In Our Likeness

By Erica Deeman

A take-home art project with tips on making a portrait

McEVOY FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS

MUSEUM CRAFT DESIGN
MUSEUM OF CRAFT AND DESIGN

Hello,

My name is Erica Deeman. My friends at McEvoy Foundation for the Arts and Museum of Craft and Design asked me if I would share with you a few take-home art projects about portraiture in honor of the great Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), abolitionist and former enslaved person. Douglass is the subject of an art exhibition called *Lessons of the Hour* on view through March 13, 2021 at McEvoy Arts.

As a speaker, Douglass compelled Americans to end slavery, give everyone voting rights, and advocated for the elevation of all human life. He was famous for his oratory, a term coined for inspirational speech. He also held that photography could affirm the whole of a person and as a means by which Black people could control their likeness beyond caricature. In fact, he was the most photographed American of the nineteenth-century. Both through words and in pictures, Douglass changed the world.

Portraiture is an art form that comes in as many expressions and styles as there are people. We know it mostly through its traditions in drawing, painting, sculpture, and photography. In my case, I am a visual artist who is keenly interested in what the camera can do. I'm sharing a few ideas here which I hope will inspire you to play in the many-faceted and fascinating genre of the portrait.

Be safe and have fun!

December 2020

How to Make a Photographic Portrait

Find the viewfinder of your camera and look through it. What can you see? What is included and excluded by the framing of your scene?

Press the button on the top of the camera to make a photograph of your environment.

Find the large background with frame poster. Use sticky tack to affix it to a wall.

Ask a person in your home to stand in front of the background. This person is your "subject."

How does the light fall on the subject? Can you change the light by moving the light source or moving the subject?

Can your subject change their pose and expression as you make a photograph?

Does this inspire you to swap positions and have someone make a photograph of you?

Move around your home and see what else you can find in the camera viewfinder. You can also make a viewfinder by looking through a cardboard tube or even make a circle with your hand by touching your forefinger to your thumb.

Do the objects in the viewfinder build a story of who you are? Arrange some of your favorite things and make a photograph of them. Can you think about why you like them?

Is there someone you can think of who you would like to share the image with?

How to Make a Silhouette

Silhouettes are the outline or dark shape of someone set off against a lighter ground—like a permanent shadow!

Silhouette paper cut-outs were very popular before photography portraiture.

Use sticky tack to affix black butcher paper to a wall in a dark-ish room.

Have your subject stand or sit in front of the butcher paper, about 1 foot from the wall, facing toward either side.

Use a flashlight, phone light, or lamp to shine light directly at the paper.

TIP: When shining the light correctly, it will be shining on the side of your subject's face. They may want to close their eyes!

You should be able to see a crisp shadow of their profile on the paper. This means you will be able to see the outline of their forehead, nose, and chin.

With the light still shining on your subject, set the light source on a table, shelf, stool, or ask your subject to hold it for you. You might also ask someone else in your home to come help hold the light, if that is easier.

TIP: Make sure the light remains stable and does not move.

Use the chalk to trace the edge of the shadow.

Turn off the light and let your subject rest—be sure to thank them!

Carefully cut the silhouette out.

Use the glue stick to affix the silhouette to the front or back of the large background poster.

You have made a silhouette! Keep trying the technique with other family members or objects.

How to Make a Portrait in Collage

Collages are pictures made from cut-outs and found materials that are reassembled into a new idea or image.

Find some used newspapers, magazines, mail inserts, postcards, or any other printed matter that nobody wants. The more color and pictures, the more fun you'll have.

Search for images and words in the printed materials that you like. Maybe these remind you of certain memories, dreams, ideas, or identities.

Cut the images out.

Arrange them on the background poster.

When you are pleased with your layout, glue the images down.

Are there other types of materials you could add?

Movie ticket stubs

Glitter

Stickers

Dried leaves or flowers

Coins

Fabric

Food wrappers

What does this kind of portrait mean to you? What do the various images and textures symbolize?

Materials Needed

Photographic Portrait

- Phone, digital, instant, film point and shoot, or other camera
- Large background poster
- Sticky tack
- Plus: A friend or family member from your household to photograph

Silhouette

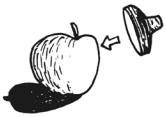
- Background poster
- Black construction paper
- Chalk
- Sticky tack
- Scissors
- Plus: A friend to trace your silhouette (or vice versa)
- Light source (phone light or flashlight or lamp without shade)
- Dark-ish room

Portrait in Collage

- Background poster
- Construction paper
- Glue stick
- Scissors
- Random ephemera (feathers, rhinestones, stickers, etc.)
- Plus: Recycled magazines, colorful printed materials, old photos, postcards
- Extra goodies (movie ticket stubs, coins, dried flowers, etc.)

Photography Tips
by Erica Deeman

Camera
What kind of camera do you have access to? Whether it is a single-use camera, a phone camera, or other, explore the features and experiment with different settings.



Direction of Light
Think about the direction of the light in your images. Where is the light source relative to the subject of your images?

Backlighting is when the light is behind the subject. This is what happens when you set your subject in front of a window and can no longer see their face. Turn your subject towards the light if you want to completely see them!

Front light from either your camera flash or sunlight aimed directly at the subject will completely light them.

Overhead lighting is usually present when making photos indoors (lights in the ceiling) or outdoors on an overcast day. If you prefer you can add flash in to remove any pesky shadows. Or maybe you want to play with the shadows for added effect!

Side lighting provides contrast and depth. Look for light from an angle hitting your subject. Remember if you can't move the light source (as in daylight or the sun) you can move your subject and yourself.

Composition and Cropping
Think about your cropping and composition when making a photograph. Poor cropping includes things like cutting off people's hands or feet.

Make your photos "interesting"
Think about the position of your subject. It doesn't always have to be in the center of the image.

Try making photos both vertical and horizontal.
What kind of clothing, accessories, and props do you want to include? What do these choices mean for what you are trying to convey?

Location
When shooting photos without the *In Our Likeness* background poster, choose your location carefully. Think about some of the points below:

Background options
You want attractive scenes, but not too busy. Pay attention to the background as it can distract from what would have been a wonderful image. Consider the whole frame of your photograph, is there anything at the edge that is distracting?

You can move your composition or subject to create a less distracting photo. You can also move yourself and the camera so that your subject blocks distracting background elements.

Perspective and Angle
There's room to play with perspective. Don't be afraid to change angles.

Connect With Your Subject
Connecting well with the person you are photographing is one of the most important aspects of portraiture. Be confident and don't rush!

Erica Deeman (She/Her) is a visual artist whose work intersects race, gender, and the hybridity of Black identity. Originally from the U.K., she has lived in the States for ten years. Deeman's work has been exhibited nationally and internationally at Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Aberystwyth, UK; Pier 24 Photography, San Francisco, CA; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA, and New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA, among other institutions. Her work is in the permanent collections of Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Columbia College of Chicago, Chicago, IL; Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego, CA; New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA; Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL; and Pier 24 Photography, San Francisco, CA. Deeman is represented by Anthony Meier Fine Arts in San Francisco, CA.

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Lessons of the Hour
October 14, 2020 – March 13, 2021

McEvoy Arts presents the West Coast premiere of Isaac Julien's *Lessons of the Hour—Frederick Douglass* (2019) a ten-screen film installation that offers a contemplative, poetic journey into the life of the freed slave, abolitionist, and statesman Frederick Douglass (1818–1895). The installation is joined by *When Living is a Protest,* an exhibition of Julien's related photography and selections from the McEvoy Family Collection, curated by Mark Nash, and *New Labor Movements,* a film-video program organized by Leila Weefur, exploring concepts of transnational Blackness and America today. Online conversations with Julien, Weefur, Angela Davis, Deborah Willis, Robin Kelley, and Kass Banning and Warren Crichlow with B. Ruby Rich explore the works on view, Douglass' legacy and his relevance today, and the history of photography, among other topics. Programmatic partners include *Film Quarterly,* the Museum of the African Diaspora, the Museum of Craft and Design, the Roxie Theater, the San Francisco Public Library, and the Universities of California at Berkeley and Santa Cruz, among others. Look for additional programs and partners in 2021.

Museum of Craft and Design
2569 3rd Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
sfmcd.org

The Museum of Craft and Design (MCD) makes creativity accessible to everyone.

MCD is building on its history as one of the first museums to present pop-up exhibitions across San Francisco and is re-envisioning its capacity to bring dynamic art experiences to the community through the launch of its mobile craft and design vehicle, MCD Mobile MakeArt. Originally conceptualized to easily bring MakeArt Lab experiences to where people live, work, and play, MCD Mobile MakeArt has shifted focus—only slightly—in order to provide creative tools and materials for San Francisco families to connect and create within the safety of their homes. MCD is dedicated to making a unique and important contribution in the community by supporting the creative and emotional well-being of families and individuals of all ages.

In Our Likeness is an MCD Mobile MakeArt Kit co-production of McEvoy Foundation for the Arts and Museum of Craft and Design. Special thanks to Erica Deeman, Bayview Opera House, Hi-Fructose Magazine, MacFadden & Thorpe, NOW Hunter's Point, and Oscar's Photo Lab.

Credits
Poster image created and edited by Erica Deeman. Photography tip illustrations by Rachel Shipps. Design by MacFadden & Thorpe.

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