

## Background

A rising star in the international art world, American artist Keith Haring visited Australia in 1984 on the invitation of John Buckley, the inaugural director of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

During his three-week visit Haring created a number of temporary works including a mural on the National Gallery of Victoria's waterwall and a wall work in the Art Gallery of New South Wales' foyer. He spent time with many local artists and designers, and created a number of responsive works including small graffiti pieces along the Yarra River and a body art work for the Melbourne Fashion Festival. Haring also created a small body of paintings which were exhibited at ACCA on its opening.

Of all the works made by Haring while in Australia, only one work was intended to be permanently sited in a public space and this was the outdoor mural painted at the Collingwood Technical College in inner city Melbourne. Organised by Buckley, Haring painted this mural in one day in front of an audience of students and local residents. Captured with Haring's typical bold and energetic use of colour and line, its pictorial content includes a giant worm with a computer monitor for a brain positioned above a cast of dancing figures.

More than 25 years later, this mural is now a shadow of its former self with a bleached pallor that has overcome Haring's signature sensibility of life and vitality. Located on the exterior of a building which has remained vacant for the past decade, it has received no regular maintenance or conservation treatment despite being registered with the Victorian Heritage Council. Due to years of neglect by the owners of the site (the Victorian Government) the mural has receded into the background of the Collingwood streetscape and now exists as a skeleton of its former self.

Recently, steps have been undertaken to develop the old Collingwood Technical College into a home for Circus Oz and other organisations. It is wonderful that the site will soon be reinvigorated and active. As part of the proposed development, the Victorian Government, along with Arts Victoria, has commissioned a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) that encompasses the site and the mural. This plan proposes spending 1 million dollars of taxpayers money on stabilising the Haring mural in its current neglected state.

Supported by the Arts Minister and Arts Victoria, this plan directly contravenes the stated wishes of the Keith Haring Foundation, which was established by the artist before his death to represent his interests. The Foundation have publicly stated that they wish to see the mural returned to the people of Collingwood through its re-painting. They do not believe Haring would have agreed nor wanted to see an excess of money spent on preserving the mural in its neglected state. This position is consistent with the treatment of other Haring murals throughout the world, which have also been repainted with the Haring Foundation's guidance. Importantly, Arts Victoria's plans for the Melbourne mural also disregard recommendations made by members of the national and international contemporary arts community who advocate for the artist's wishes to be upheld and respected in any decisions made about the livelihood of his work.