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Even in the drizzle, this L.A. arts event was a draw

Several dozen parents and children show up at the California African American Museum for Make Your Mark in the Park, part of The Big Draw LA.



Georgina Tlaxca, 7, center, and Mayra Moran, 17, right, work on a mural at Make Your Mark in the Park, a public arts event at the California African American Museum in Exposition Park. (Katie Falkenberg, For The Times / October 17, 2010)

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By Corina Knoll, Los Angeles Times
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The plan was for a scroll of white paper to stretch throughout Exposition Park. But cloudy skies and light showers Sunday prevented what was supposed to be a half-mile-long art canvas from extending farther than a canopy just outside the California African American Museum.

The cool, drizzly weather never fully cleared and probably won't for the next several days as a stalled low-pressure system continues to pull in moisture from the ocean, the National Weather Service said.

But the showers did not dampen the eagerness of several dozen parents and children who showed up at the museum for Make Your Mark in the Park, which was hosted by the Los Angeles-based Ryman Arts, an arts education program for teens. Wielding oil pastels, charcoal and graphite, participants

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quickly transformed empty space into a mural full of rainbows, palm trees, quotes and flowers.

"We're just being spontaneous," said Candice Cain, a theater costume designer who happened upon the event after visiting the adjacent California Science Center. "I'm trying to mirror for my daughter that drawing can happen anywhere, any time."

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As Cain set about sketching a tribal figure, her 9-year-old daughter, Hannah, concentrated on the outline of a

skateboard.

The event was part of The Big Draw LA, a citywide arts celebration throughout October that offers free or inexpensive opportunities for people to tap their creative talents. Assisted by a grant from the James Irvine Foundation, the month-long initiative was inspired by a program of the same name that began in the United Kingdom in 2000 and now takes place in 20 countries.

So far, the inaugural West Coast version has been going well, said Diane Brigham, executive director of Ryman Arts, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary. Interest has been strong in the family-oriented projects, which included glow-in-the-dark crayons illustrating an exhibit at the Skirball Cultural Center and adults-only "drink-and-draw" gatherings at an Irish pub. At the kickoff event, 400 people created a collage of plant materials at the Huntington Library in San Marino, using the lawn as a canvas.

Besides allowing people to collaborate artistically, the events offer many a chance to discover the artist within.

"People who think they can't draw might realize in doing one of these participatory events that we really all do use sketching of some sort to indicate our ideas, even if it's drawing on a napkin to show somebody how we're going to arrange the furniture," Brigham said.

Cecilia Ramirez of Carson wanted her two young children to participate in Sunday's mural because it was an opportunity for them to create something together. She also believes strongly in encouraging art as a form of communication.

"They need it to express their emotion," said Ramirez, 29. "When they feel sad or happy, they always draw something for me."

Other participants liked the idea that the artwork would be posted online as a scrolling panorama. And the concept of one group collaboration appealed to those who said they would usually steer clear of drawing.

"If I draw something horrible, I won't feel guilty," said Karlton Bontrager, 31.

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