

**SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE CONFLICT SURROUNDING THE KEITH
HARING MURAL IN MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA
also known as the “Collingwood Mural”**

The matter of the deteriorated mural has been brought to my attention by both my professional colleagues, the conservators in Australia who are trying to preserve the original materials of the mural, and by Julia Gruen, the Executive Director of the Keith Haring Foundation.

I am aware of the polarized nature of the response to the current condition of the mural. It is clear that all parties involved are interested in preserving the legacy of Keith Haring for the future. There are, however, two dramatically different approaches to achieving that goal.

I have not been asked to contribute my opinion officially, but I submit this document in the belief that a mutually respectful solution is possible.

**MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE CURRENT SITUATION AND THE
OPTIONS PRESENTED**

The traditional conservation approach to preserving the materials of the artist is based upon a concern that, should the mural be obliterated by another layer of paint, it will be gone forever. This scenario would eliminate any possible future intervention should the hoped-for day arrive when technology would allow our descendants to revive the original materials of the artist in a visually acceptable manner.

The non-traditional response to the sorry visual state of the mural is to create a fresh new one on top of the old one. This approach is based on an emotional response to the spirit of the artist and the original intent of the mural as a vital and attractive asset to the neighborhood (and by extension, Australia, and the world).

My understanding of the physical state of the various layers of paint, and the wall upon which they were applied, is that applying additional layers of paint over the existing ones, despite the care with which they have been consolidated to date, is simply not possible. “Inherent vice” in the original structure (which involves various factors of incompatibility) would contribute to the ongoing deterioration of any additional layers. In order to “repaint” the mural in any lasting manner, one would effectively have to scrape down the wall to the brick and start over.

AN OPTION THAT WOULD RESPECT BOTH POINTS OF VIEW

- Preserve the original painting in the manner suggested by Mr. Thorn and the other conservation experts who have provided their expertise in keeping it from disappearing thus far;
- Construct a wall of durable, and rigid, but ideally light-weight, materials in front of the mural, allowing for a work space behind it that will allow access to the original for maintenance, and for possible treatment in the future. Working with architects and

engineers, such a wall could roll, or fold, or open on hinges to allow for access to the original mural behind it;

- Replicate the mural on the new wall, using materials suggested by conservators and other professionals qualified to ensure its durability;
- Consider options of renewing the surface at regular intervals, as a community project, or as an art event.

[An alternative to the above scenario could feature a new wall built to the side of the original, which would allow continued exposure of the old mural, but this seems to create a more academic “before/after” study than a joyous community atmosphere.]

In my opinion, the only thing that would be lost by painting the original design of the mural on a new wall, in virtually the original location, would be the “brick-ness” of the support.

If the mission of the Keith Haring Foundation is indeed to preserve the legacy of the artist, then the long view of posterity must be considered for the future. Which is not to say that he cannot also be enjoyed in the present.

Respectfully submitted on 13 July 2011

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