

Portrait Drawing Round Robin

A Workshop Lesson Plan created by Peter Walsh



(Photos from a Portrait Drawing Round Robin held at Sculpture Center in Queens, NY, July 2009)

What's a "Portrait Drawing Round Robin" and how does it work?

Participants get together for a few hours to create portrait drawings of each other and construct a wall sized portrait "matrix" of the completed drawings: portraits of the participants shown horizontally, portraits by them vertically.

Lots of things go on in this process and the completed grids are truly mesmerizing. The Round Robins create a unique kind of group portraiture that turns the traditional power relationships of portraiture on their head.

How do I organize a "Portrait Drawing Round Robin"?

A Portrait Drawing Round Robin is easy to organize, but it takes some planning. Here are some notes to use as a guide.

You'll need:

- a room, such as a classroom or gallery space
- two to three hours
- a group of five to twenty interested people



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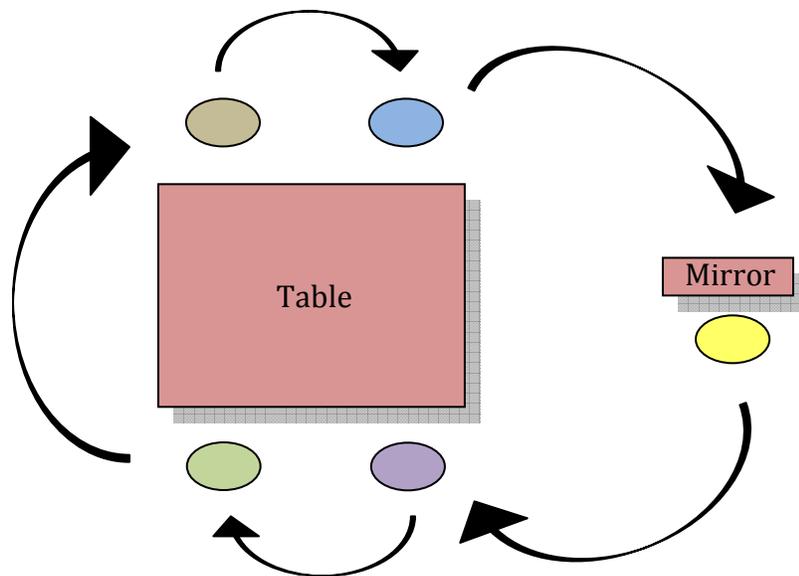
and

- some inexpensive drawing paper
- some drawing supplies like pencils, charcoal and erasers
- several tables (four to six foot long)
- several mirrors on easels, one mirror per table (for self-portraits!)
- a timer with an alarm.

How long a Round Robin lasts depends on the number of participants making each grid and the length of time set aside for each drawing. For example, a table of five persons making 10-minute drawings will take 100 minutes to create a grid of 25 portraits. Add a few short breaks and you have a two-hour workshop. Make sure to include time in your workshop for looking at the completed drawings.

I've used 11 x 14 inch Strathmore 300 Series drawing paper in the past, but any paper you like will work well. How much paper you need depends on how many people are involved. For a table of five persons, you need twenty-five sheets, plus some extra just in case.

Setting the Round Robin in Motion.



Five Person Round Robin Set-up.

1) Form groups of five people to create grids of twenty-five drawings. If you have more than five participants, form several groups. I find that this is the best basic configuration. The math behind this is simple, but specific. More people in each group increases the number of drawings exponentially. Stick with an odd number for each group so that the movement around the tables is clear.

2) Assuming five people per team, sit four persons at each table, two across from two. The fifth person will start with a self-portrait while seated at a mirror mounted on an easel.

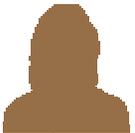
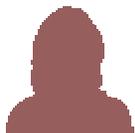
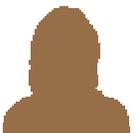


3) Begin with participants introducing themselves to the person seated opposite them. First one person draws, while the other sits, then the other way around. Drawing at the same time is not recommended. When that first exchange is completed every one should move one chair over, moving in a clockwise direction, and introduce themselves to their next partner. The fifth participant joins the table while one of the others moves to the self-portrait mirror.

4) You should use a timer for each drawing. In general, you want to give the participants as much time as you can. Ten minutes is good for a group of five people if you want the Round Robin to finish in a couple of hours. If you want a large grid, for example with seven people, you may have to go as low as seven minutes per drawing, which is challenging but possible. If you want to give the drawers more time for each drawing you will need to block out more time for the Round Robin. A group of five people doing half hour drawings would need at least nine hours to complete their grid!

Making the Grid.

5) When everyone has drawn everyone, including themselves, lay out the portrait grid. It works best to have portraits **of** someone in horizontal rows and portraits **by** them in vertical columns. If you can, have the self-portraits come down diagonally from the upper left to the lower right.

	Drawer A	Drawer B	Drawer C	Drawer D	Drawer E
Sitter A	Self-portrait 				
Sitter B		Self-portrait 			
Sitter C			Self-portrait 		
Sitter D				Self-portrait 	
Sitter E					Self-portrait 



Looking at the Portrait Matrix.

Take some time to look at the finished drawings and talk about them. Look closely at how someone else is seeing you. Listen to their surprised reaction to how you see them. Sometimes I've found that the group portrait created in these matrices tends to leave people speechless as they try to do the visual work necessary to interpret the parts and the whole.

Tips for the Round Robin.

- 1) Each sitter should be comfortably seated and should find a spot across the room to focus on. That spot will help them to keep their head in about the same place during the portrait. They can face the drawer "head on" or turn their head to one side, but once the drawing begins, they should stay in that position.
- 2) Use strong overhead lights, which can provide shadows that are useful for seeing the shapes and lines of a person's face.
- 3) There is no right or wrong portrait. Even "bad" drawings or "incorrect" likenesses provide windows onto the processes of seeing another person, passing that sight through our brains and bodies and transforming those subjective experiences into objective personifications of other beings – the drawings.

About this Lesson Plan.

This Portrait Drawing Round Robin workshop lesson plan was created by artist Peter Walsh in 2011 to describe workshops that began in 2009.

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