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Art 144

Keith haring movie

Recently I have reviewed an interesting Documentary film telling the story of the rise of an urban artist named Keith Haring. I would start by relaying the basic aspects of his birth and early life in his home town in Kutztown, Pennsylvania. All I will say is that he was creating a background as an illustrator and had hopes to work for the Walt Disney Corporation. To sum up Keith’s thirst for success I will just say that he kept meticulous note books at a young age and when ready for college jumped into it starting at Pittsburgh at the Ivy School of Professional Art, then drove cross-country with his girlfriend to San Francisco all before the start of the end of the 70s. Soon Keith returned to Pittsburgh where his only break from monotony was the occasional Pittsburgh Arts and Crafts show. Again, feeling the need to push his creativity Keith started at the Manhattan's School of Visual Arts. Where he flounced around with a young Madonna; who was a coat check girl at a club named Danceteria in the early 80s. Keith had, by that time dropped any ambition for the ladies.

During the early 1980s many young artist had a rough time in the art community “proving” themselves as artist including Jean-Michel Basquiat. Anyone who by that time was considered an artist had broken the chains that kept new/young artist from being respected and accepted. These ground breakers include Roy Lichtenstein, Kenny Scharf a close friend and the most POP of them all, Andy Warhol. Oddly enough Warhol was also from Pennsylvania a mere 270 miles or four hour drive away from Kutztown. Keith haring started his main stream art movement in the New York subways. Filling empty black canvases with something more interesting. His primitive depictions of bipedal humanoid characters, cavorting about with one another was mild a shock to the average subway patron. These living poster boards did get Keith in some trouble with the law; he was arrested more than once. As an artist Haring had trouble being accepted by the critics of the New York art markets, this would soon change as Haring; being pushed by his own motives refused to slow down. In 1982 Haring had his first show at the Shafrazi Gallery. Keith was in the thick of the modernism, hip hop, graffiti movement that was becoming the new wave of youth art.

By 1985 Keith Haring had become a recognized entity within the art industry. Leo Castelli had by the mid-80s featured haring’s works in numerous gallery shows. Absolute Vodka also had Keith’s art printed as an advertisement for their now “icon” bottle. As 1985 turned the corner Haring had open an art store called the “POP SHOP” where anyone could get a t-shirt, jacket or poster printed with one of Haring’s iconographic images. Modern urban pop art was still misunderstood by the previous 50’s and 60s generation elders. It was the under culture that pushed the primitive urban art movement. Haring was at full throttle between the years of 1986 and 1988. Producing more projects then many other artists twice his age including a mural for the anti-drug movement and 50 other public works. Keith Haring had been motivated by a trip to Australia, created a gallery environment for Steve Maas at the “Mudd Club”, Dropped out of the School of Visual Arts, and created many large scale sculptures and indoor installations. In 1986 Haring was in Berlin, creating a mural on the Berlin wall. Haring was picked to create a oversized mural which involved 900 children for the commensuration of the Statue of Liberty.

Oddly enough by the end of the 80s haring was being shunned by the art community which once welcomed him. In 1988 after Keith was diagnosed with HIV he started the Keith Haring Foundation to support AIDS organizations and children’s programs. By 1990 the young 31-year-old Keith Haring died on February 16. He is remembered by many around the world including Yoko Ono, Princess Caroline, Timothy Leary, William Burroughs and Dennis Hopper who said haring was a combination of generosity and humility. His works continues to be exhibited around the world and many are owned by such prestigious museums as the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.

In 2008 Ney York City honored Haring’s 50th birthday with a Macy’s Day parade float of “figure with heart” and a remake of Keith’s more famous mural recreated with the help of the Keith Haring Foundation and Gotham Scenics.