

Keith Haring's unseen New York

by Hynam Kendall

Ponystep takes an exclusive look at never-before-seen Keith Haring chalk drawings, courtesy of Woodward Gallery, New York.

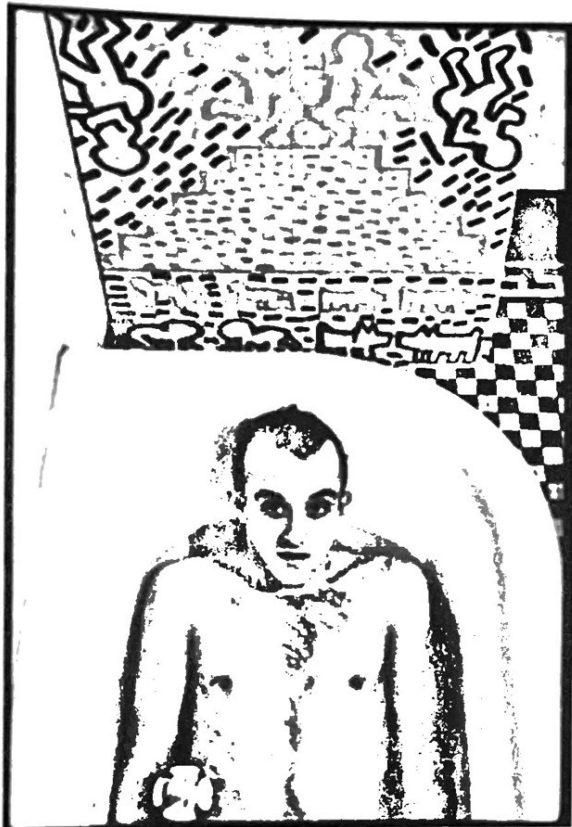
Riding the subway from his uptown apartment to the clubs, Haring noticed black paper hanging on billboards, noir sheets awaiting the next ad. Seizing this opportunity, Haring, under cloak of night, drew across the expanses of black paper. He drew all sorts. All sorts of childlike imagery. He drew barking dogs. Drew babies. Unisex figures. Ungendered figures. He drew spaceships. Drew warped, comic-strip TV sets. All using only cheap board chalk. Preferably white. The guerilla practice gained Haring great public reception, with critics dissecting these archaic modern day cave drawings, Pop Art that at once was urban storytelling, science fiction and hieroglyphics, both individually as cartoon cells, and together to form a narrative. They were all at once beautiful explorations of contemporary culture, and scenes in an otherwise unfinished story. This was the beginning of something big. Haring's first written review, "The Radiant Child" by Rene Ricard in 1981, hailed Haring and his friend Jean-Michel Basquiat as the most original artists of the decade. Praise indeed. And it seemed more prophecy than high praise. Haring would, over the years, become a cult figure, with art emblazoned across hipster's t-shirts, CD artworks, and myriad gallery spaces. Though few of these original etchings are seen, or even exist today.

"Keith Haring's signature cartoon figures spoke to our inner child with familiarity," says Kristine Woodward, owner of New York's Woodward Gallery, in contemplation of contemporary art's love affair with social activist Haring, whose iconic work, she reasons, responded to the New York City street culture of the 1980s and still resonates today, with myriad copycats and revelers still graffiti-ing walls with his signature bum-wiggling "Radiant Baby", a mass of bold lines and vivid colors. As Kristine notes to Ponystep, his work was easy to enjoy – on many levels. Her gallery will feature the playful subway drawings, studio interiors and other never-before-exhibited artworks by Haring that marked his early creative output, a time when his figures were still consigned to chalk drawings in the subways of New York, and he was only just realizing his signature style of amassed active figures bursting with life. Guests of Woodward will, for the very first time, get to appreciate Harings beginnings, when dogging the subway for empty walls and advertising boards constituted a hard day's work.

"We decided to do this exhibition and share these early works by Keith Haring to underscore the remarkable beginning of his career, looking to the past to further underscore Haring's outstanding contribution, impact and relevance to art today," Kristine says. How can you appreciate Haring's prolific output if you can't understand where he came from? "Although his work is now recognized globally, Woodward hopes to bring a new appreciation for this prolific artist, which we feel we are doing by featuring a variety of artistic mediums as Haring was exploring New York in his early years," Kristine concludes.

Keith Haring, New York, is exhibited at Woodward Gallery from September 12 to October 30.

www.woodwardgallery.net



KEITH HARING



ART
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