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INTRODUCTION

My introduction to Keith Haring's art occurred on the streets of New York City during the 1980s—a long time ago, in a galaxy far away. I first started to see his lively, gyrating figures and signature symbols in the form of white chalk drawings in the subway stations around Manhattan, his bold line taking its place amid the chaos of the surrounding graffiti. Keith's work was always instantly recognizable.

It was not uncommon to see Keith at those subway stops, too. He was courageous when it came to his art making, and despite several arrests he continued to contribute his gleeful artistic language to those underground spaces all over the city. I think that kind of fearlessness says a lot about Keith as a conscious human being—

he created work that aimed to bring light and levity, despite the risk. He was a person of action and communication; he cared and he made a difference for people, especially children in crisis and in need.

I was coming of age during those years, and it was an exciting moment in the development of American art, music, dance, theater, and performance—all of these cultural areas were being transformed in the hotbed of Manhattan's vibrant metropolitan sphere. It was also during that time that an incredibly motley group of creative individuals were based there—including Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Kenny Scharf, Futura (aka Leonard McGurr), Patti Astor, and Fab 5 Freddy (aka Fred Brathwaite), among many others—were defining and redefining the zeitgeist. Keith was closely aligned with his community, and his genuine spirit of generos-

ity is remembered by these closest friends. Their collective energy not only revolutionized the era, it has remained an enduring inspiration that continues to shape our understanding of contemporary art, aesthetics, fashion, and design on a global scale.

Looking back on those extraordinary days, I now see how that time was a truly pivotal moment in the development of art as we understand it today. Those fertile years are now commonly referred to as the “downtown scene” (synonymous with the East Village of Manhattan)—and it was an era like no other. There were many significant people that contributed to my burgeoning knowledge of the art being created during that decade, and Rene Ricard was among the most prominent. An important writer and cultural critic, Rene was a brilliant person and a passionate thinker. He wrote intensely about art,

and his ideas were hugely influential on my perspective and journey as a collector. Rene pushed open a lot of conceptual doors for me, and he also led me deeper into Keith's work.

As a maturing collector, I could see that a new kind of artistic focus was taking shape and that it was the result of that special combination of people, time, and place—it was the moment! It was clear to me that Keith's art was extremely relevant, and my passion, combined with my ambition, drove me to collect many rare works by him. Times have indeed changed, and I am honored to be one of the custodians of Keith's oeuvre.

Anyone familiar with Keith's art will also notice the power and conviction of his artistic representation. Besides the evident charm of his radiant babies, cheerful dogs, and spirited dancing dudes, Keith's work also addressed some of

the heaviest social issues of the 1980s, including the rise of AIDS, homophobia, racism, and urban police brutality. AIDS especially was an unprecedented epidemic that took many of his friends (mine too) and ultimately Keith. Yet he brought these controversies into his art, and his unwavering commitment to those themes remains evident in the power of his symbolism.

Keith's freewheeling, expressive style was also a strong catalyst for the dissolution between the exclusive, elite side of the art business and the multitude of casual art lovers around the world. His personal style eventually morphed into a recognizable brand, and in that sense he was ahead of his time with respect to self-styled influence. His famous Pop Shop on Lafayette Street in New York City was also a bridge that brought so-called high art and low art together. There he offered his editioned prints, multiples,

clothing, and other custom Keith Haring merchandise within reach. I lived in that area and frequented the Pop Shop often—it was a great place to interface with other artistic types and catch up on the latest happenings.

Keith Haring was one of the most important artists of his generation and beyond, and this book of *Haring-isms* was created to further his singular genius to a new epoch of admirers. The phrases herein are gathered from various sources, including interviews, articles, and recordings of the artist in conversation, revealing Haring's influences and his thoughts on a variety of topics, including birth and death, possibility and uncertainty, and difference and conformity.

These writings demonstrate Haring's sincere engagement with subjects outside of the art world and his outspoken commitment to activism. Taken together, these quotes reflect Haring's

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singular voice and remind us why his art continues to resonate with fans far and wide. May you enjoy these pages in the spirit of a phrase that Keith sometimes wrote on the back of his artworks: “endless love.”

LARRY WARSH
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