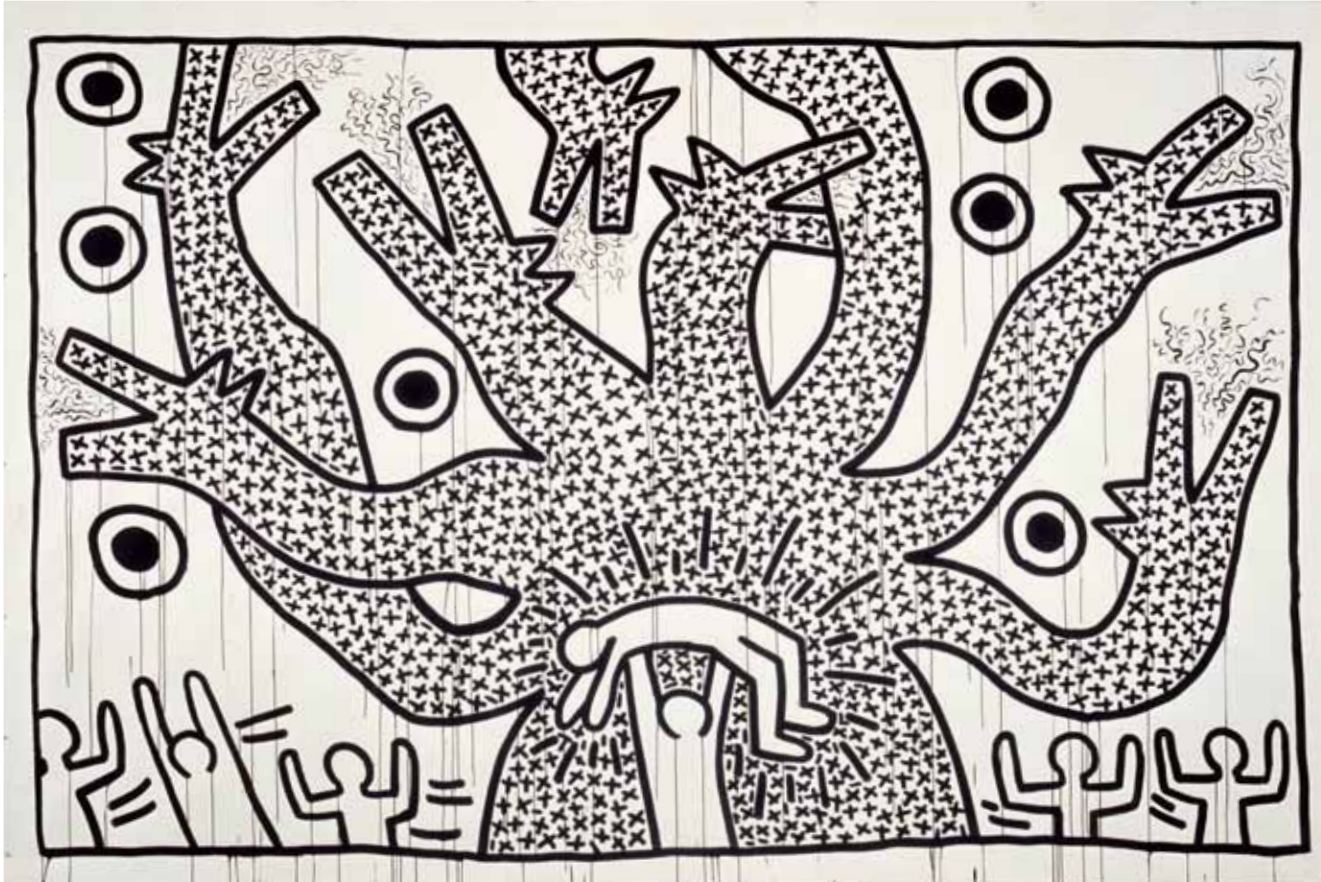


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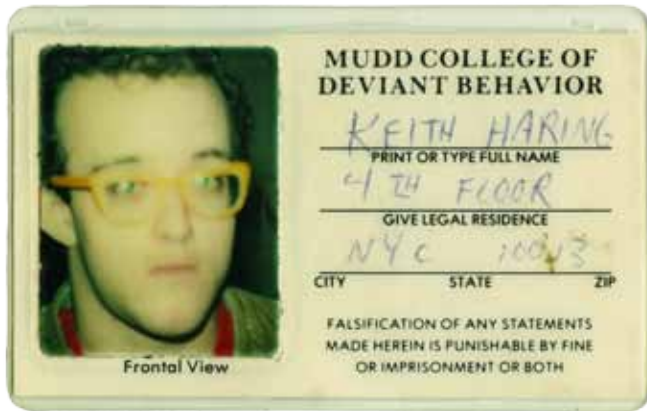
Teacher Resource Packet

Keith Haring: 1978–1982

March 16–July 8, 2012



Keith Haring: 1978–1982



About the Artist

Keith Haring (American, 1958–1990) was an artist who created works with social, political, and cultural commentary intended to appeal to a broad audience. His work spans many disciplines, including painting, video, performance, graphic art, and public art, but is rooted in his commitment to drawing.

As a child, Haring shared his father's interest in cartooning and studied illustrators such as Dr. Seuss and Walt Disney in order to create his own characters and stories. In 1978 he left his home in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, to enroll in the School of Visual Arts in New York City. Haring found a thriving alternative art community in New York and became friends with visual artists, musicians, performance artists, and graffiti artists. He began to experiment with the relationship between negative and positive space and to discover the communicative power of line, developing a visual vocabulary of figures and abstract images that would reappear throughout his works. In an effort to affect sociopolitical change and make art accessible to everyone, he created imagery that represented universal concepts such as birth, death, love, war, and relationships. Though Haring died from AIDS-related complications in 1990, his work continues to permeate popular culture in museums, public spaces, and fashion.

About the Exhibition

Keith Haring: 1978–1982 explores the period in Haring's career from his arrival in New York City through the years when he started his studio practice and began making public and socially conscious art on the city's streets. The exhibition traces the development of his extraordinary visual vocabulary through the display of some 180 works on paper, numerous experimental videos, and more than 150 archival objects, including rarely seen sketchbooks, journals, exhibition flyers, posters, subway drawings, and documentary photographs.

Haring immersed himself in New York's flourishing avant-garde and quickly became a fixture on the downtown artistic scene, befriending artists Jean-Michel Basquiat and Kenny Scharf as well as many of the most innovative cultural figures of the period. The exhibition examines the role these relationships played in his development as a public artist and facilitator of group exhibitions and performances.

Description of the Artwork

A thick, black rectangular line a few inches from the edge of the paper forms a frame for this scene. Seven human figures drawn with simple contour lines occupy the bottom of the image.

The border crops six of the figures at mid-waist. Five of them stand with their arms raised, and several are flanked by short lines suggesting motion.

In the center of the drawing, one figure lifts another, which is also flanked by short lines. Behind these figures, the composition is dominated by a creature with seven elongated necks and doglike heads. The creature is covered with hundreds of small X marks. Each head has two triangular ears and a long, rectangular open mouth that expels short, swirling, smoke-like lines. The repeated motif of one circle inscribed within another appears between the creature's limbs and the border. The entire image is punctuated by thin vertical lines of dripped sumi ink.



About the Artwork

Haring completed this drawing in 1982. Although he was only twenty-four, he had already gained international attention for works inspired by Abstract Expressionism, graffiti, and cartooning. On March 18 of that year he wrote in his journal:

I think I was born an artist. I think I have a responsibility to live up to that. I've spent my life up to this point trying to find out just what that responsibility is. I learned from studying other artists' lives and studying the world. Now I live in New York City, which I believe to be the center of the world. My contribution to the world is my ability to draw. I will draw as much as I can for as many people as I can for as long as I can. Drawing is still basically the same as it has been since prehistoric times. It brings together man and the world. It lives through magic.¹

Haring was a prolific artist and used a range of materials, including ink, acrylic paint, chalk, and permanent marker to draw on a variety of surfaces such as paper, canvas, walls, and even the human body. He developed a visual vocabulary that he used over and over again: thick bold lines that create borders and shapes, outlined figures surrounded by short lines suggestive of movement, and contrasting negative and positive space. The delicate, carefully rendered smoke swirls and lines of dripped ink work are unique in his work.

Haring provided little contextual information about his drawings and invited viewers to develop their own interpretations. He once wrote, "The viewer creates the reality, the meaning, the conception of the piece. . . . I have created a reality that is not complete until it is met with the ideas of another human being."²

¹Keith Haring, Shepard Fairey, and Robert Farris Thompson. *Keith Haring Journals* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 102.

²Ibid.

Questions for Looking

Look carefully at this artwork. What word would you use to describe it? What did you see to inspire your word choice?

A line is a mark with length and direction. Haring understood that the movement, direction, and length of a line help to tell a story. What types of lines appear in this drawing?

Many of Haring's artworks contain figures, abstract patterns, or a combination of the two. What types of abstract patterns appear in this drawing? How does the artist combine the abstract patterns and figures?

Haring's visual vocabulary reappears in many of his artworks. It includes contour line drawings that may represent people, things, actions, and mood. Once asked if his images came from dreams, Haring replied:

I don't really get things specifically from my dreams... It's more an awareness of universal images which I digest and put in my own series of explanations and definitions. I reorder things with my own imagination. I try as much as possible to let the drawings happen by themselves. I become a vessel for this information, for this kind of magic, the spirit that flows through me and creates this thing.³

What universal images might have inspired this drawing? What parts of the drawing seem imaginary?

Describe the figures. What do they appear to be doing? What type of relationship do they have?

What is going on in this scene? How would you describe the mood of the artwork?

What may have happened just before this scene? What might happen next?

³www.haring.com/archives/interviews/couderc.html

Activities

Visual Art/Social Studies

Haring devoted much of his career to public works, which often carried social messages. For example, in 1986 he painted a mural on the western side of the Berlin Wall, the barrier between East and West Germany. "I decided on a subject," he wrote, "which is a continuous interlocking chain of human figures, who are connected at their hands and their feet—the chain obviously representing the unity of people as against the idea of the wall. I paint this in the colors of the German flag—black, red and yellow."⁴

Research a historic or current event that interests you. Make a list of individuals, groups, dates, actions, terms, and objects involved in the story. Select up to four of the most important items from your list and design one image or symbol for each. Draw your designs on separate index cards. Try simplifying and condensing your shapes as Haring did, to make them clearly readable. Now use this visual vocabulary to create an artwork. Place your index cards under a clear transparency sheet and experiment with the arrangement. Use a marker to trace the images onto the transparency sheet. Move the index cards if you want to repeat any items. Remove the cards from beneath the transparency sheet and use clear tape to mount your artwork to a sheet of white paper. Finally, share your artwork and discuss what your drawing reveals about your chosen historical or current event.

Language Arts

Haring wanted people to develop their own interpretations of his artwork. Use creative writing to explore Haring's imaginative use of imagery. Select an artwork by Haring and make a list of your observations. Use descriptive language to identify the shapes, figures, images, movement, and mood. If the artwork includes any characters, you may choose to name them. Imagine and describe what these characters might hear and smell. Imagine what may have taken place before and after this moment. Write a short story that incorporates your observations of the artwork and your own imagination.

Language Arts/Performance Art (For older students)

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Haring kept extensive journals in which he drew, wrote, and collaged, recording his responses to the world and generating new works of art. Follow keithharing.tumblr.com for daily pages from these journals. Explore excerpts to learn more about the artist and reflect on his ideas and emotions.

Read one of the following entries: Election Day, November 7, 1978; May 4, 1982; Memorial Day 1977; April 29, 1977. (Note: Teachers are advised to preview these journal entries.) Consider the following discussion questions: What issue or question does Haring reflect upon? What does Haring reveal about his work or career? How would you describe his mood?

Share your responses as a dramatic monologue. Determine whether or not you will use props or additional characters. Consider how your gesture, facial expression, intonation, and volume can help convey Haring's journal entry.

Resources

www.haring.com

This website, maintained by the Keith Haring Foundation, includes an art database, archives, and biographical information. Note: Some of these exhibitions contain artwork of a sexually explicit nature. Teachers are advised to preview the website.

www.haringkids.com

This website, also maintained by the Keith Haring Foundation, is designed specifically for children. Features include an interactive coloring book, games, and artworks for young viewers. A lesson plan database for early childhood to teens is also included.

Flint, Lucy, ed. *Keith Haring: 1978–1982*. Cincinnati: Contemporary Arts Center, 2010.

This is the companion catalogue to the exhibition *Keith Haring: 1978–1982*. It features color images of works from the exhibition and essays by Raphaela Platow, Synne Genzmer, Pedro Alonzo, and Bill Arning.

Haring, Keith. *Journals*. New York: Penguin Books, 2010.

This book provides insight into the work and life of Keith Haring through his collected journals from 1977 through 1989. Introduction by Robert Farris Thompson and foreword by Shepard Fairey.

www.nytimes.com/1986/10/24/arts/keith-haring-paints-mural-on-berlin-wall.html
New York Times article about Haring's painting on the Berlin Wall.

⁴keithharingfoundationarchives.wordpress.com/2009/11/09/794/

Keith Haring: 1978–1982 is curated by Raphaela Platow. The exhibition is co-organized by the Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati and the Kunsthalle Wien. The Brooklyn presentation is organized by Tricia Laughlin Bloom, Project Curator, and Patrick Amsellem, former Associate Curator of Photography, Brooklyn Museum.

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This packet was written by Keonna Hendrick and Maya Valladares, Senior Museum Educators, with assistance from Alexa Fairchild, School Programs Manager, and Tricia Laughlin Bloom, Project Curator.

Cover, pages 2,6: Keith Haring (American, 1958–1990). *Untitled*, 1982. Sumi ink on paper, 107 x 208 in. (271.8 x 528.3 cm). Collection Keith Haring Foundation. © Keith Haring Foundation

Page 2: Keith Haring (American, 1958–1990). *Mudd Club ID*. Ink on paper, 2 x 3¼ in. (5.1 x 8.3 cm). Collection Keith Haring Foundation. © Keith Haring Foundation



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