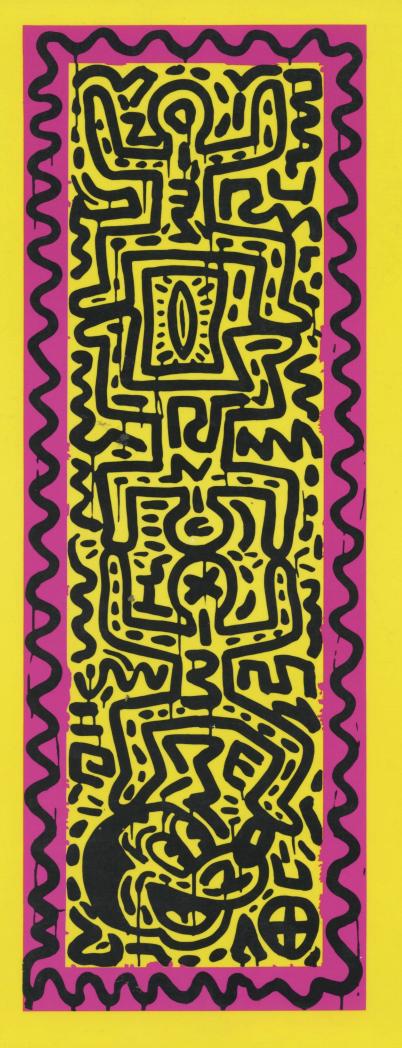
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# KEITH HARING: FUTURE PRIMEVAL

I don't think art is propaganda; it should be something that liberates the soul, provokes the imagination, and encourages people to go further. It celebrates humanity instead of manipulating it.

- K. Haring, interviewed by S. Couderc, 1985

UNIVERSITY GALLERIES
ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY NORMAL, ILLINOIS

ABBEVILLE PRESS PUBLISHERS NEW YORK LONDON PARIS



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John Berens: 1, 50.2, 62.2, 62.3, 62.4, 63.4, 75, 77

Ivan Dalla Tana: 69, 112.1

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Barry Blinderman: 21

Michael Sarver: 4, 40, 45, 111, 123

Susan Silagi: 34, 35 Craig Atkinson: 125 Lisa Kahane: 8, 94.1

Front cover: Untitled, 1982. Private collection.

Back cover: With Kermit Oswald. Untitled, 1983. Schorr Family Collection.

Inside cover: Untitled, 1985.

Frontispiece: 16 Polaroid self-portraits, 1981. Courtesy of the Haring Estate. Photo: John Berens.

Title page: **Untitled**, 1988, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 24. Private collection

Page 6: William Burroughs and Keith Haring. Photo: Tseng Kwong Chi.

### ISBN 1-55859-378-0

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Design: Dan Addington, assisted by Dan Griffin

Editing: Barry Blinderman, Peter Spooner, Jo Porter, Christina Nordholm

Cover design: Molly Shields

This exhibition and catalogue were produced by University Galleries of Illinois State University, with the assistance of a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and contributions by Martin Lawrence Limited Editions and Larry Warsh.

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"The Artist does not render the visible; the artist makes visible."

- Paul Klee

This is precisely applicable to Keith Haring's creations, literally runaway pictures swarming from perilous subways, animated by manic, electric life—Keith Life, for the quickest glance tells the viewer it is a Haring.

I was using the Brain Scanner, an electronic sound-and-stroboscopy device to activate the brain hemispheres—a flashing cacaphony of light and sound, and suddenly there is Keith, his little acrobats are jumping in all directions and popping up everywhere.

— William S. Burroughs July 30, 1989

# ''ONE RENT IN THE

# ABRIC IS ALL IT TAKES FOR O SLUICE THROUGH''

- TIMOTHY LEARY

"The Great god Pan is dead! Pan, god of panic; the sudden awareness that everything is alive and significant."

— William S. Burroughs Introduction to APOCALYPSE

n my eyes KEITH HARING was life embodied. He glowed, sparkled, danced through our visibilities; splashed living colors across our pop-eyes.

Oh, I remember, I remember the ageless, timeless youth of him!

Was he not our graceful blonde Greek god Pan in track shoes spraying retinal trails of rainbow rods and technicolored cones behind him as he buzzed our minds?

So young, he was! So vital! So lively!

Oh! The energy of him! A young man in a hurry, he was! Zooming by at ninety smiles an hour, revving up his RPM's (Realities Per Minute) to record speeds.

Keith Haring was a very important young man who played a vital role at a crucial time in world history. He accomplished his mission during the 1980s, a turbulent scary decade of negative-pandemonium.

At this time of cultural collapse and social chaos Keith took up the traditional role of performing philosopher—humanizing, popularizing, personalizing, illustrating the great pagan insights of our race. Celebrated life, Intoxicated dance, the jumping-jack-jill-joy of wise children, erotic energy, demonic confrontations.

It is Barry Blinderman who has listed with clear-poetry the nature of Keith's play: "the hallucinatory interface of biology and technology in our increasingly cybernetic society."

Barry's title "Future Primeval" really gets it right. Keith's art spanned the history of the human spirit. Keith could have jumped out of the time-capsule in the paleolithic age and started drawing on cave walls and they would have understood and laughed—particularly the kids. I showed his drawings to the Australian aborigines who initiated me and they grinned and nodded their heads. Keith communicated in the basic global icons of our race.

And here we see another awesome dimension of this young man's genius. As we move into the information-age of the 21st century it is clear that a global language will develop. Literacy—the use of letters to communicate—is the major barrier between classes, races, nations. This new language will be iconic. It will be communicated in digital patterns through fiber-optic lines flashed on screens and VR (Virtual Realities) eye-phone receivers. Graphix is the key to the information world of the future. Television passivity will be replaced by personal expression. Just as everyone was expected to "read and write" in the factory society, everyone will be expected to "receive and graphicize" in the 21st. Everyone will be a graphix artist. The graffiti impulse seen now in our inner-cities is an interesting forecast. And who taught this future?



# CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

# WITH *THE THIRD MIND*

- BARRY BLINDERMAN

### **NEW YORK 1980**

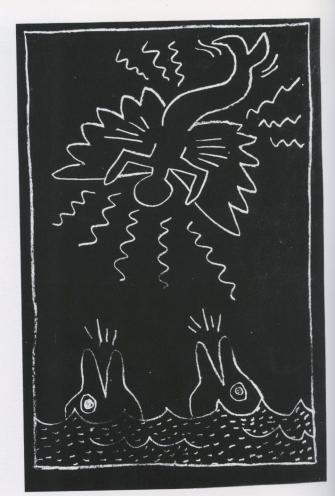
n 1980, if you were looking for the most vanguard art being created in New York, the white-walled sanctuaries of SoHo were not likely to be your first stop. At Lower Manhattan nightspots such as Mudd Club or Club 57, young artists, musicians, filmmakers, poets and other performers congregated to collaborate on one- or two-evening events. Intensity and outrageousness substituted for duration or New York Times reviews in these venues. (In hindsight, there was a lot to be accomplished in a very brief period of time-tragically so for many artists who emerged during this time.) Reagan's election that fall apparently did wonders for wiping out artistic apathy. With a Fearless Leader in the White House performing on TV, many artists felt compelled to counter with their own "acts" of sociopolitical investigation. In addition to the clubs, guerrilla artspaces and organizations flourished: ABC No Rio on Rivington Street, Fashion Moda in the South Bronx, Group Material, and Colab (Collaborative Projects) organized theme exhibitions and performances that were open to virtually any artist. Some exhibitions of particular importance in 1980 were the Times Square Show and the Real Estate Show, organized by Colab; New York/New Wave, curated by Diego Cortez for P.S. 1; Fashion Moda's Events at the New Museum; and the Election Show, organized by Group Material.

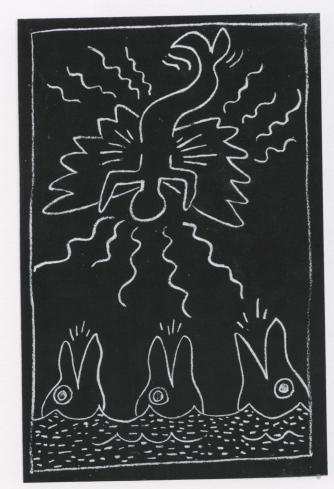
It was a time when you could keep up with what was going on by scanning the layers of posters that decorated walls and construction sites downtown. New Wave rock bands, many featuring art school dropouts, were exhibiting some of the most innovative artwork in the form of concert announcements. Cryptic messages by SAMO and other graffiti poets began to appear at regular intervals between the East Village and TriBeCa.

Indeed, subject matter and topical issues were making a viable comeback in the expanded parameters of the 1980 artworld. Many young artists who had come of age during a decade of arcane minimalist theory and banal photorealist shopwindow scenes were tired of outworn formulas that did little or nothing to address gripping social realities like nuclear threat, homelessness, hunger, scores of undeclared wars, and other manifold ills. Cultural dilemmas other than heartbreak had been voiced by musicians such as the Sex Pistols, the Clash, Talking Heads and Richard Hell throughout the latter years of the 1970s. Now it was time for visual artists to reinstate their social consciousness.

Around this time a thin, strange-looking kid whose eyeglasses were decorated in paint-encrusted patterns (different each week) was becoming a regular at Club 57, an art and performance hangout located in the basement of a Polish church on St. Mark's Place. Although shy and soft-spoken, Keith Haring had a real knack for bringing together kindred souls of the artworld demimonde. He was curating one-night exhibitions at 57, such as the *Sex Show*, and had also performed in a series called *Acts of Live Art*. During one of these "acts," Haring delivered an hour-long monologue consisting of countless rearrangements of the same randomly chosen words, all the while framing his face in a junked plastic television housing.



















CHANCE FAVORS TH



# REPARED MIND:'' THE

## ITH HARING

- MAARTEN VAN DE GUCHTE

### - MAARTEN VAN DE GUCHTE

n the exhibition "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern, organized by the Museum of Modern Art in 1984, an example of Keith Haring's art was mentioned on the very last page of the two-volume catalogue. Kirk Varnadoe wrote: "Amid all that is familiar in the latest neoprimitive painting, .... what is most happily recognized is the restatement, however slight, of this kind of dialogue (i.e. of self-projection, discovery, and self-criticism), in the new infatuation with graffiti. Here the sophisticated devices of modern international signage blend with cartoon conventions and streetwise conventions in alternatively upbeat and ominous subterranean pictographs of modern life (e.g., Keith Haring). Communication theory and cave painting meet in the South Bronx."

Varnadoe's assessment of Haring's "Affinity with the Tribal" requires additional comment after six years. In the act of writing about the "primitivist" aspect of Keith Haring's work, I vividly remember walking through the galleries of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1986. All the walls were covered with drawings, paintings, and scribbles of Keith Haring. To mind came a vision of a man, driven in the mad, intense sense of Charlton Heston in "The Agony and the Ecstacy" posing as Michelangelo Buonarotti, suffering under the high ceiling of the Sistine chapel. Haring's work caused a similar sensation, when I saw it that day in Amsterdam. Every available square foot had been utilized, creating a visual exuberance that was utterly overwhelming. But in a more subdued mood, I had to ask the question: Where had I seen this imagery before? Last year in Egypt? Central America, or perhaps Peru? Or was it a recent issue of National Geographic?

Is it possible to demarcate to what extent non-Western subject matter and styles entered into Haring's work? Was it merely a superficial interest in "primitivist" forms and images, or was Keith Haring doing something else? Many people are familiar with the Kwakiutl-inspired totempoles and the Masai-related bodypaint in Haring's work.<sup>2</sup> Are these borrowings from "other" artistic territories to be interpreted as tributes to artists working in the vernacular? Or can one speak here of a deeper level of structural assimilation of non-Western artistic forms by Haring with the express purpose of destroying notions of control and subjectivity? Chance or intentionality? Or should Haring's work be read as an intensely humanistic and democratic concern with art and its present "locus" in the contemporary world system? Haring's verbal acuity when interviewed points to his interest in language, the vehicle that determines the whole field of social relations through symbolic representations, a notion supported by the pre-eminence of linguistic signs in Haring's art.

For some time Keith Haring's relationship with ethnographic art has aroused the curiosity of authors as diverse as Suzi Gablik and Robert Farris Thompson. Both have called attention to aspects in Haring's art that appear to have strong visual links with non-Western art. Gablik juxtaposed Haring's famous logo of a crawling baby (Haring's "Radiant Child," as it was christined by the poet Rene Ricard) to an Eskimo carving of a *tupilak* (spirit) from East Greenland. Emphasizing the "complex cultural archaeology" of Keith's graffiti-influences and activities, she called him a "New Wave Aztec." Robert Farris Thompson, the anthropologist well-known for



Untitled, 1982-1983 (with LA2). Opposite: Grace Jones bodypainted. Photo: Tseng Kwong Chi.



# ITH KEITH HARING

- VINCE ALETTI

eith Haring used to live in my building on Second Avenue at 12th Street. I didn't know who this skinny, nerdy kid was, but I'd run into him at odd hours of the night (coming in at three in the morning, I'd pass him heading out). It wasn't until I found Keith in a studio at P.S. 122 surrounded by his big drawings. of barking dogs, levitating people, and flying saucers, that I connected him to the small drawings of crawling babies that had been popping up on walls all over the neighborhood. The following year, when Keith had moved uptown to a duplex studio on Sixth Avenue at 40th Street that he'd sublet from photographer Jimmy DeSana and shared with Kenny Scharf, I went there to select two drawings from a pile on the floor. Keith had had a show at a small gallery in Westbeth where a sign, announced blueprint copies of his large drawings for \$25, and I was taking advantage of the offer. On the studio's main floor, an old rug had been turned over and Keith had painted the bottom in an allover geometric pattern. Aside from the drawings and paintings on the floor, there were more tacked to the walls and rolled in corners upstairs. And, against one wall, there were enormous blow-up photos of Bianca Jagger that Keith said he found in the trash, along with a big blow-up of Grace Jone's head in the next room. It was here, just before his Club 57 show a few weeks later (May), that I did the following interview.

### **SPRING 1981**

VA I might as well start out with some basic history. Where are you from? When did you move to New York?

**KH** I was born in Kutztown, Pennsylvania. It's northeast of Philadelphia, between Lebanon and Allentown. Pennsylvania Dutch country. It's a tiny town. I lived there until I was 18.

**VA** What did your parents do?

**KH** My mother was a housewife. One of the interesting things my father was into was ham radio. He worked for Western Electric, but in his spare time he worked on ham radios as a hobby. I was never really interested [in it] when I was young, but now it has somehow come full circle to the point where what I'm involved in with communications is something that he's been doing the whole time. Now, I would be seriously interested in starting a radio station, a way of broadcasting your own material from your own base.

**VA** Like a pirate station . . . ?

KH Graffiti on the airwaves. My father was probably where I first learned how to draw because he was considered an artist when he was in high school but never pursued it. When I was little he would do drawings with me, mostly cartoon-type things—dogs with big eyes, and characters that he invented. I also remember him drawing naked ladies. I wasn't supposed to see them, but I'd find these great drawings of naked ladies, better than Vargas's in Playboy. I found them in the cellar and then he never did them anymore. I have never seen any since then.

# CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Number preceding each artwork refers to page on which it appears in catalogue. Height precedes width precedes depth in all dimensional listings.

### **XEROXES**

- 22.2 Untitled ("Reagan Slain...") 1980 Xerox on paper, 81/2 x 11 inches Muna Tseng Dance Projects
- 22.1 Untitled ("Mob Flees...") 1980 Xerox on paper, 8½ x 11 inches Muna Tseng Dance Projects
- 97.1 Untitled (Cut-up piece) 1980 Xerox on paper, 11 x 81/2 inches Muna Tseng Dance Projects

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- 29.2 Untitled, ca. 1981 chalk on black paper, 22 x 29 inches G.W.W. Fine Art
- 29.1 Untitled, ca. 1981 chalk on black paper, 45 x 60 inches Private collection
  - 26 Untitled, 1981 chalk on black paper, 46 x 29 inches Collection of Richard Hambleton
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- 40 Untitled, ca. 1983 chalk on black paper, 45 x 58 inches ARTS FOUR, New York

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- 35 Untitled, ca. 1983 chalk on black paper, 46 x 29 inches G.W.W. Fine Art
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- 43 Untitled, 1984 chalk on black paper, 83 x 41 inches Collection of Peter Belikis
- 44 Untitled, 1985 chalk on black paper, 40 x 29 inches Private collection
- 45 Untitled ("Merry Christmas 1985"), 1985 chalk on black paper, 46 x 29 inches ARTS FOUR, New York
- 46 Untitled, 1985 ("Still Alive in 85") chalk on black paper, 46 x 29 inches ARTS FOUR, New York
- 47 Untitled ("Still Alive in 85"), 1985 chalk on black paper, 83 x 41 inches Private collection

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- 62.2 Untitled (Marilyn), 1981 ink on offset litho., 38% x 26% inches The Rubell Collection
- 62.3 Untitled (Marilyn), 1981 ink on offset litho., 38% x 26% inches The Rubell Collection
- 62.4 Untitled (Marilyn), 1981 ink on offset litho., 38% x 26% inches The Rubell Collection
- 63.2 Untitled (Elvis), 1981 ink and tempera on offset litho., 38% x 26% inches Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles
- 63.1 Untitled (Elvis), 1981
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  38% x 26% inches
  Private collection

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  Collection of Kenny Scharf
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- 51.2 Untitled, 9/17/1980 sumi ink and spray enamel on bristol board, 20 x 26 inches Collection of Martin & Janet Blinder, LA
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- 5 Untitled, 1982 sumi ink and acrylic on paper, 72 x 138 inches Daniel Varenne Gallery, Geneva
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- 99.1 Untitled, 1983 sumi ink and acrylic on paper, 22 x 291/4 inches Martin Lawrence Limited Editions, Van Nuys, CA
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- 66.2 Untitled, 1982 (with LA2) enamel on metal, 22¼ x 48 inches Schorr Family Collection

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- 116.2 Untitled, 1987 (snake)
  marker on Pop Shop outfit,
  66½ x 39½ inches
  Private collection

Following page: photo by Tseng Kwong Chi.

# KEITH HARING

