



Keith Haring

4th May 1958 – February 16th 1990

Keith Haring was an American pop artist who advocated for safe sex and AIDS awareness through his images. He was born in Reading Pennsylvania and raised in Kutztown, Pennsylvania. Haring drew from a young age, learning basic cartooning skills from his father, and was influenced by cartoons such as those by Walt Disney, Dr Seuss and Looney Tunes.

Haring studied at a commercial arts school, the Ivy School of Professional Art in Pittsburgh. He dropped out after two semesters when he realised that he had little interest in becoming a commercial graphic artist. He moved to New York City in 1978 where he found an alternative art community and enrolled in the School of Visual Arts. While he was a student he experimented with different art forms and continued to draw.

He became friends with fellow artists Kenny Scharf and Jean-Michel Basquiat, as well as the musicians, performance artists and graffiti writers that comprised the burgeoning art community. He was also inspired by artists Pierre Alechinsky and William Burroughs.

He started using advertising panels covered in black paper in subway museums as a way of sharing his art with a larger audience. Using white chalk, he created public drawings which New York commuters became familiar with. Haring produced hundreds of these public drawings in rapid rhythmic lines, sometimes creating as many as forty “subway drawings” in one day. This seamless flow of images became familiar to New York commuters, who often would stop to engage the artist when they encountered him at work.

In 1981, he had his first solo exhibition in New York at the Westbeth Painters Space. In the following year he made his Soho gallery debut at the Tony Shafrazi gallery. Over his career, his work was featured in over 100 solo and group exhibitions and was a sought-after artist.

Throughout his career, Haring devoted much of his time to public works, which often carried social messages. He produced more than 50 public artworks between 1982 and 1989, in dozens of cities around the world, many of which were created for charities, hospitals, children’s day care centres and orphanages. The now famous Crack is Wack mural of 1986 has become a landmark along New York’s FDR Drive. Other projects include; a mural created for the 100th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty in 1986, on which Haring worked with 900 children.

Haring opened the Pop Up shop in 1986 which sold multiple items with his images such as t-shirts and toys. More people were able to access his work at a low cost and was an extension of his work.

Haring was diagnosed with AIDS in 1988. A year later, he established the Keith Haring Foundation to provide funding to AIDS organisations. He also raised awareness about AIDS through his art.

He died on 16th February 1990 of AIDS related complications. Haring's signature style is still seen in fashion. His estate has collaborated with Adidas, Lacoste and UNIQLO, Supreme, Reebok, and Coach.

Image designed by Andrew Dobbin, Schools OUT UK

“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jnr.



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