

KEITH HARING - a biography

Keith Haring was an outstanding artist and social activist. Born on May 4, 1958, in Reading, Pennsylvania, he grew up in Kutztown, Pennsylvania. His love for drawing developed at a very early age, learning basic cartooning skills from his father and being interested in people like Walt Disney. After graduation from high school in 1976, he studied graphic design at The Ivy School of Professional Art, a commercial and fine art school in Pittsburgh. He soon realized that he did not want to become a commercial graphic artist, so, after two semesters, he dropped out and continued to study on his own. In 1978 he had a solo exhibition of his work at the Pittsburgh Arts and Crafts Center and then moved to New York City where he enrolled in the School of Visual Arts (SVA).

For Haring New York City was thrilling and inspiring. Here he found a fascinating alternative art community in the downtown streets, the subways, the clubs and former dance halls. Haring became friends with other artists as well as musicians, performance artists and graffiti writers. He was also deeply impressed by the work of the French painter Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985), a representative of naïve art. Following Andy Warhol's idea of the perfect fusion of art and life, Haring decided for himself to create truly public art.



Keith Haring, *Radiant Baby*, 1990. (©The Keith Haring Foundation, New York, 2007)

So Haring did not only concentrate on drawing but also experimented with performance, video, installation and collage. In 1980 he found a highly effective medium: the subway. He began to create drawings in white chalk on black advertising boards throughout the subway. The subway became, as Haring said, a laboratory for working out his ideas and experimenting with his simple lines.

Between 1980 and 1986 Haring received international recognition. After his first popular exhibition at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery in New York, he took part in many group and solo exhibitions such as the Times Square Exhibition in New York or Documenta 7 in Kassel, Germany, the Sao Paulo Biennale and the Whitney Biennale.

Keith Haring also completed a great number of public projects such as designing sets for theatres, developing watch designs for Swatch or creating murals worldwide, like the ones he created for the 100th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty, on which Haring worked with 900 children. He also painted on the Berlin Wall three years before its fall.

Many of Haring's public artworks carried social messages, such as the now famous "Crack is Wack" mural in New York. He often worked for charities, hospitals, children's day care centres and orphanages and held drawing workshops for children in schools and museums.

In 1986 Haring opened the Pop Shop, a retail store in Soho selling T-shirts, toys, posters, buttons and magnets with his images at a low price. Haring wanted this shop to be part of his work, too, and painted all the rooms in an abstract black on white mural. So the shop offered and presented his artwork to a wide audience. For this reason he was criticised by many in the art world, but his friends, fans and mentors like Andy Warhol supported him.

During his career Haring often worked together with artists and performers like Madonna, Grace Jones and Andy Warhol.

Haring was diagnosed with AIDS in 1988. In 1989 he established the Keith Haring Foundation to support AIDS organizations and children's programmes. He died of AIDS related complications at the age of 31 on February 16, 1990.

Today, the work of Keith Haring can be seen in the exhibitions and collections of famous museums around the world.

**Andy Warhol (1928-1987) was an American artist associated with the definition of Pop Art. During the 1960s he began to make paintings of famous American products such as Campbell's Soup Cans and Coca-Cola, as well of celebrities like Marilyn Monroe. Warhol produced his paintings serially, seeking to mass produce the art itself. His work quickly became very popular. He gathered around himself a wide range of artists, writers and musicians.*

Annotations

skill	ability
graduation	successful final exam
commercial	with the aim of making a profit (kommerziell)
to enrol in	anmelden
thrilling	exciting
downtown	in the centre of a city
fusion	Vereinigung, Verschmelzung
to receive	get
recognition	Anerkennung
set	(here) Bühnenbild
mural	Mauer, Wand, -painting = Wandgemälde
wacky	crazy
charity	Wohlfahrtseinrichtung
orphanage	home for children whose parents are dead
retail store	Einzelhandelsgeschäft
audience	Publikum
related	connected with

Working with the text

Read the text and answer the following questions!

- *Why was it so easy for Haring to develop his love for drawing at an early age?*
- *Why did he go to New York and what made this city so fascinating?*
- *What projects did he work for?*
- *Why did Haring open a retail store?*

Discuss: Would you call Keith Haring a "social activist"?

If you are really interested in Keith Haring, consult the Internet for further information. Here are the addresses: <http://www.haring.com> and <http://www.haringkids.com>.

Choose your favourite Keith Haring picture, print it out and describe it in English.