

How do we decide what to draw as a group?

Gather everyone. Acknowledge how much time you have to make your artwork and how big your drawing can be. Now, give your team a window of time to share possibilities. Listen to everyone and make sure everyone gets to say what they want. Remember that even the “worst” idea can be the catalyst for greatness. Keep in mind that some of the best art is made from ideas that initially seem completely absurd.

From that initial collection of ideas, try to find common themes or intentions. Do the ideas collectively feel silly, serious, or romantic? What if there appear to be no connections? Sometimes there are ways to make opposing ideas become complementary. For example, let’s say that members of the group have thrown out the ideas sports, nature, animals, and self-portraits. All of these very different ideas can be incorporated by placing them in the setting of a park. That way, each team member can still work on what they want while also contributing to a unified vision.

Remember that brainstorming is acts of aspiration, not concrete plans. Do not bog down the progress of the entire team with the fine details of the mural, when those can be ironed out as the drawing is made.

We always recommend brainstorming in front of the wall or space where you will be drawing. Look at the space for clues on the size and scope of the mural and for cues on what would potentially look good in the space. Vertical spaces may inspire trees and rockets, while a wall that is long and short may summon fences and herds of goats.

Remember to think big. Do not let good ideas go because you are not sure if or how you can draw them. The more impossible it is to draw, the more we encourage you to draw it. Assume you are capable of drawing anything.

We suggest you include people in your drawing. Having characters in your murals will make them instantly relatable to the viewer. If you are not sure how to go about drawing a full-sized human, see page 32.

Be ambitious!



▲ The Grand Rapids Tape Drawing (2015)

This 160-foot, three-story, blank wall was MUCH larger in person than it seemed on Google Street View. As we stood in front of this behemoth and brainstormed for the mural, we were constantly distracted by things on wheels zooming along the adjacent street: buses, police cars, scooters, bicycles, tall bikes, skateboards, horse-drawn carriages, and the constant conga line of cars parking.

We imagined a scenario where all the wheels that we saw would be the play things of gigantic, cosmic catfish. For the next two weeks, we mirrored the activity from the street on the wall for the fish to nibble on.



How do we make our drawings come together?

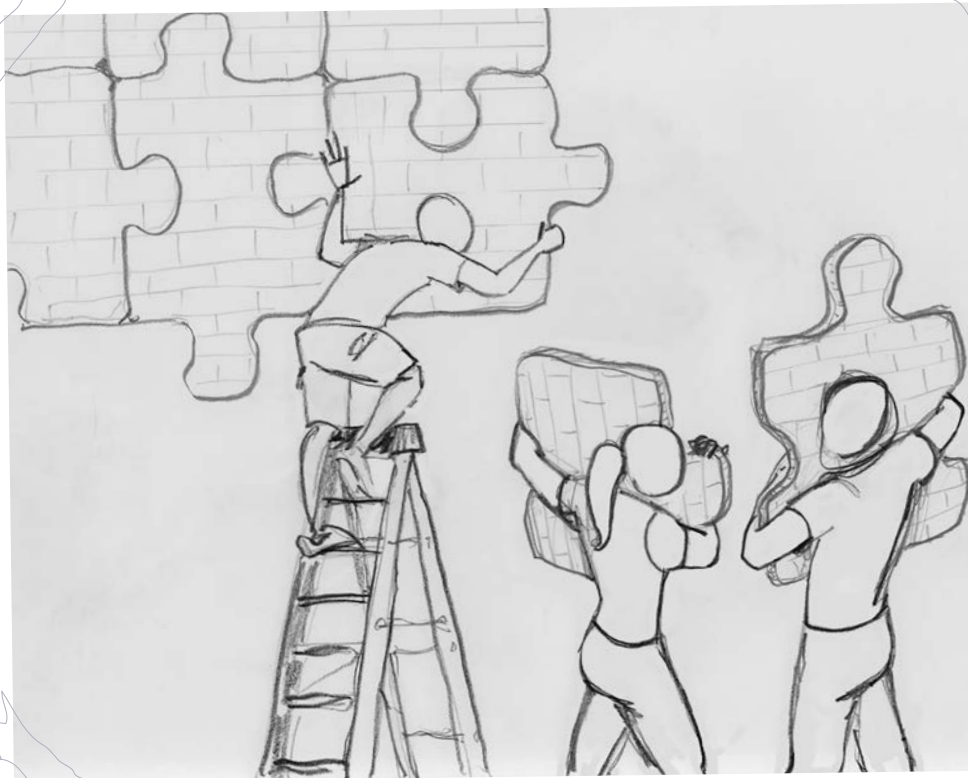
The hardest part of drawing in groups is making sure that the final collaborative artwork is cohesive. At the start of the drawing, if there is no agreement on the scale, then you may end up with one figure that is two feet tall and one figure that is nine feet tall, and both of them are standing next to a three-foot-high guinea pig. This is one of the reasons we recommend that everyone draw life-sized.

We recommend that you treat the base of the wall as the “ground” in your drawing. The ground you stand on is the same one where the characters in your drawing will stand.

Try thinking about the composition of your drawing as the set of a theater production. Where will the main characters be and what will they be doing? What is the setting, and where might elements like trees or houses be placed in the scene?

You can organize the location of major elements in the drawing by simply pointing to where you intend them to be and describing them for your collaborators. Instead of just “horse and man” you might say “a man wearing an epic sombrero atop a galloping stallion with its mane and tail blowing in the wind.”

On the next page is a breakdown of how a mural by the Tape Art Crew developed as a collaborative project.



▲ Be prepared for everyone’s drawings to overlap each other. Your stuff should touch their stuff to make it look like one big drawing.



▲ Don’t fight the wall. If life gives you a long, blue rectangle, enjoy a day at the beach. Use architectural cues to guide the composition.



▲ Temporary guidelines, like the lines indicating the height of the water above, create consensus about the composition of major elements yet to be drawn.



▲ Like the background of green hills, you can happily complete monotonous tasks *before* they become monotonous.



◀ Large elements, like this life-sized shark, can be easier to draw with the help of several hands at one time. You can bite off bigger challenges with drawing friends.



◀ These large, collaborative drawings both look like the unified work of a single artist. These groups paid very close attention to the style of each other’s work, especially with regard to the repeated elements of the stone blocks and pillar shadows.

Trebuchet Mural

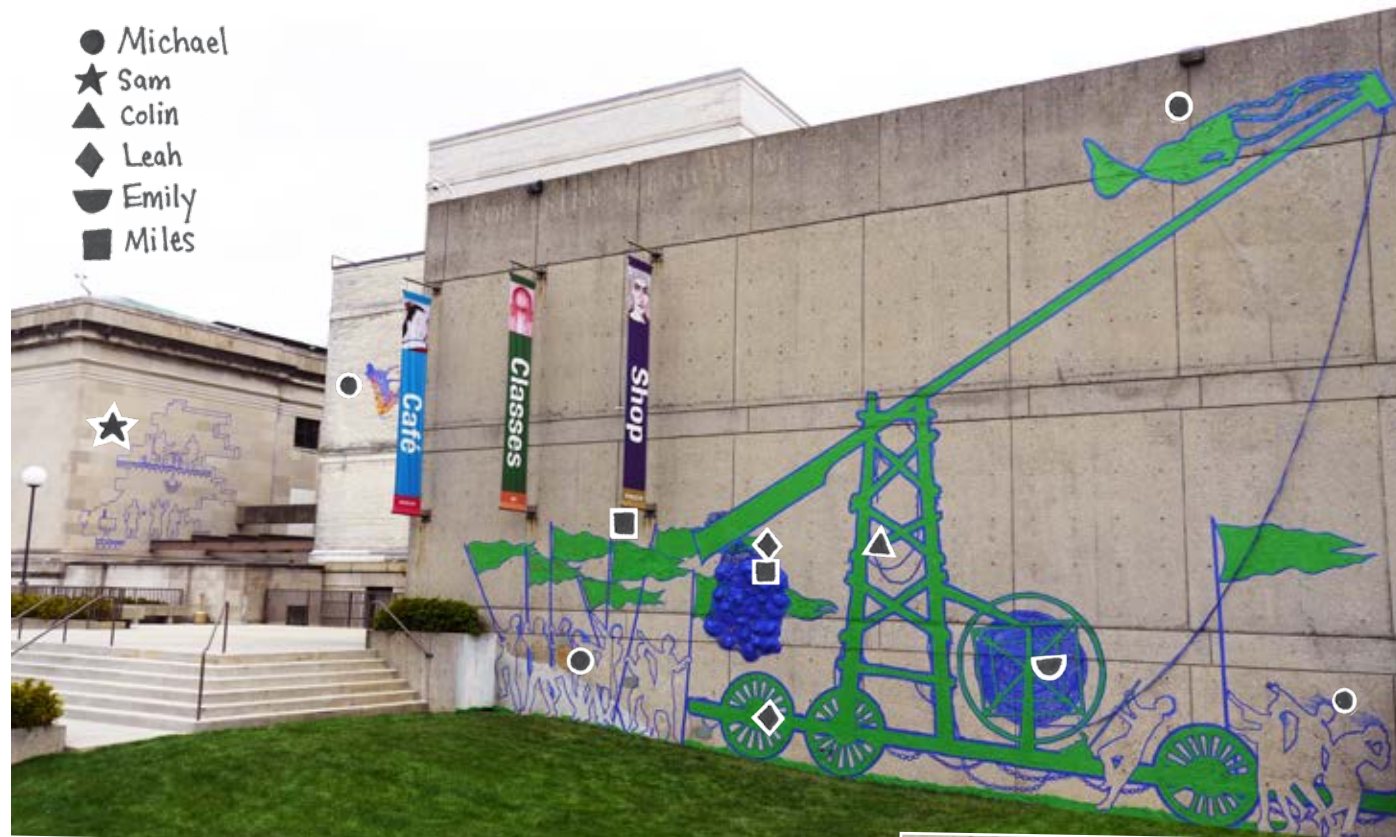
In Worcester, Massachusetts, there is a four-story building made of steel and glass that used to house one of the largest collections of armor in the world. When Higgins Armory closed, the nearby Worcester Art Museum inherited its amazing collection.

As we stood outside the Worcester Art Museum brainstorming about what to draw on its walls, we discussed ways to poke holes in the museum to expose the remarkable pieces of medieval armor hidden within. What medieval-themed thing could blast a hole through the side of an art museum? A trebuchet!

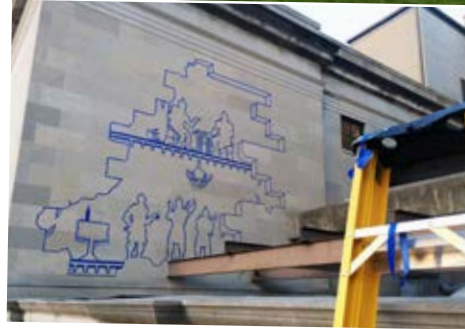
We agreed that we would draw a life-sized trebuchet hurling an object at the museum. Sam suggested the resulting opening would catch people in full suits of armor off-guard as they went about their business. Colin dived right into the mechanical aspects of this huge catapult. Miles started fashioning rope systems and nets. Emily set off on flag patrol. Leah made a compass and started making the massive wheels. Michael started drawing a small crowd of people egging the whole process on.

We averaged 12 hours of drawing a day for the next four days. All the artists moved throughout the drawing, collaborating on all the different drawing projects that had been started. As we continued to push the drawing forward, we mused about what the trebuchet was throwing at the wall and remembered that, in the 14th and 15th centuries, it was not uncommon to throw carcasses of animals at besieged castles. We had all separately laughed at the comedy of this historical trend as it is found in *Monty Python's The Holy Grail*. This idea quickly escalated to a flaming cow and, by the fourth day, this ballistic bovine was hurling toward the museum.

▶ At the start of this mural, the group verbally agreed on the story of the mural—a trebuchet launching flaming objects through the side of the museum. Details like what was being launched were the topic of laughter for days before being added to the wall.



▲ This traditional art can't even deal with this flaming cow right now.



▲ The knights taken by surprise are far from the trebuchet itself, but they are drawn in the same scale as the rest of the mural.



▲ In real life, people in groups and crowds compositionally overlap. We enjoy drawing groups of people as one, uninterrupted silhouette.



▲ We balanced out the figures at the front of the trebuchet with a smaller group of figures at the back. There are fewer here, so the momentum of the drawing still presses forward.

Can I use any type of tape?

In our experience, the answer is a resounding no. A tape needs to meet clear criteria to be usable to make collaborative drawings like the ones described in this book. Currently, in the entire global market, there may be only a handful of tapes that are definitively serviceable for this type of drawing. For more than 30 years we have been constantly on the hunt for the best tapes for drawing. We have spent a lot of time with tapes of all kinds. Here are the main things we look for:

Will the tape damage my walls?

Painter's tapes came into the marketplace at about the same time we started drawing with tapes. How lucky we all are that there are tapes designed to stick to walls and then come off with little difficulty. Now there are hundreds of painter's tapes on the market and we have experimented with most of them. The majority of them are great for painters, but terrible for drawing. For temporary tape murals, the tape has to work on a concrete wall one day, then on a freshly painted hospital wall the next. It has to work on dirty surfaces, as well as glass and metal. In all cases, it has to come off the wall effortlessly. For the purposes of drawing, we are asking the tape to do a lot.

In the early 1990s, painter's tapes were generally "juicier." They were made with a thicker paper and glue, which made them great for drawing, but bad for painting. In the last few decades, the market has seen these tapes become thinner and flatter so that they apply in straight lines. There are very few of the old-school painter's tapes left.

Is the tape an attractive color?

Most painter's tapes are blue. In Canada, painter's tapes are green. In the early 2000s, the tape industry got funky for a few years and produced an awesome number of different colors. None of these colors were designed for the purposes of art, and for the most part, were washed-out and not vibrant. As with any art medium, color is important. For tape drawings to be most effective, the color of the tape has to have high contrast to the color of the surface it is being applied to.

What will your students notice?

A lot of tapes smell bad. That is a fact. If you have a whole hallway of tape artists, there is nothing worse than trying to work through the smell of a bad tape. In the same vein, some tapes do not feel nice to the touch. Even some paper tapes can be a little oily, and over time leave a gross residue on your hands. Some tapes have adhesive systems that stick too much to their own adhesive. This is especially frustrating for young artists when the sticky stuff touches the sticky stuff and will not come undone.

Does the tape curve elegantly?

Curving is critical to drawing, but finding a tape that allows you to create nice curves is tricky. Very few tapes with low adhesion are designed to curve, and unfortunately the buffet of painter's tape out there are specifically designed to lie perfectly straight. These tapes produce curves that are stiff and jagged. Tapes good for drawing let you curve in smooth, even motions.

Does the tape rip easily?

Ideally, tape for drawing has a paper backing so that it can easily be ripped by hand into thin lines, smaller pieces, and odd shapes. If a tape can not easily do this, it stymies the drawing process, and the drawings suffer. It is also critical that the tape can be torn by younger hands, folks with a wide range of abilities, and our elderly friends.

