



Keith Haring's Artwork of Symbolism

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What To Expect

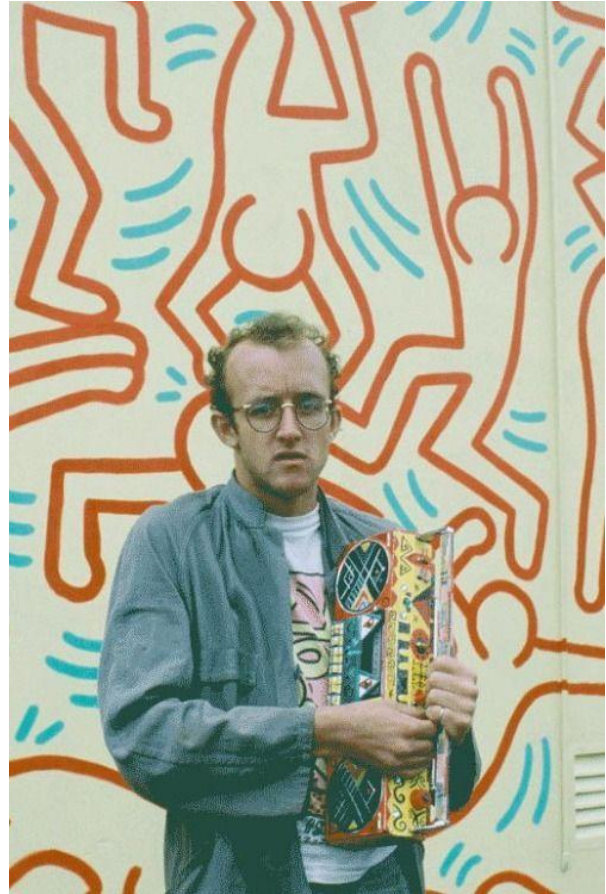
Keith Haring's work in relation to symbolism.

What is the messaging within each of his pieces? His icons, symbols, posters, etc?

How does his work correspond with theories of previous artists?

Who was Keith Haring?

Haring was an artist who used symbols and icons in his work to often tackle social issues. He used simple linework with bright colors to create unique yet simple icons/symbols. These icons/symbols would often represent in-depth meanings that Haring would explain.



Life Background

Haring was born a Pennsylvanian in 1958.

He realized his love for drawing and art at an early age, learning from his own father.

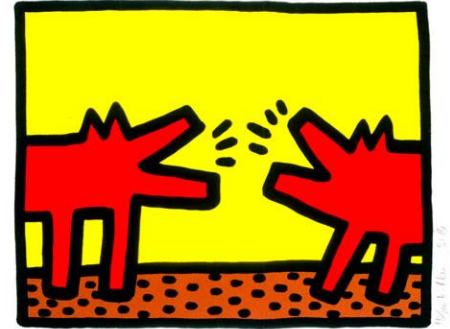
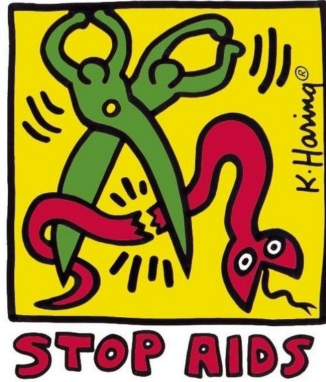
In 1976, after dropping out of the Ivy School of Professional Art in Pittsburgh, he moved to NYC to study at the School of Visual Arts (SVA).

Life Background (cont.)

He became enthralled in the alt art community. (Graffiti, seen outside galleries, museums, in downtown streets and subway systems. He wanted to focus on public art.

Haring was diagnosed with HIV in 1987 and AIDS in 1988. He died at a young age of 31.

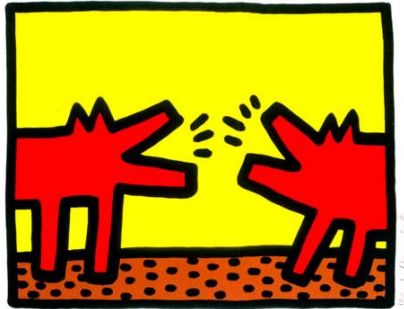
Haring's Artwork



Haring's Artwork (info)

Haring's style of artwork consisted of bold lines, geometric shapes, and often bright colors. With how simple his designs appeared, colors and the shapes chosen always had a deeper meaning than just what was seen. Haring communicated a lot within a single design. This was how he tackled social issues such as violence, ignorance, drugs, and especially the AIDS/HIV pandemic.

Symbol's Broken Down Meanings: The Barking Dog



A dog can be viewed as both a figure of obedience, and a dominator. Haring created these icons to represent oppression and aggression. He tries to warn the viewers of those in power. What should we think of those who bark/speak the loudest? Should you always trust authority figures?

Broken Down Meanings (cont.): The Radiant Baby

Babies are viewed as the most innocent beings on Earth. Haring puts this meaning of innocence into his design of the crawling baby, radiating positive energy. This symbol of innocence is changed, however, completely flipping it's meaning 180°. Haring covers the innocent symbol in Kaposi's sarcoma, viewed as the HIV infection. This was also a symbol for himself and his HIV diagnosis; the feeling of his innocence and positive life depleting. The infected baby design has a more ominous, "stay-away-from-it" feeling.



Broken Down Meanings (cont.): Figures with X's or Holes



The hole in the middle is to represent the emptiness within people. With the hands up “don’t shoot” position of the arms, these figures can be viewed as feeling threatened or targeted. We see the dots of infection again, referring to the HIV virus. With the combination of the individual symbols meanings in the second work, one can think the authority figures are the real virus, threatened the average person with ignorance, bigotry, etc.

In Relation to Saussure's "Course in General Linguistics"

Images make it a lot easier to understand what the concept or story is behind it; it's less to take in but still just as effective at communicating. Saussure states, "The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image." Symbols make for quick and easy communication of an idea. Seeing a baby with the color blue will quickly translate to innocence in many minds.

In relation to Rodchenko's "Who We Are"

Rodchenko believed art should serve a purpose, and Haring's works definitely did. Rodchenko believed art should benefit society, speaking on constructors, engineers, lab workers, etc. However, Haring's symbols and posters brought up tough conversations in society that needed to be addressed and destigmatized, such as the HIV pandemic. His art served as conversation starters and fights against social injustices.

In Relation to Bayer's "On Typography"

Herbert Bayer speaks on a similar service to society in regards to typography, and bridging the gap between people with different languages. Haring achieved this also through his iconic imagery. He uses his unique form of art to communicate his concepts and beliefs, and people are able to easily recognize the meanings and the story they may tell. Instead of a universal typeface, Haring created universal imagery.

In relation to Barthe's "Rhetoric of the Image"

Haring has a ton of messages in all of his works. Taking a look at Haring's "Ignorance=Fear" piece, we can see the denoted message being people covering their eyes, ears, and mouths. Along with this are the headlines clearly stating "Ignorance=Fear. Silence=Death. Fight AIDS. Act Up." These are blunt, obvious messages being handed to the viewer.



In relation to Barthe's "Rhetoric of the Image" (cont.)



The connoted message, however, is the symbolic meaning behind these obvious objects in the piece. Each element, covering the eyes, ears, and mouth, the lines surrounding the figures to represent shakiness, the X's in their stomach; these all come together to symbolize the impact the AIDS pandemic had on society. The X's symbolising the figures as targets, scared of being next; scared of even being in that conversation and choosing to be ignorant. This results in fear/anxiety, hence the lines to represent shakiness.

Wrap Up

- Haring was a talented artist who created pieces of work with deep meaning and symbolism.
- Easily turned a concept, belief, or issue into a “sound-image” with clear communication.
- Served a purpose in society by bringing up taboo topics within his art.
- Created a universal way of communicating with his style of art.

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