Artist Resources – Keith Haring (American, 1958-1990)

The Keith Haring Foundation: biography, essays and press, interviews, artworks

In 1980 *Rolling Stone* interviewed Haring while the artist was at work on a 500 ft mural with high school students in Chicago. Haring discusses his upbringing and education, relationships with Andy Warhol and Jean-Michele Basquiat, and AIDS crisis and his relationship with the disease. Speaking of his symbolic pictorial language, Haring remembers "trying to figure out where this stuff came from, but I have no idea. It just grew into this group of drawings. I was thinking about these images as symbols, as a vocabulary of things…Suddenly it made sense to draw on the street, because I had something to say."

In addition to subway drawings, paintings, public sculpture, and art activism, Haring was a prolific muralist.

Haring, 1986 at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
Photograph: Nationaal Archief

Haring, 1984, Photograph: Stuart William Macgladrie/Fairfax Media via Getty Images

Haring speaks about his subway drawings in a brief interview for a local tv program in 1983 while at work on a mural for the Marquette University Campus in Milwaukee, on the construction site for the Haggerty Museum.

New York Times review of the first retrospective of Haring's work in a major museum in the U.S., curated by Eilsabeth Sussman, at the Whitney Museum of American Art

The Guardian remembered Haring's "radical joy" in 2019 with a profile celebrating his consistent relevance, and a collection of memories from fellow artists and friends. "He was unique," explains Carlos Rodriguez, a graffiti artist who worked with Haring. "The vernacular of his art was so appealing, with a quality of entertainment. But it was also a tremendous, beautiful response to the activism of the time… the really unusual thing about Keith is that he felt he could be of service."

Artist Karey Maurice Counts looks back on his friendship with Haring and celebrates an enduring influence in conjunction with Haring's first retrospective in the UK, at Tate Liverpool.

Keith Haring (American, 1958-1990)
Untitled (Three Dancing Figures), Version C, 1989
Painted aluminum

Private Collection; L2026:67.1

"I think public sculpture should aggressively alter our perception of the environment in a positive way." – Keith Haring

Born and raised in Pennsylvania, Keith Haring moved to New York in 1978 and quickly became a prominent figure in the urban subcultures of the city. His iconic style of simplified, child-like figures and primary colors were inspired by his surroundings and often charged with activist or political themes. **Untitled (Three Dancing Figures), Version C** captures the energy of club culture in 1980s New York. Created in the midst of the AIDS crisis (and just one year before Haring's AIDS-related death), the sculpture is a radical statement of joy in an era marked by grief.

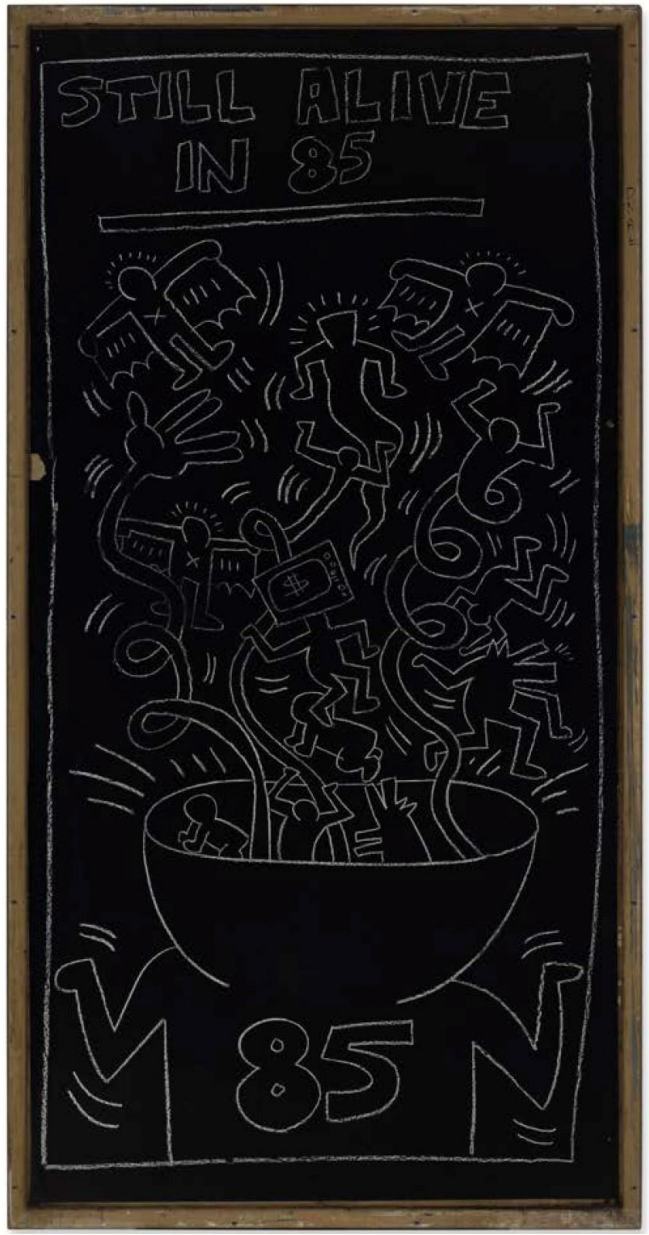
On view October 14, 2026 – February 8, 2027

Keith Haring (American, 1958-1990)
Untitled (Grace Jones Mask), 1987
Enamel on aluminum

Private Collection; L2026:49.1

Keith Haring moved to New York City in the late 1970s and burst into the subcultures of hip-hop, urban graffiti, and the conceptual slip between “high” and “low” art. His short but prolific career made a major impact on contemporary art, and his work continues to inspire artists today. **Untitled (Grace Jones Mask)** is part of a rare series of large-scale masks that Haring created in 1987. Drawing from modern art’s fascination with African masks and other cultural objects, Haring puts himself in conversation with 20th century masters such as Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Constantin Brâncuşi. At the same time, he makes the work his own, with bright mint green color and his signature line drawing design.

On view August 12 – November 20, 2026

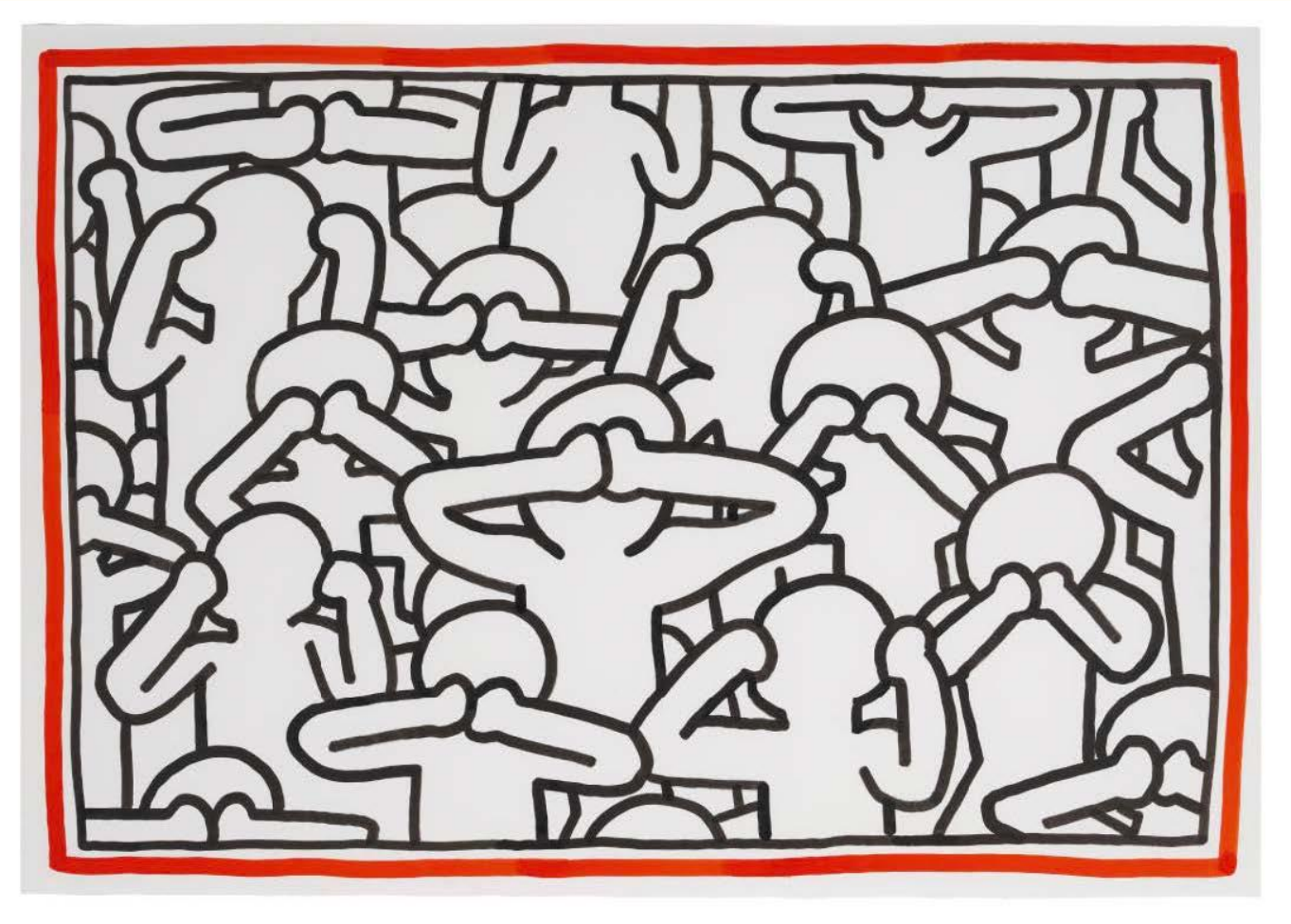


Keith Haring (American, 1958-1990)
Untitled (Still Alive in '85), 1985
Chalk on 3 joined sheets of black paper on original MTA mount

Private Collection, Los Angeles; L2024:117.1

Keith Haring moved to New York City in the late 1970s, where he became immersed in the emerging subculture of hip-hop and urban graffiti. The artist began creating works in subways, taking advantage of the blank sheets of black paper pasted over unsold advertising spaces by the Metropolitan Transit Authority. **Untitled (Still Alive in '85)** is one of the largest and most significant subway drawings from this time. Haring's iconic figures tumble out of a shrugging body representing the year 1985. The artist's insistence on being "still alive" is a statement of resilience and protest in the face of the spiraling AIDS crisis, political turmoil, and Reagan-era conservatism. The artist said: "In this underground environment, one can often feel a sense of oppression and struggle in the vast assortment of faces. It is in this context that an expression of hope and beauty carries the greatest rewards."

On view March 12 – June 15, 2025



Keith Haring (American, 1958-1990)
Untitled, 1988
Sumi ink and gouache on paper

Private Collection, Los Angeles; L2023:139.1

Keith Haring's deceptively simple line drawings emerged from his connection to the graffiti and urban subcultures of 1980s New York. His iconic style of thick black lines, bright primary colors, and simplified figures was often charged with activist and political themes. **Untitled** takes inspiration from the Buddhist parable "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" to advocate for AIDS education and discussion. Haring used the motif many times, particularly for the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) campaign, which equated ignorance and silence about the AIDS crisis to the fear and death experienced by his community. Tragically, the artist himself died of AIDS-related complications only two years later. As the artist once said: "I'm sure that what will live on after I die is important enough to make sacrifices of my personal luxury and leisure time. Work is all I have and art is more important than life."

On view March 27 – June 30, 2024

Keith Haring (American, 1958-1990)
Untitled, 1988
Gouache and sumi ink on paper

Private Collection; L2023:142.1

On view January 24 – April 28, 2024

Keith Haring (American, 1958-1990)
Hiroshima Project, 1989
Ink on paper

Private Collection; L2023:118.1

Keith Haring moved to New York in 1978, where he became immersed in the emerging hip-hop and urban graffiti subculture. His short but prolific career is defined by his iconic black-and-white line drawing style with simplified figures and shapes. In 1988, Haring traveled to Japan to open an iteration of his “Pop Shop,” which sold accessories, posters, shirts, and other items designed by the artist. **Hiroshima Project** was painted after a visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and site of the first atomic bomb. Haring was inspired to incorporate Hiroshima as a subject into his anti-war, anti-apartheid, and other political works. The artist wrote in his journal: “Who could ever want this to happen again? To anyone? The frightening thing is that people debate and discuss the arms race as if they were playing with toys. All of these men should have to come here, not to a bargaining table in some safe European country.”

On view November 29, 2023 – March 3, 2024

Keith Haring (American, 1958-1990)
Untitled, 1988
Marker on paper

Private Collection, Los Angeles; L2021:140.3

Jean-Michel Basquiat, George Condo, and Keith Haring are three of the most influential artists who pioneered the Neo-Expressionist movement in 1980s New York. In addition to strong friendships, they greatly respected each other's work and often collaborated. Condo later reflected on his friendship with Basquiat: "We basically hung out as artists all the time and would meet up in different parts of the world and get smashed and go out and pull pranks on everyone." Tragically, Basquiat died in 1988 at the young age of twenty-seven. Condo's **George Imitating Basquiat** and Haring's **Untitled** offer an homage to Basquiat's prolific legacy, featuring the artist's iconic crown motif that appears in the upper-right corner of Basquiat's **Untitled.**

On view December 8, 2021 – March 13, 2022

On display with Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Untitled,* 1980 and George Condo, *George Imitating Basquiat,* 1989

Keith Haring (American, 1958-1990)
Untitled, 1985
Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:88.2

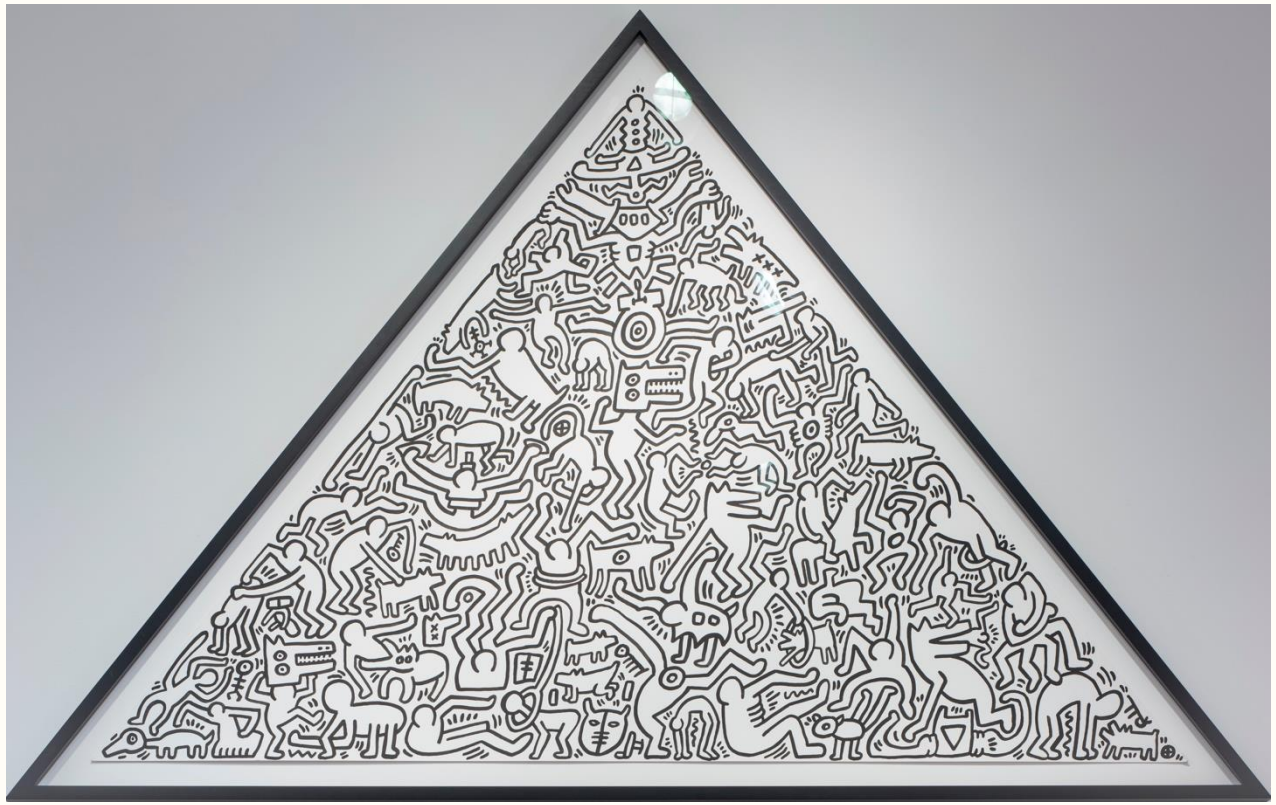
After moving to New York in 1978, Keith Haring quickly rose to prominence with an extensive series of subway drawings inspired by the authenticity, technical skill, and creativity embodied in the graffiti, hip hop music, and break dancers that enlivened his East Village neighborhood. The bright colors, playful patterns, and cartoon-like figures populating Haring's canvases are deceptively simple, a personal language of symbols and motifs repeated with variation that generate a complex commentary on gay culture, AIDS, drugs, consumerism, and race in late twentieth-century America. This untitled canvas depicts the artist's interpretation of the "tree of life" – a symbolic archetype common to mythological, religious, and philosophical traditions throughout history. Haring offers a vision of joyous gratitude and a celebratory worship of knowledge, community, and creativity open to anyone. "When I paint, it is an experience that, at its best, is transcending reality," Haring commented in 1989. "When it is working, you completely go into another place, you're tapping into things that are totally universal, of the total consciousness, completely beyond your ego and your own self. That's what it's all about."

On view September 23 – December 27, 2020

Keith Haring (American, 1958-1990)
Untitled, 1990
Sumi Ink on board

Private Collection; L2019:155.1

Keith Haring moved to New York in 1978, beginning a short but prolific career inspired by the city's rich outpouring of masterful urban graffiti, its flowering hip-hop culture, and the conceptual gap between “high” and “low” art. Haring developed a deceptively simple pictorial language in which he rendered form, setting, and emotional energy through little more than line and monochromatic accents of color. An AIDS diagnosis in 1988 did little to deter the artist's creative output. **Untitled** features dozens of Haring’s iconic characters, who seem to dance in a celebration of life, contorting wildly to music we cannot hear. Completed shortly before the artist’s death, the painting demonstrates Haring’s professional and personal ambition to infuse art with commentaries on global issues like the AIDS crisis. Haring saw his disease as a reason to celebrate living, not to fear pain or an inevitable end. Wishing to accept his impending death without regret and limitation, Haring explained, “No matter how long you work, it’s always going to end sometime. And there’s always going to be things left undone…. If you live your life according to that, death is irrelevant. Everything I’m doing right now is exactly what I want to do.”



On view January 29 – May 3, 2020