

Artist Biography

Keith Haring

Childhood

American Pop artist Keith Haring was born on May 4, 1958, in Reading, Pennsylvania.

His parents, Allen and Joan Haring, raised him and his three sisters in Kutztown,

Pennsylvania. The oldest of all his siblings, Keith and his sisters all shared the letter “K” as their first initial. His sister’s names include Kay, Karen, and Kristen. As a child, Haring was fascinated by the cartoon art of [Walt Disney](#), [Charles Schultz](#), and the illustrations of [Dr. Seuss](#). It was from this that he developed a love for drawing at a very early age. Haring learned basic cartooning skills from his father who was an engineer with a hobby of cartooning. They would spend many hours drawing together.

Education

Haring attended Kutztown Area High School and graduated in 1976. Soon after, Haring enrolled in The Ivy School of Professional Art in Pittsburgh, which is a commercial arts school. He quickly realized that he had little interest in becoming a commercial graphic artist and after two semesters, Haring dropped out. Haring continued to study Art, working and traveling on his own for a while. In 1978, Haring had his first important



show at the [Pittsburgh Arts and Crafts Center](#). It was here that central elements to



Haring's signature style started to develop when he started using a visual vocabulary of small, abstract, interconnected shapes.

Later that same year, Haring ended up moving to New York City and enrolled in the School of Visual Arts ([SVA](#)). As a student at SVA, Haring experimented with performance, video, installation and collage, while always maintaining

a strong commitment to drawing. In New York, Haring found a thriving alternative art community that was developing outside of the gallery and museum systems. Located in the downtown streets, subways, clubs, and dance halls, Haring was immediately drawn to this art underworld. He became friends with fellow artists [Kenny Scharf](#) and [Jean-Michel Basquiat](#), as well as many local musicians, performance artists, and graffiti writers that comprised the up and coming art community in the area. Haring was swept up in the energy and spirit of this scene and began to organize and



participate in exhibitions and performances at Club 57 and other alternative venues. Haring didn't place value on the location that his art was exhibited. He wanted people of all kinds and

backgrounds to see and experience his work, making it even important for Haring to place his images in non-traditional settings, making his art accessible to all.

Early Artwork

As mentioned earlier, when Haring arrived in New York, it was all ready home to a thriving underground art scene. By befriending fellow emerging artists who shared his interest

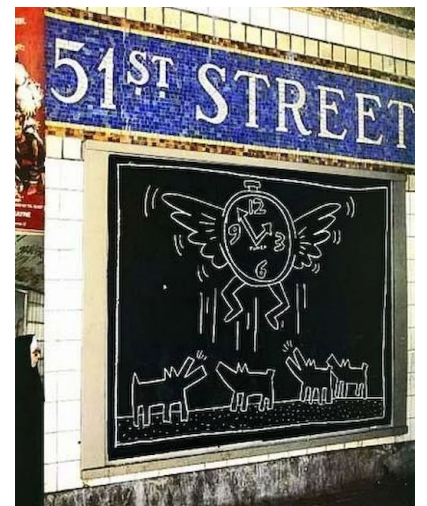


in colorful, boundary breaking graffiti art, Haring and these other artists organized



regular exhibitions at many alternative locations. Art, music and fashion all came together in a dynamic mix at these exhibits and soon Haring began using the city as his literal canvas. In 1980, while riding the subway one day, he noticed the black paper rectangles of empty advertising panels on train station walls and he came up with the idea to fill these spaces. Using white chalk, Haring drew on these black panels,

illustrating simple and quickly drawn pictures. His signature images included dancing figures, the *radiant baby*, a barking dog, flying saucer, large hearts, and figures with televisions for heads. These graffiti drawings attracted the attention of thousands of New York commuters, as well as the city





authorities. Between 1980 and 1985, Haring produced hundreds of these public drawings in rapid rhythmic lines, sometimes creating as many as forty subway drawings in one day. Haring was even arrested several times for vandalism but this never deterred him from

continuing his work on these public platforms. The subway became a “laboratory” for working out Haring’s ideas and experimenting with his simple lines. He believed in the independence of the artist and it was because of this, Haring was able to push his own kind of graphic expression based on the simplicity of *line*. Inspired by [Andy Warhol’s](#) unique fusion of art and life, Haring was determined to devote his career to creating truly public art and persisted with his work.

Success and Acclaim

Haring soon began to apply his universally recognizable imagery to freestanding drawings and paintings. The energy and optimism of his art, with its bold lines and bright colors, brought him popularity with a wide audience. He had his first formal solo exhibition in 1981, at the [Westbeth Painters Space in Manhattan](#). In 1982 he began to show his art at the [Tony Shafrazi Gallery](#), which would represent him for the rest of his career. Throughout the 1980s, Haring's work was exhibited widely both within the

United States and internationally. He also collaborated with other big name artists and performers, including Andy Warhol, Grace Jones and William S. Burroughs.



Always wanting to make his art more accessible, Haring opened a retail store called the Pop Shop in New York City's SoHo neighborhood in 1986. The shop sold posters, t-shirts, toys, buttons, and magnets bearing his images. Haring considered the

shop to be an extension of his work and painted the entire interior of the store in an abstract black on white mural, creating a striking and unique retail environment. The shop was intended to allow people greater access to his work, which was now readily available on products at a low cost. The shop received criticism from many in the art world, however Haring remained committed to his desire to make his artwork available to as wide an audience as possible and continued to offer affordable items featuring Haring's signature designs.



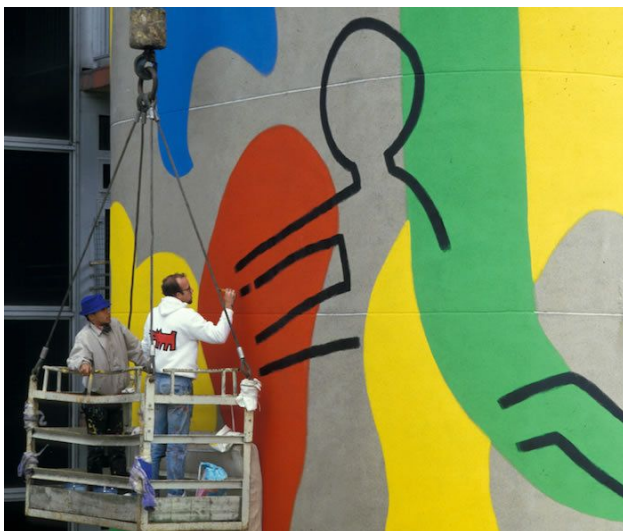
Throughout his career, Haring devoted much of his time to public works, which often carried social messages. He produced more than 50 public artworks between 1982

and 1989, in dozens of cities around the world, many of which were created for



charities, hospitals, children’s day care centers and orphanages. He also hosted numerous art workshops for children. The now famous “Crack is Wack” mural of 1986 has become a landmark along New York’s FDR Drive. Other projects included a mural created for the 100th

anniversary of the Statue of Liberty in 1986, on which Haring worked with over 900 children! In 1987, Necker Children’s Hospital had Haring create a mural painted on the western side of the Berlin Wall three years before its fall in Paris, France. These are just some of the notable public murals Haring had created.



Haring also held drawing workshops for children in schools and museums in New York, Amsterdam, London, Tokyo and Bordeaux, and produced imagery for many literacy programs and other public service campaigns. This all

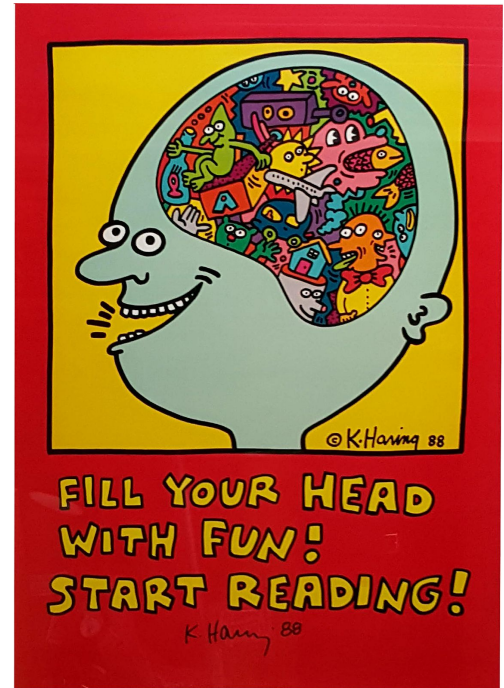
ties back to Haring’s personal philosophy of making his art accessible to everyone

around the world. By being accessible and willing to share his work and techniques with those around him, it launched Haring's career into success very quickly. Children really loved the colorful, graphic quality of his work while adults who normally may have been intimidated by art found it approachable and fun to look at.

Death and Legacy

Haring was diagnosed with AIDS in 1988. Despite this in 1989, he established the [Keith Haring Foundation](#) to provide funding and imagery to AIDS organizations and children's programs. This foundation also expanded the audience for Haring's work through multiple exhibitions, publications, and the licensing of his images. Haring used his own artwork and imagery during the last years of his life to speak about his own illness and generate activism and awareness about AIDS.

Although brief, Haring's intense career spanned all throughout the 1980's. His work was featured in over 100 solo and group exhibitions. In 1986 alone, he was the subject of more than 40 newspaper and magazine articles. He was highly sought after to participate in collaborative projects ,and worked with artists and performers as diverse as Madonna, Grace Jones, Bill T. Jones, William Burroughs, Timothy Leary, Jenny Holzer, Yoko Ono and Andy Warhol. By expressing universal concepts of birth, death,



love, and war, using the simplicity of a line and directness of message, Haring was able to attract a wide audience and assure his imagery would be around forever. Haring's work has become a universally recognized visual language of the 20th century.

Sadly, Keith Haring died of AIDS related complications at the age of 31 on February 16, 1990. A memorial service was held on May 4, 1990 at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, with over 1,000 people in attendance. Since his death, Haring's work still continues to be on display today in many exhibitions and collections of major museums, as well as throughout the streets around the world. This includes locations including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, France. Haring's art, with its deceptively simple style and its deeper themes of love, death, war and social harmony, continues to appeal strongly to viewers.

Resources:

"Bio." Keith Haring Foundation. 1997-2020. Available from: <http://www.haring.com/!/about-haring/bio#.XppRWezYo3E>. Accessed on April 17, 2020.

"Intro to Keith Haring." YouTube. Amy Markham. Available from: <https://youtu.be/-QWL60HoUOQ>. January 27, 2018. Accessed on April 17, 2020.

"Keith Haring Bio." The Magnificent Paintbrush. Available from: https://youtu.be/Z7SnDuPX_JA. March 16, 2020. Accessed on April 17, 2020.

"Keith Haring Biography." Biography.com. A&E Television Networks. Available from: <https://www.biography.com/artist/keith-haring>. April 2, 2014. Accessed on April 17, 2020.

"From 1982: Keith Haring." CBS Sunday Morning. Available from: <https://youtu.be/8Nscsx9NldA>. September 25, 2016. Accessed on September 13, 2020.

"Keith Haring Documentary." Public Delivery. March 31, 2019. Available from: <https://youtu.be/Mrhk7UYq59o>. Accessed on September 13, 2020.