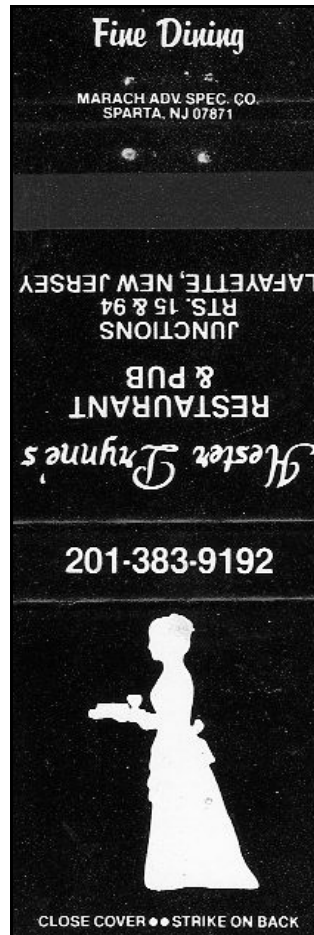


# Silhouettes

by  
Mike Prero

In today's world of high-definition photography, CG graphics and animation, and everything presented in a blazing palette of colors, most people probably don't even think about silhouettes any more, silhouettes are certainly a category within the hobby of collecting matchcovers and, just as certainly, still a part of the world of art.



In fact, Pliny the Elder, c. 78 AD, stated that the Ancient Greeks “all agree that it [*the art of painting*] originated in tracing lines round the human shadow.” And, since shadows are silhouettes, one could reasonably argue that silhouettes, themselves, even predate humans! But, we’re interested in man-made silhouettes here.

The work of the physiognomist Johann Caspar Lavater, who used silhouettes to analyze facial types, is thought to have promoted the art. The 18th century silhouette artist August Edouart cut thousands of portraits in duplicate. His subjects included French and British nobility and US presidents. Much of his personal collection was lost in a shipwreck. In England, the best known silhouette artist, a painter not a cutter, was John Miers, who travelled and worked in different cities, but had a studio on the Strand in London. He advertised “three minute sittings”, and the cost might be as low as half a crown around 1800. Miers’ superior products could be in grisaille, with delicate highlights added in gold or yellow, and some examples might be painted on various backings, including gesso, glass or ivory. The size was normally small, with many designed to fit into a locket, but otherwise a bust some 3 to 5 inches high was typical, with half- or full-length portraits proportionately larger.

In America, silhouettes were highly popular from about 1790 to 1840. The invention of photography signaled the end of the silhouette as a widespread form of portraiture.

The skill was not lost, and travelling silhouette artists continued to work at state fairs into the 20th century. The popularity of the silhouette portrait is being reborn in a new generation of people who appreciate the silhouette as a nostalgic way of capturing a significant occasion. In the United States and the UK silhouette artists have websites advertising their services at weddings and other such functions. In England there

is an active group of silhouette artists. In Australia, S. John Ross plied his scissors at agricultural shows for 60 years until his death in 2008. Other artists such as Douglas Carpenter produce silhouette images using pen and ink. [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silhouette#Profile\\_portraits](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silhouette#Profile_portraits)]

No one has reported stats for largest Silhouettes collection, but I certainly run across them all the time, so there must be a goodly number. Restaurants would seem to be the best place to look for them.

You might consider adding this interesting ‘art’ category to your repertoire!

