

Stephen Seelal

Professor Matthew Lange

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Keith Haring's *Crack is Wack*

To create work that is relevant, impactful and ultimately stand the test of time is what every great artist should strive to achieve. Graffiti artist Keith Haring is the perfect person to support this idea. With his 1986 mural, *Crack is Wack*, Haring conveyed a very important message-being against crack cocaine, while staying true to his unique artistic stylings. Composed of a vibrant orange background, an arrangement of defined lines and his recognizable figures, all of which surround the phrase "Crack is Wack". The period in which the mural was created consisted of the rising popularity of crack cocaine in cities like New York, where the mural is located. He chose to create *Crack is Wack* without legal permission, resulting in an impactful work of art that took a stand on an imperative relevant issue and appealed to a wide audience.

Crack is Wack incorporates elements of the Pop Art, a vibrant visual where a direct message is understood and a sense of enthusiasm is conveyed. Pop Art is known to be very dramatic and consist of elaborate concepts. Haring's mural can be described as very childlike or eccentric, as the many drawn figures can be seen as a distraction to the real issue at hand. Even though this can be one's understanding, the real concept behind the mural is very much serious and important. Pop Art embodies different topics and attitudes, often in a very direct or complex manner. *Crack is Wack* goes straight to the point; consuming crack cocaine is not okay. The most

obvious way Haring's mural relates to Pop Art is the lack of hierarchy. He intentionally created a visually jumbled art piece, but his use of clean lines and curves evoke a sense of professionalism. His talent is made very apparent.

When art is created with good intentions and positivity, greatness can be achieved. Keith Haring was able to seek inspiration within an ongoing problem and create an influential piece of art. A concept which Bruno Munari discusses in "Design of Art". Munari details how designs and art that are created with purpose results in longlasting pieces. Designers should design with purpose and play a beneficial role within society. *Crack is Wack* not only played a role in New York where it stood but could be seen as a message to the world. Haring knew what message he wanted to share and was able to finish his intended idea. To be informative and present relevant ideas, is the most successful way to contribute to society and Haring did just that. Munari directly expresses this concept when he states, "the designer is therefore the artist of today, not because he is a genius but because he works in such a way as to reestablish contact between art and the public..." (32). This is present in *Crack is Wack*, the mural does not cater to a specific group or community, instead is a message to all who may come across it.

Keith Haring's mural having the words "Crack is Wack" is a direct example of how language can be the root in which connections are made. The iconic mural can be seen as simple in way, but the connection that is made to any viewer is very apparent. Haring was able to bring light to an issue through written language and cartoon figures. His use of black bold letters and shapes creates a clean and direct image, in other words a straightforward message. The many black humans or creatures that Haring always used in his work, is an obvious representation of society and the people. Together they create an interesting visual but with further thought and

analysis, it gives a hint to what his intentions are, to bring awareness to the dangerous use of crack cocaine. Haring's ability to stay true to his unique graffiti art style while covering a serious issue is inspiring. Having spread this message on a mural opposed to posters or another form of media, allows for a connection to be made to the people of New York. His use of graffiti aesthetics feels true to the streets of New York and on brand with the emotions that fill the city. Despite it's true nature of feeling like a New York art piece, the mural's message and theme can be related worldwide. Not only did he create a visually pleasing and creative mural, but created art that people can understand and identify with across the world. Connecting to your audience is an element art or design should present. When people are motivated or moved by your work the greatest success is achieved and Keith Haring was able to with his mural *Crack is Wack*.



Works Cited

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