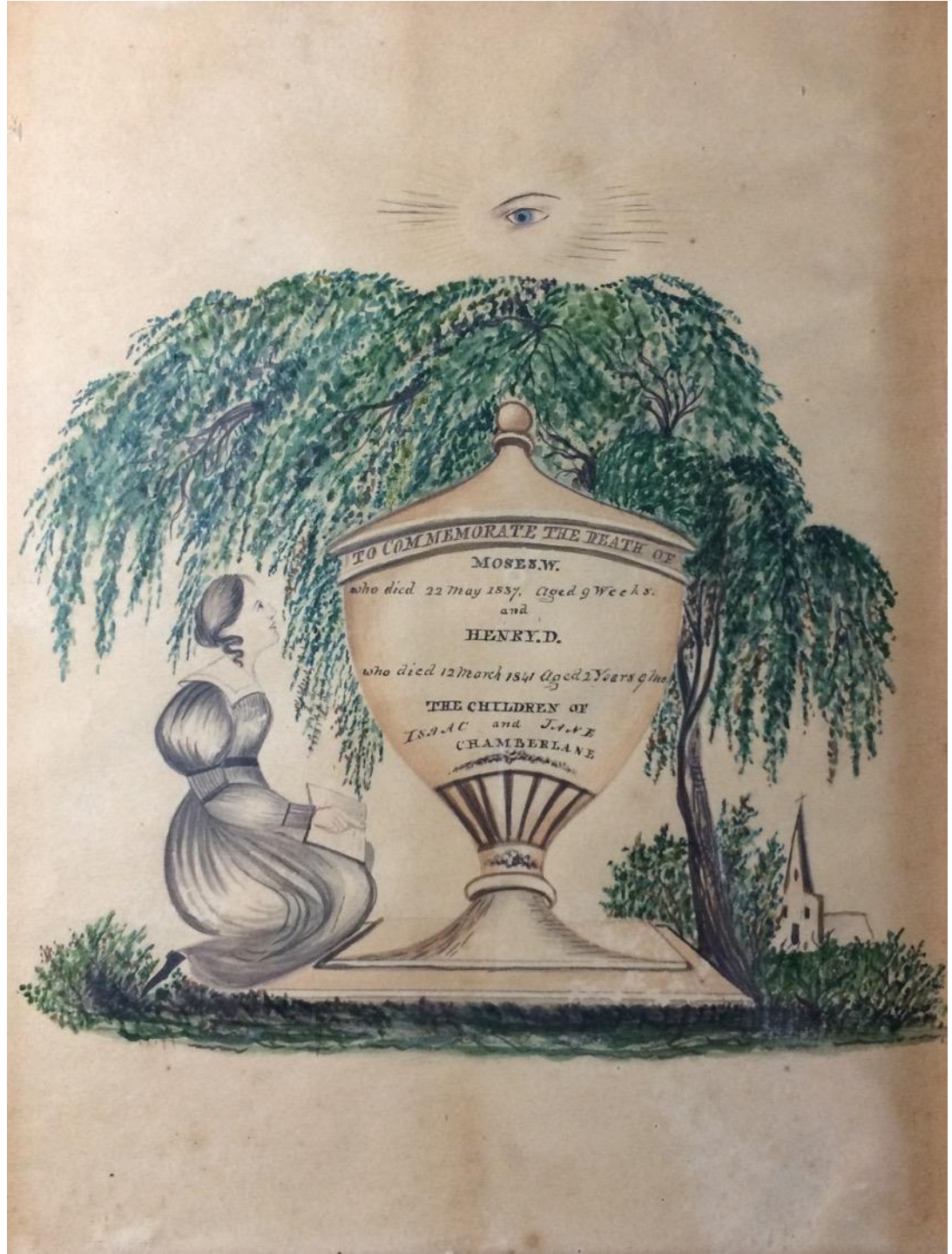
- Steel pen drawing was evidently a masculine art, in the form of a penmanship exercise comparable to the more recent Palmer method.
- The difficult technique was taught in academies to boys, or privately by “masters of penmanship” who samples were frequently copied.
- The drawings, found mostly in New York State and in New England, are usually signed with a male name and proudly inscribed, “executed entirely with a pen.”
- Patriotic and historical subjects, animals, birds, and equestrian figures served as chief inspiration (Cogar, Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1940).

O what a pretty book is here
A gift of love to Adaline dear
Upon whose pages virgin-white
Her friends their wishes pure may write
And earnest prayers that she may be
A gem of spotless purity
A jewel sparkling in the crown
Of Him the High and Holy One
Who came on earth to bleed and die
To win such treasures for the sky.

DEATH MEMORIALS/ MOURNING PICTURES

- George Washington's death encouraged more traditional mourning customs in America. Jewelry with portraits such as he specified in his will became the trend. Finishing schools for young ladies helped create watercolors or silk embroideries depicting classical urns and tombs. Artwork and needlework created a way to express the loss of a loved one and would embellish the home.
- In the mid 19th century lithographs were available to the masses depicting tombstones for inscribing the deceased person's name and birth-death dates. These were filled in by the family and made a sad, yet colorful remembrance to hang in the home. Postmortem photographs replaced expensive artwork. With cameras available, the middle class would have photographs of family members. Often, the only photograph of a child would have been taken postmortem (http://peggymcclard.com)


Memento Mortis
Sacred to the
Memory of Captain
Simeon Sampson
who departed this life
June 22d 1789,
Aged 53 years.


TO COMMEMORATE THE DEATH OF
MOSES W.
who died 22 May 1837. Aged 9 Weeks.
and
HENRY D.
who died 12 March 1841 Aged 2 Years 9 Mos.
THE CHILDREN OF
ISAAC and JANE
CHAMBERLANE

SCHOOLGIRL SAMPLERS

- Samplers started in 16th century Europe as memory aids for favorite stitches and patterns.
- They evolved into familiar and endearing textiles associated with genteel female education.
- They were educational tools used to develop a girls stitchery skills for practical and ornamental purposes.
- Girls were made to sew upon verses, poems, tracts of life/death, and rewards of pious behavior. They were embellished with decorative motifs to practice intricate stiches and designs.
- They were meant to foster virtue and exhibit moral and needlework accomplishments (Milwaukee Public Museum, https://www.mpm.edu).

Elizabeth Mary Fraser, aged 7 years. 1838.

PIN PRICK DRAWINGS

- Pin prick drawings were popular in the early to mid 1800s (late Georgian to early Victorian period). They were less common as the 19th century ended.
- They came in various forms: embroidery on paper with pre-pricked designs, watercolor/gouache paintings that incorporated pin prickings as a drawing tool, and Pennsylvania fractur drawings with pin prick enhancements.

SCULPTURE

- Folk sculpture has a continuous history in this country—from carved tombstones of first settlers to Victorian lawn ornaments.
- Objects were made of wood, metal, clay, or chalk. They included ship's figureheads, weathervanes, trade signs, a few portraits, phrenology busts, wild fowl decoys, architectural trim, whirligigs, mantel ornaments, and toys.
- They were created by carpenters, shipwrights, cabinet makers, house builders, professional carvers, miscellaneous whittlers, blacksmiths, coppersmiths, potters, and amateurs of all walks of life (Cogar, Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1940).

HENRY KNIGHT
JEWELER
WATCHMAKER
ENGRAVER

SILHOUETTES

- Silhouettes are the earliest form of art—on cave walls, tombs of Egyptians, and Grecian vases,
- The term was coined in the early 18th century. Etienne de Silhouette was the Controller-General of France under Louis XV. He was a frugal man and a cutter of these black profiles, so his name was applied to this art form by those who considered all shades/profiles cheap.
- Profile cutters came to American in the early colonial days. Most were itinerant, although some were permanently located in large cities.
- The works were popular because exact likenesses could be produced quickly, accurately, and inexpensively. They appealed to Quakers and Fundamentalists who considered oils and watercolor portraits too worldly (Kotun and Guyton, Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, 1973).

Two Types of Silhouettes

- Cut and paste—the profile was traced and then cut out, or cut freehand with scissors of knife, and then pasted on a background of contrasting color.
- Hollow cut—The subject was interposed between a candle or lamp and a piece of paper, and the outline traced. By use of a series of reducing parallelograms, the profile was reduced to a miniature size and then cut out. It was then mounted on a contrasting color background.
- Silhouettes were often cut on folded paper, producing 2-4 profiles per cutting.
- The cutter or artist occasionally signed his work or used an embossing seal. The artist can sometimes be identified by characteristic features generally found on the lower portion of the silhouette (i.e. the “bust curve”) (Kotun and Guyton, Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, 1973).

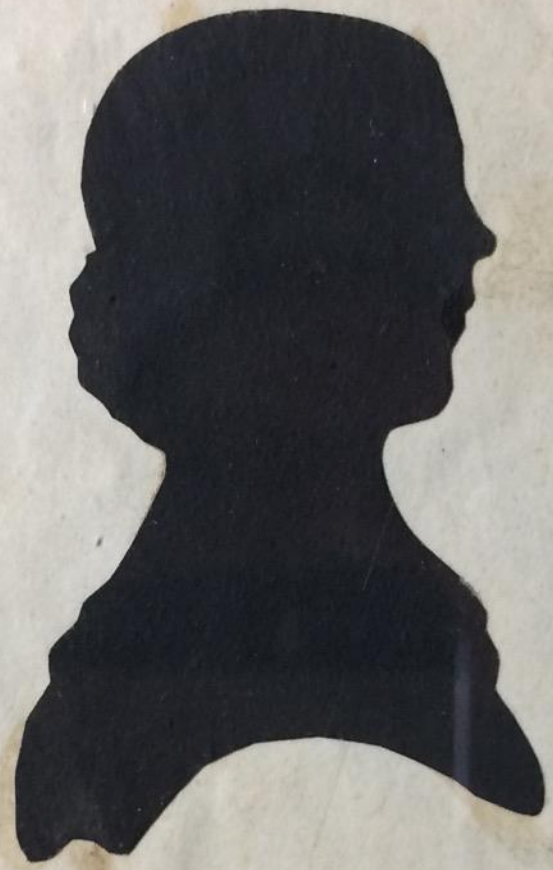
Likeness of George Benton Osborn
taken at the Age of ten months. Oct. 30 M. 184

Augustin Edouart, Silhouette Artist

- Augustin Edouart was born in France in 1789. He began cutting silhouettes in England in 1825 and in 1839 traveled to America, working in large cities and summer spas such as Saratoga Springs.
- He is said to have cut more than 50,000 , silhouettes. Each was cut in duplicate, one for the subject and one for his portfolio.
- Each was carefully identified—subject, date, location.
- Edouart stayed in America 10 years and then sailed from Baltimore on the Oneida, which sank off the coast of the Isle of Guernsey. All on board were saved, but only 14 Edouart portfolios were salvaged. Edouart gave them to a family on Guernsey that befriended him. Mrs. Nevill Jackson later found, catalogued, and sold these “lost” portfolios (Kotun and Guyton, Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, 1973).

M.A. Honeywell, Silhouette Artist

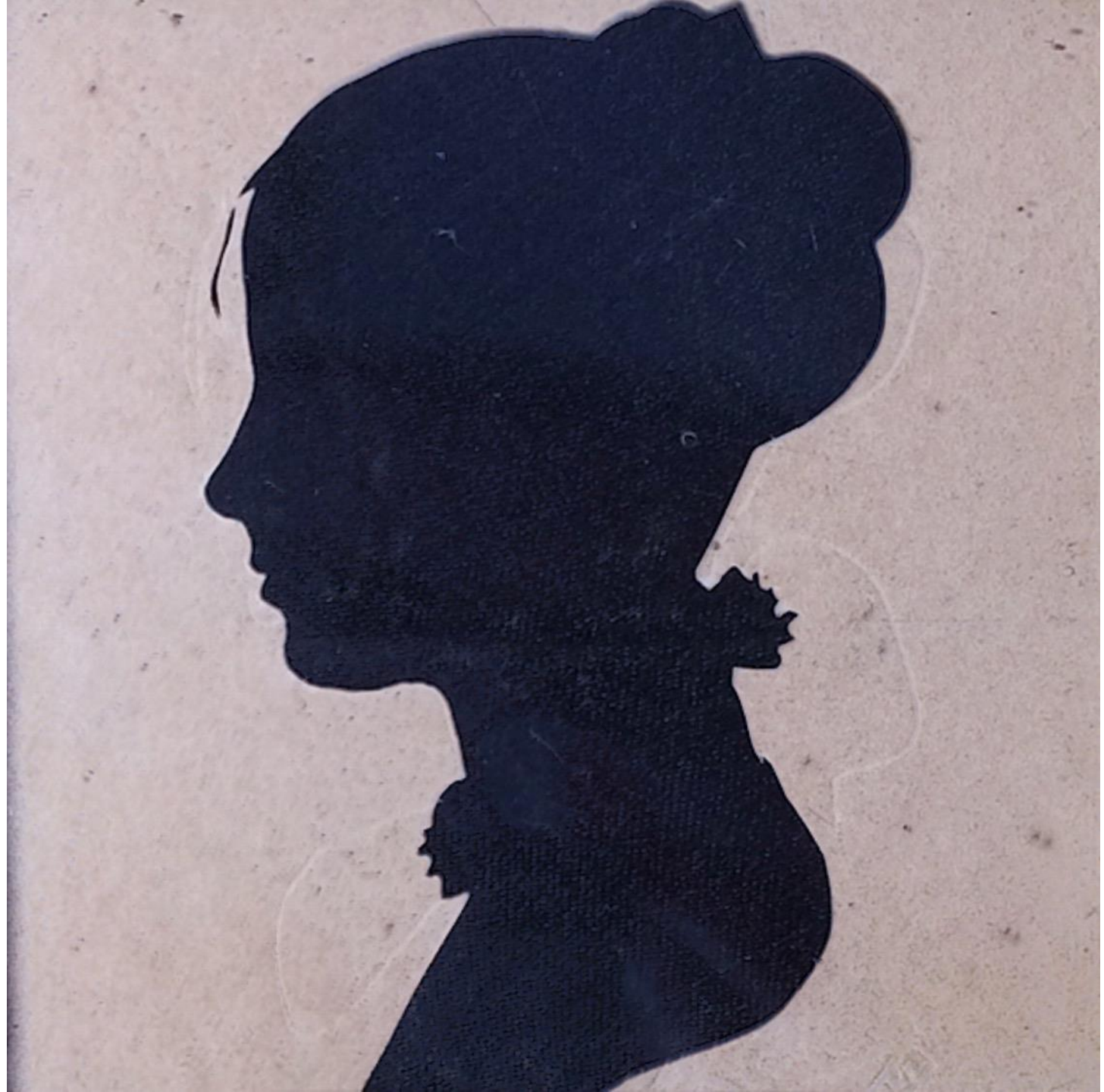
- Miss M.A. Honeywell was morn in New Hampshire in 1787.
- She had no hands and only 3 toes on 1 foot.
- The paper was held in the toes, the scissors in her mouth, and the silhouettes cut in a few seconds.
- Her fee was 25 cents for adults and half price for children (Kotun and Guyton, Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, 1973) .



Cut without Hands by M. A. Honeywell —

Charles Wilson Peale, Silhouette Artist

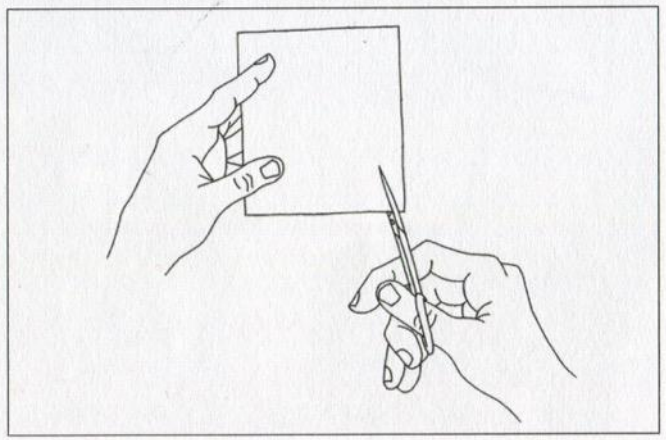
- Charles Wilson Peale was born on the Eastern Shore of Maryland in 1741.
- Peale had 3 wives, fathered many children, and was given to establishing many business adventures, most of which ended in failure.
- In addition to being one of America's great artists and portrait painters, he established the National History Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which was a success. Washington, Franklin, John Paul Jones, and Lafayette were patrons.
- At the museum, Peale cut silhouettes with a machine he invented—i.e. the physiognotrace, a stylette to trace the profile and a mechanical device to reduce it to miniature size. Moses Williams, Peale's slave, assisted. He earned 8 cents per silhouette and became rich, purchasing his freedom and marrying Peale's white cook (one of the first mixed marriages in the U.S.) (Kotun and Guyton, Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, 1973).

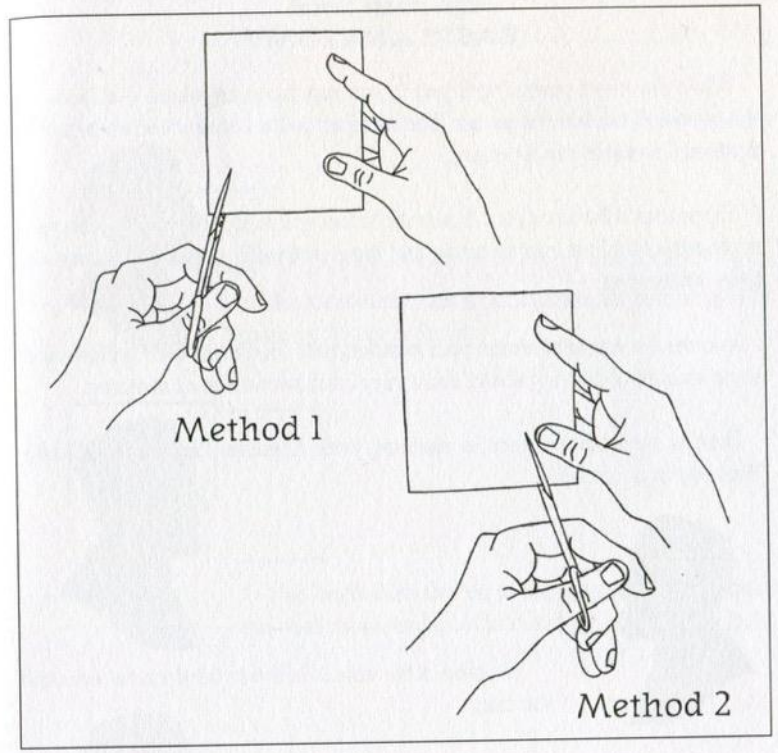


Next, hold the paper vertically in front of you at about chin or breast level. Keep the paper approximately 12 inches from your face. The subject's head should be at eye level. Your eyes should constantly move back and forth from subject to paper. Resist temptation to hold the paper flat on your lap! The portrait will be distorted if you do so and probably won't look at all like the subject.

HOLDING THE PAPER AND SCISSORS

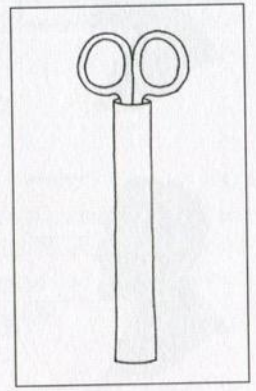
If you are right-handed, hold the paper in your left hand at the fold. Holding the paper at the fold helps prevent it from falling apart at mid-cut. Have the subject sit in a chair in front of you about one to two feet away. Then, cut the subject's right profile.





Lefties can cut silhouettes in one of two ways:

1. Hold the paper in your right hand at the fold. Cut the subject's left profile. Left-handed scissors are required.
2. Hold the paper in your right hand at the loose end of the paper and cut the subject's right profile. You may find the previous method less awkward, but try both ways and see what suits you best. For this method, you may use right-handed scissors.



Safety First. Make a protective sheath for your scissors and always keep them out of the reach of children. Use one 5x7 piece of white 4-ply paper and some tape to fashion the sheath.

CHAPTER FOUR

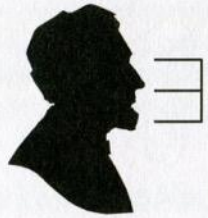
BASIC ANATOMY

When drawing a portrait with pencil, you may begin anywhere -- at the nose, the outline of the face, or an eye. The nice part is that construction lines may be made and mistakes can be erased.

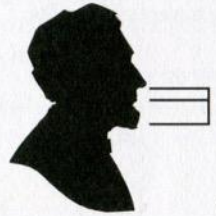
Silhouettes differ from pencil portraits in that you must begin at a certain spot, no construction lines can be made, and there is virtually no erasing of any mistakes whatsoever.

In order for you to minimize your mistakes, you should enter the art form with some amount of drawing ability and a very basic knowledge of anatomy.

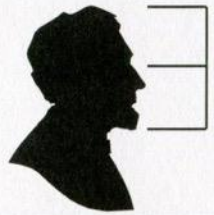
Here is a refresher course in anatomy, with Abraham Lincoln and George Washington as models.



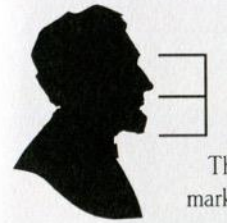
The base of the nose is half-way between the eyes and the chin.



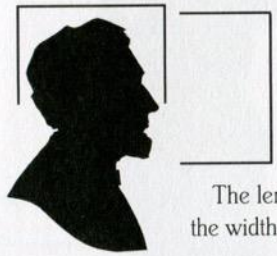
The mouth is 1/3 of the way down from the base of the nose to the chin.



When the head is divided into two equal parts, a line bisects the lower eye lid.



The lower half of the face can again be divided equally, marking the top of the lip.



The length from the top of the head to the chin equals the width from the tip of the nose to the back of the head.

In many faces, a slanted line can be made from the tip of the nose touching the upper lip, lower lip, and chin.

The nape of the neck is directly across from the area between the chin and bottom lip. Measure this area carefully at all times, remembering the thickness of the neck denotes the subject's age and weight.

Scissor-cut Portraits

This project introduces my own routine for cutting portraits with scissors, learned by cutting well over 100,000 silhouettes! Other artists may have their own routines, but all silhouette artists begin by cutting the face first and the shape of the head second. Right-handed artists generally find it easier to cut the right profile, while those using left-handed scissors will tend to prefer the left. This is because it feels more natural to hold the emerging silhouette in your free hand, while the paper outside the blades is waste. This is certainly the way you should begin.

YOU WILL NEED:

- Black or black-surface paper, 100 gsm or lighter
- Scaled-down captured shadow or photograph printed at the right scale for cutting
- Adhesive tape
- Red crayon
- Your favorite pair of scissors
- Some waste paper for warming up
- An envelope or glassine slip
- LED light

Optional:

- White cardstock

CUTTING SHADES

Preferably use black art paper that has a smooth surface. Alternatively, use silhouette paper, which is black on one side and white on the other.

A) Take a scaled-down drawing or photograph (see pages 22–5). This acts as a cutting guide, so it should be drawn on thin white paper (80 gsm is ideal) or the white side of black-surface paper. Tape a sheet of black paper to the back at the bottom of the drawing, or fold black-surface paper in half. For comfort, the combined weight of the papers shouldn't exceed 200 gsm.

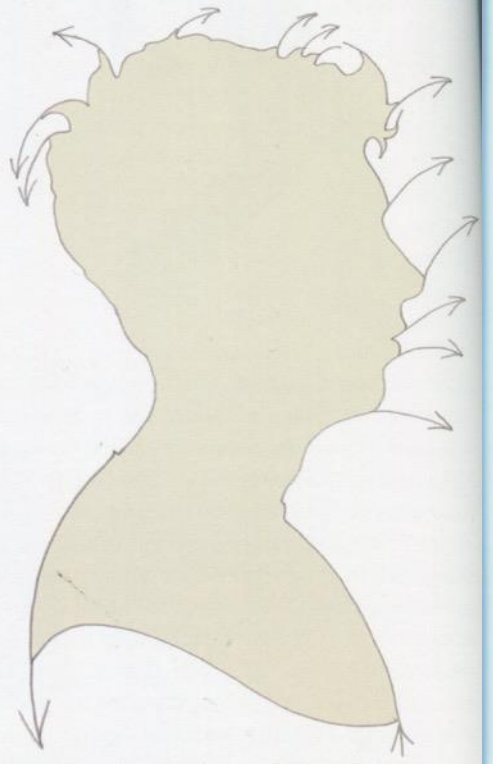
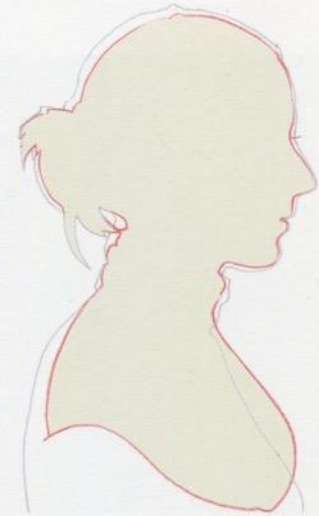


Figure 1: Natural wave pattern for a cut silhouette, showing breakaway lines outside the silhouette.

B) Thinking about the conventions of proportion, take a look at the outline and try to imagine how it would look in black. Start to draw in your alterations with red crayon, for example narrowing the neck or reducing the shoulders. Take another look at the detail by John Miers on page 39 to get an idea of the sort of minute adjustments made to the face. Decide what type of bust line you want at the bottom of the silhouette (for example, a traditional "S"-shape) and then reconsider the shape of the upper body. The illustration shows such alterations in red, while the original reduced shadow can be seen in pencil. The aim is to create a pleasing overall composition that accurately reflects the weight and demeanor of your subject.

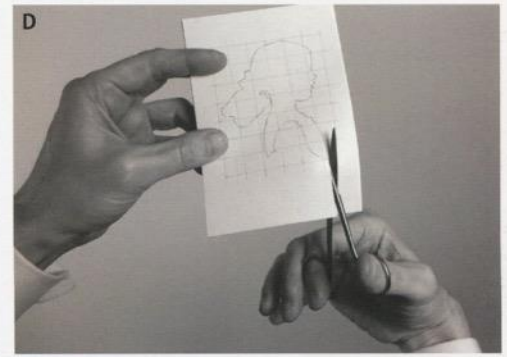
B



C) Spend a minute or two cutting wave patterns (see pages 32–5) in scrap paper to warm up your wrists.

D) Cut through the tape, or fold, at the bottom of the paper, up the body and neck, and then around the face, working from the bottom to the top. Cut slowly, but continuously, with a regular rhythm, using a series of smooth, confident curves (see Figure 1, opposite). As you turn the paper and start going down the back of the head, resist the temptation to speed up; continue to cut the hair in relaxed, natural waves. At this stage, the head will be upside down, so trust your drawing and follow the line.

D



E) When you reach the end, ignore the bust line and cut straight out through the bottom of the paper. This completes the "first cut" and means that the cutting guide and silhouette are still joined together, which is important if you wish to do more cutting. Open the hinge and have a look, holding the black shade up to the light. Can you see a likeness? If you have planned your cutting well and practiced your scissor skills, the likeness should be plain to see. If not, consider what might have gone wrong.

E

Session 2: Residence of Jim Laney and Philip Lamb, 38 Royal Oaks Circle, Denton, TX 76210

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