

WORKSHOP The Portrait in Time: Observation, Layering & Gesture With Curtis Holder

Price £125

Location RWS Gallery at Whitcomb Street

Date Monday 26th October 2026

Time 10.30am – 4.30pm

About the Workshop

In this portraiture workshop with Curtis Holder, you will explore how likeness can emerge through time, observation and repeated drawing.

Working from a live model, you will begin with a series of quick observational exercises, including blind and contour drawing, one-minute studies and loose compositional sketches. Rather than treating these as warm-ups, students will use them as accumulated information, exploring how posture, gesture, clothing, expression and conversation can contribute to our understanding of a sitter.

In the afternoon, students will develop a longer portrait from a seated pose, working into and building upon their earlier drawings. Through layered pencil techniques, earlier marks and observations may be retained, overlapped, transformed or selectively erased as the final likeness emerges. The workshop considers portraiture not simply as a finished image, but as a record of looking, capturing something of the person, the sitting and the passage of time.

Suitable for beginners.

Morning

- Initial introductions
- Curtis will introduce the group to examples of his work, discussing his process and approach to portraiture.
- Working from the live model, Curtis do a demonstration exploring the portrait as an accumulation of observations
- Curtis will lead a series of short exercises, including blind and contour drawings, one-minute studies, and observations of the head, shoulders and upper body.
- The model will change position and gesture throughout the morning. Participants will make a series of drawings exploring proportion, posture, clothing, silhouette, expression and characteristic mannerisms, with conversation forming part of the sitting.
- Participants will review their drawings and consider which observations they want to carry forward into the afternoon portrait.

Afternoon

- Break for lunch
- Participants will establish a larger composition using information gathered during the morning rather than beginning again from a blank sheet.
- Curtis will demonstrate how earlier outlines and observations can be retained, overlapped, softened or transformed.
- Working from a longer seated pose, participants will develop a final portrait through layered pencil, exploring proportion, facial structure, likeness, tone and depth. Earlier marks may remain visible as part of the finished drawing.
- The session will conclude with final adjustments and a group discussion considering how each portrait has developed from the same sitting, and how observation, gesture, personality and the passage of time have shaped the work.

About the Tutor

Curtis Holder (b. 1968, Leicester) is a London-based artist whose drawing practice is shaped by an enduring interest in people. Working primarily in graphite and coloured pencil, he creates large-scale portraits and figurative works through close observation and conversation. His work is held in the collections of the National Portrait Gallery, Leeds Art Gallery, Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery and Soho House. He won Sky Arts Portrait Artist of the Year in 2020, received the John Ruskin Prize in 2024 and was awarded a residency at Yaddo, New York, in 2025.

Materials

- **Cartridge paper:** A2/A3 for preliminary drawings
- **Good-quality drawing paper:** A1 or A2 for the final portrait
- **Graphite pencils:** ranging from H to 6B/8B
- **Kneaded/putty eraser**
- **Standard eraser**
- **Pencil sharpener**
- **Optional:** coloured pencils

Useful Links

Website: <https://www.curtisholder.co.uk/>

Instagram: www.instagram.com/curtisartist

Location



RWS Gallery
3-5 Whitcomb Street
London
WC2H 7HA

Just off Trafalgar Square
Nearest tubes: Leicester Square
and Charing Cross

Nearby parking is very limited.
There is a Q-Park multi-storey car
park at the top of Whitcomb
Street that charges around
£9/hour. If you wish to travel by
car we recommend checking
nearby parking on
parkopedia.com

Lunch & Refreshments

Lunch is not provided and it is recommended that you bring your own food and drink for the day, which can be consumed in the gallery. Students are welcome to use the gallery fridges to store their food and drink. There are also many cafes nearby including a Pret-a-Manger next door to the gallery.