

**KEITH
HARING
THE ALPHABET**

Contents

Exhibition Facts

Press Release

Introduction

Wall Texts & The Alphabet

Quotes

Exhibition Facts

Press conference	15 March 2018 10.00 am
Opening	15 March 2018 18.30 am
Duration	16 March – 24 June 2018
Venue	Basteihalle
Curator	Dr Dr Dieter Buchhart Elsy Lahner, Albertina
Works	90
Audio guide	German & English
Contact	Albertinaplatz 1 1010 Vienna T +43 (01) 534 83 0 info@albertina.at www.albertina.at
Opening Hours	Daily 10 am – 6 pm Wednesdays & Fridays 10 am – 9pm
Press contact	Fiona Sara Schmidt T +43 (01) 534 83 511 M +43 (0)699 12178720 s.schmidt@albertina.at Sarah Rainer T +43 (01) 534 83 512 sarah.rainer@albertina.at

Presented by



Sponsor



Partner



Media Partner



Keith Haring

The Alphabet

16 March – 24 June 2018

To mark what would have been his 60th birthday, the Albertina is devoting a large-scale exhibition to the exceptional American artist Keith Haring (1958–1990) that includes around 100 works sourced internationally from numerous museums and private collections.

The artist, who initially became known for his drawings of the crawling baby, the barking dog, and figures dancing and climbing over each other, numbers among the most celebrated artists of his time. Haring's creative career, though short, took a truly meteoric course, and the exhibition *Keith Haring. The Alphabet* retraces his wholly unique artistic development and historical significance.

Symbolic Practice As Resistance

Keith Haring conceived of his artistic practice as a political statement in the public realm that took aim at the establishment, the authoritarian enforcement of order, and state repression of citizens. He consistently emphasized the creative process and the aspect of performance as well as the political, anarchic act in and of itself.

Haring's works were shown at documenta 7 (1982), at leading international museums and galleries, and at numerous biennials all over the world, and his impact on his contemporaries as well as subsequent generations of artists has been both enormous and lasting.

Messages of Social Justice

Keith Haring's drawings, paintings, and sculptures embody messages that take a stand against the violence of ruling elites, against the oppression of minorities, against prejudice, and against barbarism. His themes thus repeatedly revolve around justice and change. His notion of art is an egalitarian one: Keith Haring's oeuvre draws on the creative principles of graffiti as well as on semiotics and the art-historical canon. With his deceptively simple stick figures—embodying deliberately primitive codes—he is part of that process by which *low art* is transformed into *high art*, such as with the cartoons and advertisements that found their way into museums via the Pop Art movement.

Haring never conceived of art as propaganda, yet he did make use of similar mechanisms as well as public space in order to disseminate his art and his ideas.

ALBERTINA

He championed the individual, standing up to the oppression emanating from dictatorship, racism, capitalism, and drug addiction. He fought to end Apartheid in South Africa, and his dedication to the struggle against AIDS is legendary. He was also among those voices that, during the 1980s, uttered the loudest warnings about the perils of nuclear war, environmental destruction, and countless other threats to humanity and our planet.

Development of a Symbolic Language

Despite his early and lasting success with critics and on the art market, one central aspect—which can be viewed as a primary concern of Keith Haring’s art—has to this day hardly been recognized in its true significance: the systematic symbolic language that runs through his entire oeuvre like a golden thread.

Haring—whose coursework at the School of Visual Arts in New York had also included semiotics—developed his symbolic vocabulary and its alphabet based on a keen awareness of how pictures can function just like words. His famous drawings in stations of the New York subway system played an important role in this development: “It sort of became the perfect environment or laboratory for working out all of the ideas that I was discovering,” said the artist. The ultimate outcome of this was Haring’s development of his very own artistic vocabulary.

Quite early on, Keith Haring was impressed by the hieroglyphic writing of the ancient Egyptians. What interested him was how they were reduced to just a few lines, a principal that he adopted in his own work. In doing so, he evolved the abstract shapes of his early drawings into his very own language of symbols. This gave rise to his characteristic symbols including the baby, the human being, the dog, the golden calf, the heart, the snake, the pig, the nuclear reactor, the pyramid, the radio, the UFO, sexual intercourse, and much more besides. He “activated” the silhouettes of living beings and objects by drawing radiant halos around them.

Communication and Humanism

Keith Haring’s picture-word system was something like a predecessor to today’s emojis: his smiley faces as well as his hearts, his stylized globe, and his other ideograms aren’t that far off from the miniature graphics that we send on our smartphones today. After all, the desire for a universal system of communication is something that our Internet age, Keith Haring’s ideograms, and ancient hieroglyphics all have in common.

Haring’s involvement in the struggles against drugs, against AIDS, and for a fairer, better world for all people, as well as his obsession with drawing in public places from New York, Paris, and Tokyo to the Berlin Wall, found expression in his works and symbols, which have by now become part of our everyday popular culture. His “urban guerrilla art” pushes back against ignorance, fear, and silence, remaining in one’s memory like a beneficial, humanistic virus.

Introduction

Keith Haring, who was born in Pennsylvania in 1958, probably mirrored his age more graphically than any other artist. As an adolescent he witnessed the United States traumatized by the Vietnam War. Keith Haring was ten years old when Martin Luther King was assassinated and when the Black Power movement raised its fist against the discrimination of Afro-Americans. As a child, Haring saw technology triumphant when man landed on the moon, whereas as a young artist he experienced the disaster at the American nuclear power plant of Three Mile Island: with the radiant nuclear reactor as a motif recurring throughout his art, he committed himself to the struggle against the threatening destruction of our planet even before the catastrophic nuclear accident of Chernobyl.

Keith Haring's future loathing of war, oppression, ecological destruction, and the all-devouring power of the state was fuelled by these early experiences.

The 1980s – the decade of his artistic career proper – provided Haring with the foundation of his visual language, with the mass suicide of almost 1,000 people in Jonestown and the environmental disaster of Bhopal, the financial crisis plunging New York into bankruptcy and the virtually hopeless fight against drug addiction, the fatal spreading of AIDS and racism in the USA and under South Africa's apartheid regime.

By inventing the symbolic figure with a hole in its stomach, Keith Haring responded to the assassination of John Lennon in 1980. Using the motif of the barking dog, the artist sought to shake us up and prevent us from closing our eyes to the oppression of minorities or lethal HIV, stigmatized as “gay plague.”

Leaving his political messages behind in the corridors of the subway and on New York's sidewalks and façades, Keith Haring realized his art not only in the sheltered zones of museums and art galleries. At the same time, Haring achieved more or less unprecedented international fame within only a few years.

From a synthesis of Paul Klee's archetypal forms and the instruments of street art, Keith Haring developed a visual language built of simple lines. The mural he did on the Berlin Wall, more than three hundred feet long, became an outcry against dictatorship. He was proud not to be an “angry white male,” but to be gay, different: to belong to a minority.

Radically democratizing his art, he brought it into his Pop Shops to distribute it among the people in mass editions.

ALBERTINA

Haring's age was that of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, of the growing social gap between rich and poor, high life and low life, white and black. With his friends of the New York Pop scene, including Grace Jones, Madonna, Andy Warhol, and Basquiat, and the parties at the East Village, Haring personifies the brief moment in history when the mass culture of Pop and the artistic avant-garde were not perceived as opposites.

In his final year, he witnessed the crushing of Chinese student protests in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, but also the fall of the Berlin Wall and Nelson Mandela's release from prison. In 1990 Keith Haring died of AIDS-related complications at the young age of 31 years.

Comprising nearly 100 works, the retrospective at the ALBERTINA is the first to present all of the leitmotifs – the entire alphabet – developed by this exceptional artist: from the radiant baby to the pyramid and the barking dog.

Wall Texts

The USA and Popular Culture

On the one hand, Keith Haring appreciated US-American popular culture and drew his inspirations from comics and the famous figures of Walt Disney's cartoons. On the other hand, he took a critical stance toward capitalism and consumerist society, always aware of the close connection between capitalism, racism, and suppression. The artist expressed his criticism by appropriating symbols of power and transforming them without respecting their cultural and political connotations. For example, he chose the figure of the Statue of Liberty, the US-American symbol of freedom and independence per se, to desacralize it together with LA II (Angel Ortiz) by covering it with glaring colors, graffiti tags, and his characteristic signs.

Early Drawings

In 1980 Keith Haring began working on a series of powerful, mainly large-format ink drawings. He executed them on long rolls of paper and accented them with mostly red spray paint that stirred associations with New York's public space and its prolific graffiti. He drew framing lines around the individual scenes, as in a comic strip, emphasizing some by cutting them out of the paper roll to present them as individual works.

The Alphabet before the alphabet

In 1978 Keith Haring created his first monumental drawing as a work that still comprised abstract, similar-looking red, green, yellow, and white forms. However, he soon decided against this abstract visual sign language. The artist explained his abandonment of abstraction with his project of the subway drawings and the universal impact of signs and symbols: "The abstract paintings would not make any sense if they were painted in public space. It was first when I started to draw images which could be read as signs that I went into public space. Because these paintings made sense in the streets – all people, all languages could read them. After studying the theory of communication, information, and drawing and how meaning speaks through signs and how this language— because that's what it is— works—I chose a primitive code."

Mickey Mouse

Mickey Mouse recurs frequently in Keith Haring's oeuvre. His preoccupation with this iconic figure stemmed from his childhood: "I had found a book at my grandmother's house showing Mickey Mouse being broken down into circles and ovals and had learned how to construct a Mickey Mouse. I was going back into this childhood experience and making these paintings and drawings of Mickey Mouse." Like his friend and role model Andy Warhol, Haring also

ALBERTINA

created his own Mickey Mouse. For Haring, Mickey Mouse stands for Walt Disney and his studios, as well as for popular culture, capitalism, mass culture, and childhood.

Beyond paper and canvas

Throughout his career, Keith Haring experimented with numerous unconventional supports, including objects he found in the streets, repurposed parts of furniture or cars, industrially produced vinyl tarpaulins, or fiberglass sculptures. Explaining his sense of experiment, he said that he did not wish to be a conventional “studio painter.”

One of his most outstanding series is that of the terracotta or fiberglass vases, for which he drew his inspirations from Egyptian and antique vase paintings he had studied in New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. Similar to his Statue of Liberty, this must be understood as a political act by which he transformed cultural symbols into Pop objects of our consumerist society by playing with scale and material without respecting the cultural or political implications of these symbols. Moreover, the round, three-dimensional surface of the vase also allowed him to develop his two-dimensional storyboard drawings further.

Storyboards

Keith Haring’s early subway drawings reverberate in his large-scale ink drawings from 1980. Symbols and scenes are combined on rolls of paper like in a comic strip or storyboard. Whereas his drawings in the subway only revealed themselves to spectators as related sequences as they were passing by them on their way through the corridors, here the artist was able to connect individual scenes on a single sheet of paper to create entire picture stories.

Subway Drawings

Between 1980 and 1985, Keith Haring created between 5,000 and 10,000 illegal subway drawings under the constant risk of arrest. He used white chalk to draw onto the black paper that was pasted over temporarily unused advertising panels in New York’s subway stations. As Haring walked along the subway corridors, he paused briefly to rapidly cover the black paper with his drawing in one sweep and then continued his line of motion on to the next vacant panel. These works played an instrumental role in the development of his visual sign alphabet. The artist said: “It sort of became the perfect environment or laboratory for working out all of the ideas I was discovering.” In this way he arrived at his very own vocabulary of form.

The Matrix

The large-scale drawing *The Matrix* can be regarded as a summary of Keith Haring’s entire visual sign alphabet as per 1983. The work contains a number of the artist’s elementary picture-words.

Horror Vacui

In Haring's art, seemingly abstract works are also always figurative. The artist deals with horror vacui (the fear of empty space) by filling his outlined surfaces, placing several smaller symbols inside larger figures and covering the spaces between them with black squiggles. The picture becomes overgrown with an increasingly impenetrable fabric of lines until it is almost illegible. Like in a picture puzzle, the figures are hidden within a densely packed overall pattern.

Fluorescent works

Keith Haring was eager to bring the energy and dynamism he had witnessed in the streets and lively New York art and music scene into the galleries. In a number of works he thus used a type of paint that would fluoresce in combination with black light and which was frequently employed for the decoration of club interiors. When his exhibition at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery opened in 1984, Haring staged an installation of his fluorescent works with a performance of breakers dancing to the music of a DJ. The impact of the breakdancing, hip hop, and club culture on Haring's visual sign language manifests itself in the poses of many of his silhouetted figures and in the energetic, powerful lines surrounding them, signifying dance and movement.

Haring's dystopias

Although Keith Haring's HIV infection was only diagnosed in 1988, his visual sign alphabet had begun to change significantly in 1985, after several of his friends and acquaintances had died of the disease. Flying skulls, corpses, fantastical demons and mythical creatures inspired by Hieronymus Bosch, and human figures in a state of horrendous decay now populated his drastic images of horror. It was Haring's vision of the apocalypse, which left little hope for humanity's salvation. Having received his own diagnosis, he visualized the HI-virus as a monster sperm that was hatching from an egg, as a symbol of the deadly danger. But Haring was aware that life on earth would go on without him, but also without humanity.

One work recalls Hieronymus Bosch's triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* or Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Seven Deadly Sins*. In this crowded apocalyptic picture, horrible monsters and fantastic creatures composed of various body parts have been tightly packed into a confined space. A myriad of human beings fight for their lives as they are tortured, devoured, and excreted by genitals, orifices, and open mouths that have developed a momentum of their own.

Although Haring did not know when he would fall victim to the disease, he increasingly concentrated on the subject of AIDS in his later works. Their deterrent effect was meant to save others. At the centre of his impressive work appears a deathly monster, negatively marked by a red cross. With its multiple arms grabbing for its victims, it holds out to them its orifices, offering itself. On the left and right, two figures with crossed-out eyes are suspended upside down from their genitals, a tongue lifelessly dragging on the ground. Winged skulls hover above the scene.

The Alphabet

Keith Haring used the **atomic mushroom**, the **atom symbol**, or the **nuclear reactor** in a number of works to address the nuclear threat and deal with his own fear of it. In 1979 a reactor accident took place in the nuclear power plant of Three Mile Island not far from Kutztown, Haring's native city. Keith Haring also played an active role himself in the anti-nuclear movement. On June 12, 1982 he took part in a large "anti-nuclear rally," designing, producing, and paying for 20,000 posters that he and friends distributed to passers-by.

The **Golden Calf** is generally considered a symbol of idol worship. Haring also used the sign in this way to address such themes as mass hysteria, mass infatuation, and manipulation.

It is an important aspect of Keith Haring's sign alphabet that the meanings of the individual picture-words always depend on the context in which they appear. This becomes particularly evident in one of his most famous symbols: The silhouette of the dog with its mouth wide open can mean a barking dog as well as a biting one, or a panting one, too.

The **dog** - the "family dog" - sometimes functions as a symbol of justice or embodies a protector, but it may also turn into a ravaging beast that attacks a graffiti sprayer or expresses the abuse of power. Haring states: "The dogs really were representational of human and animal. In different combinations they were about the difference between human power and the power of animal instinct. It all came back to the ideas I learned from semiotics and the stuff from William S. Burroughs - different juxtapositions would make different meanings." Additionally, the barking dog functioned as Haring's tag, a kind of signature the artist used when drawing in the subway or in public space. The dog and the radiant baby were among the first symbols Haring reproduced in the streets of New York.

Keith Haring uses the **pig** to reference among other things Porky Pig from the animated series of the Looney Tunes. It is a happy pig with a happy face. The pig also alludes to our consumerist society and its increasing disconnection from nature and the environment, an observation Haring commented upon as early as June 4, 1978 in a large-format drawing with the quotation "EVERYBODY KNOWS WHERE MEAT COMES FROM IT COMES FROM THE STORE".

In Haring's art, the **flying saucer** generally symbolizes space and space travel, but it also designates a particular form of communication. It is also a symbol of otherness and can describe any person who lies outside of the social norm and community. In Haring's work, strength emanates from these outsiders, for they have the power to activate and empower others.

ALBERTINA

Although the artist adopted a rather skeptical stance towards new technologies, his flying saucer always has a positive influence on the objects and creatures touched by its rays: “When the flying saucer zapped the babies, I put rays all around the babies, because they had now been endowed with all this power. Later on, this image became misinterpreted. People wrote that the baby has radioactive energy. That wasn’t so. The rays from the flying saucer gave this glowing power.”

We are familiar with the blinking **light bulb** that symbolizes an idea or brainstorm from comic strips or animated cartoons. Haring uses it in the same way, mostly to describe ideas spread by the media in order to influence the masses positively.

In his art, Keith Haring uses picture-words for **sex, sperm, vagina** and **penis**, as well as **pregnancy** and birth to allude to the beginning of the life cycle. In many of his works, however, the penis is also a symbol of (male) homosexual intercourse and, in a broader sense, thus stands for divergence from the social norm.

In Haring’s art, **ghosts** and the souls of spirits mostly signify death. However, inspired by the cartoon series Casper, the Friendly Ghost, Haring also created the nice and funny ghost as a counterbalance to the daily sufferings of existence. He is the smiley face in the artist’s world of spirits.

As so often in Haring’s work, animals, similar to the protagonists of fables, stand as representatives of human characters. The model for Haring’s depictions of **chickens** was presumably Foghorn Leghorn, a cartoon figure from the famous Looney Tunes. Another source could have been “hex” signs, which Haring had seen as a child in the Amish countryside in Pennsylvania, where one can still find these folk art symbols painted on barns or hung inside homes to bring luck, ward off evil, and signify home and hearth. Many of these signs incorporate birds, some of which resemble chickens.

Occasionally, Haring depicts his human figures with dotted bodies. These **dots** can describe otherness, such as in terms of skin color or homosexuality, but in his later works, they can also signify illness, primarily AIDS.

In Keith Haring’s art, the **smiley face**, the laughing face, stands for the pursuit and feeling of happiness and for luck in life. In some depictions, coarse brushstrokes or the stuck-out tongue point to the fragility and momentariness of happiness.

In Haring’s work, on the one hand the **stick** commonly describes a weapon that is used to beat, torture, and murder. On the other hand, the stick has almost magical powers for Haring and is also used to “activate” other people, creatures, or objects, so as to imbue them with strength and dynamism.

ALBERTINA

For Haring, **electricity** describes progress as well as energy itself. Energy finds its expression in powerful lines of movement, inspired by the breakdance and electric boogaloo of the 1980s club and music scene.

In Haring's art, the **exploding, bursting head** symbolizes the rising flood of information transmitted by the media and its overwhelming effect on humanity.

For Keith Haring, the **brain** signifies human thought. Replaced by or displayed on a screen, it can symbolize the threat of computers feared by Haring. The brain can also stand for brainwashing by religion and populism.

Matryoshkas are egg-shaped **Russian dolls** made of wood and brightly painted, which can be inserted into each other. They are said to have a talisman quality. In Haring's work they stand for change, transition, and transformation.

The **dolphin** is another figure populating Haring's oeuvre. Probably the artist originally used it to refer to the mythological figure of the fish-tailed **Yemanjá**, a fertility deity and goddess of the seas worshipped, for example, in the Brazilian Candomblé religion. During his frequent stays in Brazil, Haring became aware of the deity, who played an important role particularly for fishermen. Yemanjá's myth is based on a cycle of metamorphosis from dolphin to human and back to dolphin. Haring understood the mythological legend as a critique of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and its brutal hierarchical ranking.

Even before he learned about the mythological figure of the fish-tailed Yemanjá, a fertility deity and goddess of the seas, Haring had created a **hybrid creature of angel and dolphin**, which he drew, among other places, in the New York subway. But it was only when he used it to decorate fishing boats and people's homes in Brazil that local fishermen "recognized" the figure as Yemanjá, so that it gained additional symbolism.

Keith Haring responded to the murder of John Lennon on December 8, 1980 with a figure that has a large **hole** in its **stomach**: "Actually, this image of the man with a hole in his stomach came after I heard of John Lennon's assassination. I woke up the next morning with this image in my head, and I always associated that image with the death of John Lennon." In Haring's art, however, the hole in the stomach can also symbolize the emptiness within us.

A **person lifting up** another **person**: on the one hand, this figure in Haring's work can be interpreted as honoring and elevation the lifted figure, and as an act of sacrificing it on the other.

In Haring's art, an **encounter** or **embrace** generally stands for human connection, togetherness, love, and sexual intercourse, regardless of skin color and sexual orientation.

ALBERTINA

Together with the dog, the „**radiant baby**“, depicting a crawling baby surrounded by rays, is the most important and well-known element of Keith Haring’s visual sign alphabet. Haring developed the figure from the drawing of a man crawling forward. For Haring, the baby had exclusively positive connotations and represented not only the future, but also perfection: “Babies represent the possibility of the future, the understanding of perfection, how perfect we could be. There is nothing negative about a baby, ever. The reason that the ‘baby’ has become my logo or signature is that it is the purest and most positive experience of human existence.”

Over the millennia, the symbol of the **pyramid** has been associated with numerous meanings, from a sign of stability and strength to the Christian interpretation of the Holy Trinity. In Keith Haring’s art, the pyramid symbolizes ancient times, as well as the inconceivable cultural achievements of humankind. Haring’s choice of this picture-word also reflects his interest in ancient Egypt and the hieroglyphs and his critical engagement with slave labor, social injustice, and inhumanity. The Egyptians’ pyramids may be architectural and logistic masterpieces, but they could only be created with the brutal exploitation of slaves.

As it casts off its skin, the **snake** denotes change and transformation. However, in assessing it as a symbol, it is ambivalent. In Haring’s work, too, it always bears the ancient biblical symbolism: Adam and Eve, the temptation with the apple, and the expulsion from paradise. The motif of the ouroboros (“self-devourer”) can be found in the iconography of ancient Egypt as the pictogram of a snake that bites its own tail and thus forms a complete circle with its body: a symbol of eternal return and of the cycle of life. In Haring’s late works, this snake and the life cycle are threatened by the HI-virus.

Telephone, radio, and TV mark communication and the media as an expression of the dissemination of news, advertising, and entertainment produced for the masses in the 1980s. In Haring’s art, the theme plays such a prominent role as Haring witnessed a profound and dramatic change in communication and information technologies. For example, the first cell phones and home computers appeared on the market, and the first 24-hour news channel went on air.

The **clock** symbolizes **time**, temporality, and duration. Both Keith Haring’s reference to the expression “five minutes to twelve” and the globe stand for a world threatened by ecocide. As the environmental movement gained importance in the early 1980s, Haring became involved not only in opposing new technologies, but also the danger of humankind being extinguished through pollution and the destruction of the environment.

In all its different manifestations, the **dog** is one of Keith Haring’s trademarks and most frequently used picture-words. Haring developed the symbol in early drawings from some indefinite creature that over time started to look more and more like a dog. Haring’s dog can be understood as a mythical creature representing a human being. In this large-format

ALBERTINA

drawing, the artist has depicted his **dogs dancing**, meaning dance in general and specifically breakdance and artistic performance.

In addition to the barking dog and the biting dog, Haring's art also features the Anubis-like dog. Haring thus refers to Egyptian mythology, in which **Anubis** as the guardian over burial rites and mummification was also entrusted with the weighing of the heart during the judgment of the dead. The deceased person's fate was therefore in his hand, and it is this very power to which Haring alludes in his work by depicting a monster playing with humans, dragging the figures around or crushing them. The scene is also reminiscent of the Christian tradition of the "dance of death," a motif reminding us that all people are equal in the face of death.

The worship of and homage to the great red **monkey** can be seen as an ironic paraphrase of the dance around the Golden Calf. Haring has replaced the calf here with a monkey to underscore his warning against mass infatuation and hysteria. With this picture-word, he also refers to the three wise monkeys of Nikkō, who can see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil. The crowd depicted in this work thus worships a god that promotes lethargy: people are encouraged to close their eyes, ears, and mouths to problems – an attitude against which Haring fought in his art.

In his works, the artist mostly uses the **dollar sign** or **dollar note** as a symbol to criticize our consumerist society. Keith Haring had a decidedly ambivalent relationship with money. As a successful artist he earned very well, after all: "Money itself is not evil, in fact it can actually be very effective for good if it is used properly. You have to be objective about money to use it fairly. It doesn't make you any better or more useful than any other person. Even if you use your money to help people. [...] That doesn't make you better than somebody who has no money but is sympathetic and genuinely loving to fellow humans."

Rebellion against the process of de-individualization and a state promoting it is an essential aspect of Haring's visual sign alphabet. His faceless silhouettes are meant to suggest that all people are equal, regardless of sex, skin color, or sexual orientation. By no means should they be understood as a plea for uniformity: "It is important to the future existence of the human

race that we understand the importance of the **individual** and the reality that we are all different, all individuals, all changing and all contributing to the 'whole' as individuals, *not* as groups or products of 'mass-identity', 'anti-individual' or 'stereotyped' groups of humans with the same goals, ideas and needs."

The **caterpillar** is the actual feeding stage of the butterfly and has to shed its skin several times before achieving its final size. Only after metamorphosis does it transform into the butterfly, whose beauty solely serves the purpose of procreation and then fades.

ALBERTINA

In Haring's art, the caterpillar thus stands for both transformation and metamorphosis and for greed and a craving for food, which is why in some of his works it is depicted as a monster.

With a **computer** replacing its head, the caterpillar turns into a technological ogre. In Haring's art, computers and **robots** describe the prevalent fear of new technologies, the space age, Silicon Valley, and the potential control of machines over humans. As early as 1978, Haring gave much thought to the subject of computers and to what they mean for our daily lives: "The silicon computer chip has become the new life form. Eventually the only worth of man will be to service and serve the computer. Are we there? In a lot of ways we are."

In this work, Haring depicts a **giant foot crushing a human** while another figure is shown falling to the ground. Keith Haring used a similar approach in his works criticizing apartheid, such as in his poster *Free South Africa* of 1985, in which a huge black figure that is bound stomps on a smaller white figure that holds on to the other's leash. With the large black silhouette and the tiny white ones he illustrates the self-empowerment of the oppressed. Haring's deep outrage toward racism and violence thus also finds its expression in the depiction of a violent end for the oppressor. In his struggle against racism and discrimination, Haring always made his rejection of the "angry white male" clear, in both life and art: "All stories of white men's 'expansion' and 'colonization' and 'domination' are filled with horrific details of the abuse of power and the misuse of people. I'm sure inside I'm not white. [...] I'm glad I'm different. I'm proud to be gay. I'm proud to have friends and lovers of every color. I am ashamed of my forefathers. I am *not* like them." He rejected his white heritage and opposed the history of his ancestors.

For Haring, the **angel** is basically a sign of death, but was a part of the cycle of life. In some works, the angel is depicted as a symbol of good in the battle against evil, or as a contrast to evil.

On the one hand, the depiction of a **crowd** can describe its incredible strength, like in the present painting: forming a virtually endless and impenetrable cheering front, the people are invincible because of their cohesion. In other works, however, Haring also refers to the seducibility of the masses, for example when they are shown worshipping a technological monster or paying homage to a false deity, a savior, or a dictator. Haring thereby also alludes to such sects as the Peoples Temple and its leader Jim Jones, who provoked 909 of his followers into committing mass murders and mass suicides in Jonestown on November 18, 1978. In this case the mob thus stands for tragedy, murder, war (World War II, Vietnam War), and extermination.

In Haring's art, however, the crowd can also have positive connotations. In his last painting it was "against all odds" that he represented a jubilant crowd ready to mount the battle against oppression, suffering, death, and doom. For Keith Haring, this battle ended on February 16, 1990.

ALBERTINA

Such **torture scenes** as the present example appear in a number of Keith Haring's works. They show figures bound to chairs whose eyes are being covered or who are depicted blindfolded. The artist sought to not merely speak out for tolerance and humanism but to also explicitly address the violence committed by people against their fellow human beings in drastic pictures.

In Haring's work, the **skull** symbolizes death in the times of AIDS: the flying skulls and corpses represent the victims of the disease. The **X** marks an object or turns an individual into a target.

In Haring's art, the **cross** is the symbol of Christianity, religion, churches, and preachers. Haring's depictions are always marked by his rejection of any form of fundamentalism and his critique of the role of the church in suppressing the broader population. He spurned answers that sought to generalize: "You can only help and encourage people to live for themselves. The most evil people are the people who pretend to have answers. The fundamentalist Christians, all dogmatic 'control religions,' are evil.

The original ideas are good. But they are so convoluted and changed that only a skeleton of good intentions is left." The cross refers to televangelists, free churches, and sects. In Haring's works, crosses are either used by people to commit murder, or they lose their own lives upon them, like in this work.

Quotes

"I am interested in making art to be experienced and explored by as many individuals as possible with as many different individual ideas about the given piece with no final meaning attached. The viewer creates the reality, the meaning, the conception of the piece. I am merely a middleman trying to bring together ideas."

"The drawing is 'finished' from the time you start with the first line. There are places you can 'stop' the drawing and call it 'finished' but it is never really 'finished' until time and space itself are 'finished.' There are always infinitely more things you can do to the composition; the trouble is knowing when to stop. The beauty is knowing when to stop. I choose when to stop, but my work is never 'finished' and always 'finished.'"

"The drawings which I do have very little in common with drawings in the classical sense as they developed during the Renaissance, and the drawings that imitate life or make a lifelike impression. My drawings do not try to imitate life, they try to create life, to invent life."

"Drawing with chalk on this soft black paper was like nothing else I had ever drawn on. It was a continuous line, you didn't have to stop and dip it in anything. It was a constant line, it was a really graphically strong line and you had a time limit. You had to do these things as fast as you could. And you couldn't erase. So it was like there were no mistakes. You had to be careful to not get caught."

"Most of my political concerns and social concerns came from my life experiences. Partly being born in the late 1950s and growing up in the 1960s and sort of being around that counter culture but not being able to participate. Definitely being very affected by that and being at an age at the time when I think I was most impressionable, like seeing the Vietnam War when I was ten years old, seeing race riots on television and reading Life magazine."

"I saw beautiful Egyptian drawings today. There is a lot to be learned from Egyptian design concepts and their use of symbols."

"I am intrigued with the shapes people choose as their symbols to create language. [...] There is within all forms a basic structure, an indication of the entire object with a minimum of lines, that becomes a symbol. This is common to all languages, all people, all times."

"The public has a right to art. The public needs art, and it is the responsibility of a "self-proclaimed" artist to realize the public needs art, and not to make bourgeois art for the few and ignore the masses. Art is for everybody."

ALBERTINA

“Art is nothing if you don't reach every segment of the people.”

“An artist putting as many images into the world as I am should be aware of how they affect the world. Art should be something that liberates the soul, provokes the imagination, and encourages people to go further. It celebrates humanity instead of manipulating it.”

Keith Haring

“By association, Keith is part of the whole New York subway system. Just as no one can look at a sunflower without thinking of Van Gogh, so can no one be in the New York subway system without thinking of Keith Haring. And that's the truth.”

William S. Burroughs

ALBERTINA

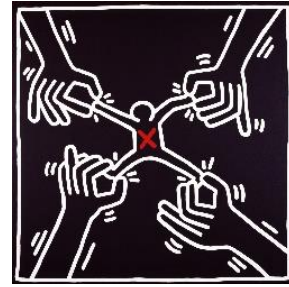
The following images are available free of charge in the *Press* section of www.albertina.at



Keith Haring
Untitled, 1982
Vinyl paint on vinyl tarp
Private collection
© The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
Untitled, 1985
Acrylic on canvas
Private collection
© The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
Untitled, 1985
Acrylic on canvas
Alona Kagan, USA
© The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
Andy Mouse, 1985
Acrylic on canvas
Private collection
© The Keith Haring Foundation



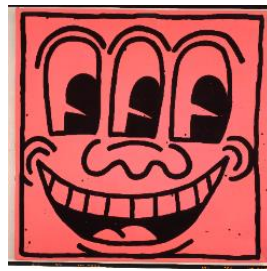
Keith Haring
Untitled, 1983
Vinyl paint on vinyl tarp
Collection of KAWS
© The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
Untitled, 1980
Ink on poster board
© The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
Untitled, 1980
Spray enamel, ink, and acrylic
on poster board
© The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
Untitled, 1981
Enamel on metal
Courtesy of The Brant Foundation,
Greenwich, Connecticut, USA
© The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
Untitled, 1981
Vinyl paint on vinyl tarp
Museum der Moderne Salzburg,
permanent loan from
a private collection
© The Keith Haring Foundation

ALBERTINA



Keith Haring
 Untitled, 1982
 Enamel and fluorescent
 paint on metal
 © The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
 Untitled, 1982
 Baked enamel on steel
 Courtesy of Larry Warsh
 © The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
 Untitled, 1982
 Sumi ink and acrylic
 mounted to canvas
 Courtesy of The Brant Foundation,
 Greenwich, Connecticut, USA
 © The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
 Untitled, 1983
 Fluorescent paint and
 lacquer on wood
 Gerald Hartinger Fine Arts, Vienna
 © The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
 Untitled, 1984
 Fluorescent acrylic on muslin
 Private collection, courtesy of
 Skarstedt Gallery
 © The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
 Untitled, 1985
 Acrylic on canvas
 Courtesy of The Keith Haring
 Foundation, New York,
 and the Gladstone Gallery,
 New York and Brussels
 © The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
 Untitled (Self-Portrait), 1985
 Acrylic on canvas
 Udo and Annette Brandhorst
 Collection, Munich
 © The Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
 Untitled, 1989
 Acrylic and enamel on canvas
 © The Keith Haring Foundation



Gottfried Helnwein
 Keith Haring (from the series *Faces*),
 1989/2014
 Black-and-white print on baryta
 paper, mounted to aluminium Dibond
 The Albertina Museum, Vienna
 © Gottfried Helnwein

Legal notification: The images are only to be used for press purposes and coverage related to the exhibition *Keith Haring. The Alphabet* (16 March – 25 June 2018).