

Ben Johnson
THE PEOPLE'S PANORAMA



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THE BACKGROUND

I have for the last 10 years concentrated the majority of my work into making large city panoramas. So far I have painted Hong Kong, Jerusalem and Zürich. Currently my studio is working on the largest and most complex painting to date – the commission by the National Museums of Liverpool of a Liverpool Cityscape to become an icon for the city and the celebrations in 2008 when Liverpool will be European Capital of Culture.

This painting will take 3 years for myself and 6 assistants. The drawing alone represents 4 years of full-time concentrated work for a single draughtsperson. Each building is analysed and reconstructed on an individual basis.

Given this intense and concentrated project spanning 36 months, when approached by The Big Draw to participate in this year's launch at Somerset House I took on the challenge of producing, in just a few days, a drawn panorama of London made by over a thousand people of all ages and from all walks of life.



THE PROJECT

I took a panoramic photograph of London from the top of Canary Wharf tower. This image was divided into 1280 squares measuring 3 inches or 76.2 mm each.

Each square was reproduced on the left hand side of an A4 sheet of paper. On the right hand side of the sheet was a blank square.

The idea was to draw with an HB pencil the image on the left hand side in the blank square on the right. (Some of the surrounding area was shown to help a little.)

Every drawing was then cut out of the A4 sheet and pasted in its correct position onto a panel to recreate the panorama as a drawing.

All participants received a stamped certificate.

After Somerset House the panorama moved to The Museum of London for four days and many contributors returned to see the work develop and reach its completion.

The project was made with huge enthusiasm. There was a great sense of concentration as people did their individual squares and then a sense of pride at being part of a collective experience. There was not one bad drawing among them and each was unique and special to the person that made it. Even the initially reluctant surprised themselves and many people's enthusiasm to do multiple squares had to be restrained. It truly is The People's Panorama.

Although the work is in my studio at the moment I am hoping it will reach the public realm where it may be able to be seen by a wider audience. Watch this space for the next stage in its progress.

