Keith Haring Biography

Keith Haring was born in Reading, Pennsylvania on 4 May, 1958. He developed an early interest in drawing and by the time he graduated from high school, knew he wanted to be an artist.

Keith studied commercial art at the Ivy School in Pittsburgh in 1976 before moving to New York City in 1978 to attend the School of Visual Arts (SVA). He was fascinated by the street art scene he discovered there and soon began experimenting with the distinct and bold graphic line work that was to become his trademark style.

In various biographies, Keith is remembered as an exuberant individual with a passionate zest for life. In New York, he found a thriving alternative art community that was developing outside the gallery and museum system, in the downtown streets, the subways and spaces in clubs and former dance halls. Here 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. Keith 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.

As a student at SVA, Keith experimented with performance, video, installation and collage, while always maintaining a strong commitment to drawing. In 1980 he began to create drawings in white chalk upon blank paper panels that covered unused advertising panels throughout the subway system. This highly effective medium allowed him to communicate with the wider audience he so desperately desired to connect with. Between 1980 and 1985, Keith 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. The subway became, as Keith said, a "laboratory" for working out his ideas and experimenting with his simple lines.

During Keith's brief life, his work was exhibited in over 100 solo and group shows including renowned international survey exhibitions such as Documenta 7 in Kassel; the São Paulo Biennial; and the Whitney Biennial. He completed numerous public projects in the first half of the 80's as well, ranging from an animation for the *Spectacolor* billboard in Times Square, designing sets and backdrops for theaters and clubs, developing watch designs for Swatch and an advertising campaign for Absolut vodka.

Throughout his career, Keith also 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. The most famous included: the 1982 mural at Houston Street and Bowery in New York; the 1984 murals at Collingwood Technical College, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia; the 1986 Crack is Whack mural at 128th Street and 2nd Avenue in Harlem; the 1987 Necker Children's Hospital mural in Paris; the 1987 Tony Dapolito (formerly Carmine Street) Recreation Center mural in New York's West Village; and the 1989 Tuttomundo mural commissioned by the City of Pisa, Italy.

In April 1986 Keith opened the Pop Shop in SoHo, a retail store selling reproductions of his artwork on t-shirts, badges, toys, magnets, posters and more. He 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.

Keith is also remembered as a generous individual who volunteered his time, skills and finances to numerous causes. The concerns of underprivileged children's organisations as well as AIDS and HIV-related charities were especially important to him. Keith set up the *Keith Haring Foundation* in 1989 to oversee his charitable contributions to society and to maintain the integrity of his artistic legacy and archives. He personally appointed over half of the board members who serve on the *Keith Haring Foundation* today.

Keith worked rigorously until his early death from an AIDS-related illness on 16 February 1990. He was 31 years old. Keith left a lasting impression on the world. He broke down barriers and made people rethink how art is seen and what can be perceived as art. Keith Haring was a remarkable artist who in his short life connected with the masses, pushed the boundaries of the art world and created a lineage of works that celebrated life.

Visit www.haring.com/about_haring/bio/index.html for more information on Keith Haring.