

Rolf is big draw at art in the square

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Dab hand: Rolf Harris at the Art on the Square event. Photo: Michael Stephens/PA

Television presenter leads attempt to recreate Constable masterpiece as amateurs and professionals help to launch nationwide festival

Inside the National Gallery, visitors paused before the Titian masterpieces in the central hall of the east wing, opened to the public yesterday after a multimillion pound makeover.

Outside, in Trafalgar Square, they admired new works by younger, lesser-known but unquestionably talented artists, such as Holly Wong, whose bold use of colour and striking regard for form bore testimony to her father Hon's rueful observation.

"She draws everything - including on the walls," he said, inspecting the paper plate which the 2-half-year-old had adorned with green and orange noodles. "We came down here by chance, but anything creative is good for kids."

The day of art activities for amateurs - with considerable help from professionals - was a triple celebration. It marked the completion of the National Gallery's redecoration, the launch of The Big Draw - a nationwide festival of more than 1,000 events - and the last of the summer's events in the square.

The mayor of London has been determined to return one of London's greatest public spaces to full use, and has been largely successful. English National Opera's performance of *La Bohème* was rained off, but this month viewers packed out the square to watch a screening of *Battleship Potemkin*, with a live performance of its new score by the Pet Shop Boys.

Ken Livingstone described yesterday's event as "a brilliant finale, a really memorable way of getting people of all ages interested in art".

Rolf Harris hosted the event and roped in other artists to help him recreate Constable's masterpiece, *The Hay Wain*, on a canvas the size of a double-decker bus. The catch was that they had just a few hours to reproduce the work for the crowd in the square and BBC viewers; the painter took around five months to create the original.

"Art is something for everyone to enjoy in one way or another," Harris said.

"All you need is passion and inspiration, and I hope that through this event we will pass that on to the viewers watching at home."

Other highlights included the dancers who "drew" with their bodies in the dusk thanks to fibre optically illuminated costumes, and the vividly coloured *Venus de Milo* that bobbed gently in one of the fountains.

But many of the most striking works were by the amateurs. Dan Mason, 12, knocked out an alarmingly good pencil sketch of the National Gallery in just under an hour, with accurate proportions and an impressionistic cloudscape, which would have been beyond most adults.

"He's very good at drawing but doesn't do an awful lot of it, which is one of the reasons I brought him here," his father Rick said.

"It's not cool, particularly, is it? And there's much less art in schools than there was 10 years ago. I think some parents want more of a focus on the things that get you a job, but some people lament the fact that there's less art and drama. I'm probably more in the latter camp."

Kate Jelley, a civil servant, was busy sketching a friend who was sketching St Martin-in-the-Fields.

"I read about this yesterday, love drawing, and haven't drawn for about a year," she said. "I used to draw a lot, but I just don't have the time now.

"You don't necessarily have the materials at hand and you just don't think about doing it, so it's nice when someone suggests it.

"It's a form of expression, but it's also really nice to capture a moment. I really like drawing people; sometimes you can start seeing more of someone's face by studying it."

Close by, painters aged between three and 70 were splashing watercolour paints on to black-and-white postcards of the square with brio. "I've been drawing all my life - since I was as small as the youngest of you - and it doesn't get boring," Quentin Blake, The Big Draw's patron, told an audience of tiny but remarkably attentive children.

"Lots of people don't draw in their lives, but when you're small you don't think about it; you do it. The first drawing you do is quite a complicated idea and yet you do it naturally.

"I still enjoy it and do it everyday... I hope everybody here has been doing some drawing - and will go on doing it."

Making of The Hay Wain

- John Constable took nearly five months to paint The Hay Wain in 1821
- Rolf Harris aimed to complete a recreation of the painting on a 30ft by 20ft canvas in Trafalgar Square
- The mass "draw-in" was part of Art on the Square, an event in which hundreds of professional and amateur artists of all ages took part in a range of art-inspired activities
- The Hay Wain is one of Britain's best-known paintings and features a country scene of a horse-drawn cart in Flatford, Suffolk
- The cottage and path along the river Stour shown in the painting are still much the same today as they were in Constable's time
- Constable (1776-1837) is considered one of England's greatest landscape painters
- The Hay Wain, on display in the National Gallery, is an example of the picturesque - viewing nature as if it were an infinite series of more or less well-composed subjects for painting
- Constable won a gold medal at the Paris Salon of 1824 for the painting

- Rolf Harris was named the world's most famous artist, with Constable coming in second in a UK poll in 1992
- The Australian TV presenter became famous for his large-scale cartoon drawings for television and for the classic pop hits Two Little Boys and Tie Me Kangaroo Down, Sport
- The fourth series of the popular TV series Rolf on Art will start on October 3
- Harris may be better known as an entertainer and singer but he originally came to the UK to study fine art
- He attended the City and Guilds art school in south London in the early 50s, has exhibited at the Royal Academy and National Gallery, and has received honorary membership from the Royal Society of British Artists