“Meaning” of Portraiture

Early portraits (drawings, paintings, sculptures) often served a purpose other than creating a record of a person – they could serve as symbols of wealth, importance, power, etc. due to the skills needed to create them and the cost often associated with hiring someone with those skills…
Silhouettes and Cut Outs

One approach to portraiture that could be seen as a conduit to egalitarianism was the silhouette.

- Unlike drawings and paintings and sculptures, there was not as marked a difference between the skill level of the creator and the end result.
- For example, while there were (and are) artists who can create a silhouette “freehand, by eye” and it might have greater fine details and artistic flair, a quite acceptable one could be made by tracing a person’s shadow on a sheet of paper and then filling it in or cutting it out.

Silhouettes as Records

Being easier and faster to create, silhouettes could also be used by some more as a record of people than as formal portraiture.

The example at the link below is a sample book of portraits, but in the end to me it feels more like a record of the people.

https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.2002.184
Digital Silhouettes

It is also possible to take a photograph with the intention of altering it into a digital silhouette.

– Imagine hanging a light-colored bedsheets in a dimly lit room with a light behind it, and standing a person on the other side of it. If you set the exposure to make the sheet look bright but not blown out, the person would likely appear close to just being a silhouette.

– You could edit it afterwards using things like level adjustments to make the dark parts all solid blank.

Paper Cuttings

There are also art forms in which you make paper cutouts depicting scenes. The creator requires fewer (or perhaps just different) drawing skills to convey a scene.

– Imagine you can draw shapes well, but have trouble drawing details like the faces on people. What do you do? One answer could be paper cuttings...

Shadow Puppetry

As we have seen, a single technique can be applied in many contexts. Here consider shadow puppetry and how it makes use of the imagery of silhouettes and the techniques used in making paper cuttings…

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pSVd_0AKTKc

The presentation of the tale of the three brothers in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1* was inspired by shadow puppetry!