

June 25, 2022

THE
GLOBE
AND
MAIL

Arts & Pursuits

SATURDAY, JUNE 25, 2022

GLOBEANDMAIL.COM

FOOD

Chili crisp is the hottest condiment du jour – and here's how to use it at home P2

ART

Edward Burtynsk's immersive project In the Wake of Progress focuses a critical wide lens on industry P8

BOOKS

Author Naben Ruthnum continues to genre-hop with his latest novel, Helpmeet P11



Just in time: A Haring Renaissance

Pop artist Keith Haring has transcended the 80s to reflect the highs and lows of a new generation struggling to claim their queer joy, writes **Elio Iannacci**

I was 11 years old when I had my first Keith Haring encounter. It was 1986 and I spotted him on MuchMusic, peeping a cameo appearance in Grace Jones's video, *I'm Not Perfect (But I'm Perfect For You)*. I remember how confident he looked sporting Dwayne Wayne spectacles while painting thick, black tribal patterns across a massive swathe of white fabric. The video's last scene, however, took my attention span hostage: It's a moment where Jones transforms from mere mortal to super diva by donning Haring's painted cloth. Jones exuded glamour and androgyny, and in the last few seconds on film, she's headlining at a nightclub, wearing and living art simultaneously.

At that age, I didn't grasp the gender puréeing, Afrofuturism or feminist fashion statements at work but looking back, that video was a lifejacket. After seeing the video, I started asking questions and found some answers: Haring was gay and he was cool and he was working with cool people. That simple equation offered a queer Catholic schoolboy an alternative to the church sermons I heard that demonized homosexuality on a weekly basis.

In its own way, with Jones looking as she did – Black, butch and gorgeously styled in Haring's, spectacular art – the pair became a salve from the tyrannical rules surrounding masculine and feminine roles running rampant on the playgrounds I found myself in. In her 2015 memoir, Jones wrote, "Keith understood me ... [he] knew that I belonged at all points in time, not only in Studio 54 or an MTV video." Most important, these images offered a hopeful tonic for something I couldn't define or identify at the time: oppression.

HARING, P5

American artist Keith Haring body paints American choreographer and dancer Bill T. Jones before a photo shoot with American artist Tseng Kwong Chi (not in the picture) in London in 1983. STD/DAILY EXPRESS/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES (HARING), THE GLOBE AND MAIL (FRAME)



Clockwise from top left: Grace Jones wearing a dress with a Keith Haring designed print in 1987, similar to what was created for her music video 'I'm Not Perfect (But I'm Perfect For You)'. In 1986 Haring stands in front of part of the Berlin Wall that he painted with a crawling baby in Berlin. Keith Haring's work, 'Untitled', April 1982, Acrylic on tarp. RON GALELLA COLLECTION VIA GETTY IMAGES (JONES); ELKE BRÜHN-HOFFMANN/AP (HARING); COURTESY OF RITA KRAUSS AND PHYLIS MACK (1984).

Haring: In the 'Don't Say Gay' state the artist's hallmarks of resistance and resilience remain important

FROM P1

Almost four decades later, Haring's vision is more prescient and powerful than ever. This month alone, the work of the Pennsylvania-born artist has managed to cross-pollinate popular culture, fashion and the art world in profound ways. Although Haring died of AIDS-related complications in 1990 at the age of 31, his famous quote about his craft — "Art is nothing if you don't reach every segment of the people" — is as prophetic then as ever. Decades after passing away, Haring's work is still influencing culture and reaching a wide audience that covers the art world, fashion retail, the music scene and a vast number of public spaces.

For example, the largest Haring work ever made, a 30-foot sculpture called "self-portrait," was unveiled in the newly opened Chicago's AIDS Garden and serves as a gigantic symbol of Haring's newfound rise. Adding to this, a plethora of competing fast-fashion companies have released licensed products featuring his artwork. The laundry list of Haring merch begins with apparel megastores such as GAP, Uniqlo, Simons, H&M, Reebok, Converse, Études, Swatch and Coach, and ends with indie fashion lines from HighSnobiety and DJ Honey Dijon. Decor companies such as Ruggable and Yellowpop (which makes floor coverings and lamps) have also gotten in on the Haring revival, while MAC cosmetics recently launched a "Red Haring" Viva Glam Lipstick.

The artist is also making waves outside of retail. Haring's first foray into the NFT game happened in May by way of a piece called Cosh Grab, whose bids started at 1495 SOL (\$60,000 Canadian). Online auction house ArtNet is currently selling Haring's signed IRL Attack on AIDS screen print, at an opening bid of US\$50,000. The latest sale recorded by Sotheby's for the artist's work was an untitled piece that sold for US\$5,499,950 in December, 2021 and according to the auction house, "the average compound annual return for Keith Haring resold at auction between 2003 and 2017 was 13.3 per cent, and 91.9 per cent of 74 such works increased in value."

Off the auction block, Haring continues to make posthumous statements in a current exhibition at the NSU Art Museum in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., called Confrontation. The presentation of 60-plus works on display until Oct. 2 explores Haring's multi-generational influence in the heart of the "Don't Say Gay" state. The museum's curator, Ariella Wolens, says the art on display — situated in a place where it is illegal to discuss sexual orientation and gender identity in schools — is filled with Haring's hallmarks: resistance and resilience.

"There are very intense social messages within his art that are uniquely relevant to what is going on today," Wolens says. "Not only was Keith outspoken about being gay,

but he also incorporated his community into works about [the iconic New York queer nightclub] the Paradise Garage, raised awareness with his Free South Africa posters for the injustice of apartheid; and his ACT UP Silence = Death pieces [were among] the most searing images of creative response and action towards the government neglect of the death of countless people. He has created markers that have the power to galvanize people."

Haring's political prowess was a long time in the making, says Toronto-based artist Scott Treleven. "It all started developing when he still was a student [at the Ivy School of Professional Art in Pittsburgh] and found out about [Canadian painter] Brian Gysin," he says. The first clue of Haring's fascination with Gysin comes from a 1978 journal entry in which he writes, "Buy a copy of The Third Mind." He's referring to the book, written by Gysin and William S. Burroughs, that serves as a manifesto for emerging artists and helped shape Haring's own illustrious career.

The tome had such an impact on Haring that he went on to collaborate with both Gysin (on a publication called Fault Lines) and Burroughs (on works such as Apocalypse and The Valley). Treleven aims to connect the dots between this creative threesome with a book set for release in 2023. "Gysin and Burroughs experimented with cut-ups and video with arbitrary edits so they could transcend the language of governmental and societal control," he explains.

"A pictographic, hieroglyphic language was developed that side-steps the words 'gay,' 'queer,' 'transgender,' and even the word 'love,' and presents them in a way that's immediately legible on an instinctive and compassionate level. It was a very future forward-looking kind of thing that Haring emulated."

Treleven adds that Haring's works could be viewed as a secret way of communicating to his community. "Haring was a young gay man interested in codes and telegraphing to the underground in ways that couldn't necessarily be read by the mainstream," he says. "If you look at the way that Keith used his hieroglyphs to talk about AIDS in a time when you couldn't even get a PSA on television to save people's lives, it's astonishing."

In this way, Haring's works can also be read as tarot cards and red flags which indicate how history may be repeating. "Health services of the eighties were like the era we're heading into now — over-taxed, overburdened and underfunded," Treleven says. "Keith saw a place where syllabic language was failing in this area to extend compassion or to create awareness, and so, he stepped in. Those messages are

still so pertinent."

Haring's vast archive — which spans 30 public art works, more than 5,000 chalk works and a still undetermined amount of drawings (each one took 20 minutes) over 13 years — is also under academic scrutiny. Ricardo Montez, an associate professor of performance studies at The New School in New York, is teaching a class this fall which examines Haring's intersections with Gysin and Grace Jones. Built off his work from his recently published book, Keith Haring's Line: Race and the Performance of Desire, Montez's research tackles the often neglected inner workings of Haring's legacy and holds the artist accountable to ideas of appropriation and gay, white privilege.

The first book of its kind to look at Haring through critical lenses, it is far from a take-down of the artist's cannon. Instead, Montez's writing seeks to dial down the common practice of hero worship attached to Haring and place his work into a modern context. In the same way that Netflix recently flipped the script on Andy Warhol's image as an inhuman, sexless, faultless art being in a documentary called The Andy Warhol Diaries, Montez hopes his research will change a few perceptions.

"I want people to think about the complicated nature of Haring's work and his life," Montez says. "What did it mean that he wholeheartedly engaged with BIPOC people in his work who inspired him? We see Haring as a person who transcends racial barriers, but there's something more happening. It's not transcendence, it's someone who is engaged in a very complicated relationship with people of colour and it would benefit us to think about what those complicated fields of contact were in his art and his collaborations and how they continue."

Serendipitously, Grace Jones' recent performance at London's Meltdown Music Festival last weekend brought Haring back to centre stage, yet again. The icon played to a crowd of many millennials and Gen Zers, wearing a replica of the larger-than-life gown Haring made for her in 1988. While swaying in a gigantic reel of fabric — marked with Haring's queer codes and sociopolitical insignias — Jones sang the song This Is, containing lyrics such as "This is the key / This is the door" to a new generation of club children.

For the average viewer, this may mean nothing, but for all the 13-year-olds dealing with the repercussions of anti-queer discrimination and right-wing legislature such as the Don't Say Gay bill, this moment can be a beacon, a talisman or a testament to the potentiality of LGBTQIA+ life.

Special to The Globe and Mail

POP SHOP

Keith Haring once opened up a small store in New York selling moderately priced "art merch" so people of all incomes could have access to his work. His dream lives on — online and in stores



H&M Keith Haring Pendant Key Ring is part of a collection featuring hats, footwear, fleece and more with the artist's signature style.



M.A.C. Viva Glam x Keith Haring Lipstick gives back 100 per cent to support women and girls, the LGBTQIA+ community and people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS.



The Ruggable x Keith Haring collection lets you bring the icon's artwork to your home. (Ruggable rugs are machine washable, too).



This tee from Uniqlo's collection of UT: Graphic tees is part of the retailer's Pop Art Masters series featuring iconography from Haring, Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat.



Express yourself with shrunken tees (just right for summer's high-waisted jeans and shorts) from The Gap's Keith Haring Collection Artist Series Tee Shop.