



Keith Haring Journals

Keith Haring , Robert Farris Thompson (Introduction)

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Renowned in his lifetime for spontaneous, hands-on, archetypal imagery, Keith Haring was embraced by a street audience while also winning the respect of the art establishment during his prolific and regrettably brief ten-year career. His journals, kept from his teens until just before his death from AIDS in 1990, dispel any lingering notion of him as a "naïve" artist, and reveal him to be a conscientious, serious, visionary artist, committed to extending the boundaries of art. Here in his own words - illustrated with previously unpublished drawings from his notebooks - is Haring's record of the evolution of his work, from on-the-road notes and early ideas about art, to School of Visual Arts experiments, to early subway chalk drawings, to full-scale color canvases, outdoor murals, collaborative public art projects with children, massive suburban steel sculptures and international exhibitions. The journals track his emergence into world fame as a pop icon, his hectic and colorful social life in the New York scene, and his friendships with Andy Warhol, Timothy Leary, William S. Burroughs and other writers, musicians and artists. Haring documents his efforts to bring art and everyday life closer through the controversial Pop Shop, which remains a vital legacy of his work. Later entries show him expanding his understanding of what the role of the artist should be, trying to deal with his entry into the commercial world and pop culture, and coming to accept his impending death from AIDS: "Work is all I have and art is more important than life." Robert Farris Thompson's lively and provocative introduction situates Haring in relation to the art historical establishment, and shows the intellectual underpinnings of his work, including the influence of such painters as Leger, Alechinsky, Dubuffet, Stella, Pollock, and Olitski.

Keith Haring Journals Details

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Ilmatte says

Conosco e inseguo da tempo le opere di KH, ma non conoscevo pressoché nulla della sua vita. Sono i suoi diari, come li ha scritti lui, con salti, dimenticanze, momenti intensissimi, di vita privata che non ha nulla a che vedere con l'arte, in mezzo a spiegazioni (a se stesso) del perché dei suoi dipinti.

<http://bookcrossing.com/journal/1292528>

Patrice says

It took me over a year to read this book. It may have been due in part to the fact that I knew that Haring would inevitably die an early heart breaking death. I first found this book in Ara Güler's café in Istanbul back in 2008. I sat at the small table pouring over the journals and knew I had to order it when I got back to the states.

These journals start in 1977 when Haring is a teenager living in Pennsylvania hitch hiking and busing around the country attending Grateful Dead shows, visiting Disney Land, and seeing the west coast. Fast forward a year and Haring has made the leap of moving to New York City and is attending the School of Visual Arts.

Haring's early journals show the work of a devoted artist and student of art. Haring frequently quotes articles, biographies, literature, and philosophers as he examines his relationship and vision of art. These journals are rich and illuminating. Haring seems to be keeping a vital record of his process, inspiration, and motivation behind creating his work.

Reading Haring's descriptions of the late 1970's and early 1980's are brilliant. The group of artists, musicians, DJs, poets, writers, and socialites that Haring surrounds himself with are incredible. In addition to being an amazing visual artist, Haring is a descriptive and generous writer. I couldn't help but feel lucky to be privy to Haring's stories about some of the clubs, all night dance parties, and creative work that was happening in NYC at that time.

Haring is brutally honest about the harshness of the art world as he climbs to success in a relatively short period of time. One of his journal entries categorically picks apart the process of marketing and selling art. It's almost a how-to manual on how the auction houses, art dealers, gallery owners, and critics create and destroy artists.

The later entries of Haring's diaries are a whirlwind tour of the world as he travels from Japan to Europe to NYC and back again. Between each year of entries is a list of one man exhibitions, group exhibitions, special projects, and books & catalogues. These lists are increasingly long and active. Haring's special projects are overwhelming to behold, his work is often for charitable organizations, and many children's organizations.

Haring often bemoans his lack of acceptance into the upper reaches of the art world. In one journal entry he visits the MOMA in NYC to visit the solo exhibition of a contemporary. His contemporary is obviously influenced by Haring's work, but the MOMA has never purchased Haring's work or asked him to exhibit.

Haring's journals are delightfully honest and full of interesting stories about people, cute boys, and children he meets and loves all over the world. Haring runs in the top circles of the celebrity, society, and art world.

There is no clear indication in the journals of when Keith is clearly diagnosed with AIDS. A journal entry late in 1989 tells of his daily AZT medication, but there is little mention of his realization of being diagnosed with the disease. However, earlier entries in Haring's journals are prophetic and filled with worry that he will someday be diagnosed. Haring writes about his thoughts that AIDS is a government created disease/war. If anything, Keith's work only increases after his diagnosis with the disease.

The work that Keith Haring left for the world is immense and incredibly important for an artist who had such a short time to work.

Jory Dayne says

Keith Haring's images are some of the earliest I remember — I can still see his drawings in my mind, animated, accompanied by the goofiest songs on Sesame Street. The more I learn about his life the more and more respect I gain for him. His pieces, like himself, are at once reserved and saturated with emotion — a king of permanent Interrobang Introspection, and his journal is perhaps all of that in a more raw form.

A journal is what it is. In some places this book leaves a little to be desired, I find myself skimming as the art theory gets a little thick or the narration disjointed... but then I get snapped back to attention by devastating passages like the one from March 28, 1987:

"Anyway, there is one question George [Condo:] is asked about life and and art and which is more important, and George said art is more important because it is immortal. This struck a very deep note inside me. For I am quite aware of the chance that I have or will have AIDS.

The odds are very great and, in fact, the symptoms already exist. My friends are dropping like flies and I know in my heart that it is only divine intervention that had kept me alive this long. I don't know if I have five months or five years, but I know my days are numbered.

This is why my activities and projects are so important now. To do as much as possible as quickly as possible... I'm not afraid of anything I've ever done. Not ashamed of anything."

It's hard not to get emotional as you progress from this point, knowing that time is running out for him, that he had not five, but barely three more years left to live. In a addition to that, it's a fascinating look into Haring's increasingly star-studded life, into his struggles and progression as an artist. The new Penguin Deluxe edition is especially nice: it wants to be toted along and left under a pillow — it begs to be touched and weathers nicely. It's appropriate and well considered.

Rita says

I love him so reading his journals was a must. Oh boy, I loved it even more than I was expecting. A must read book for art lovers in general, not just Keith Haring fans. I love his reflections on life and art and the view of NY society in 1980-90, specially in LGBT+ and AIDS awareness. The part where it ends out of nowhere and then you read he dies (no spoilers there, right?) it's chilling. Always freaks me out to read such stuff.

Schmacko says

I'm going to read it again.

Nativeabuse says

This was more depressing than anything. It starts out the story of a guy who is totally committed to coming up with neat interesting artistic concepts, he starts out with his art school ideals writing in such a lovely way about how he does his work and you really watch Haring begin to grow as an artist across each page! The first part of the books is awesome.

I would recommend skipping the second half entirely though. It jumps abruptly from Harings neat musings on art and aesthetics and his current shows, ect. to 4 or 5 years of no journals, then when you resume them his journals consist of nothing but a laundry list of business and which famous people he was partying/eating dinner with last night. Gone completely are his musings on art. Most of the rest of the book is Keith being pissy about how people are acting toward him and complaining about stuff. He talks about nothing but business and 'work' he sees it as nothing but a job from this point, which is sad.

He also doesn't really touch on his current relationships very much at all., And later on he doesn't muse about death or his aids. Right up to the end it is 'work' was this today, this guy called, meeting with this guy, dinner with this chick. Ect.

I hated how it totally skips out how he met up with all the right people and got famous, skipping from being in a couple of local galleries to being completely famous? What happened?

It was really depressing to watch this guy throw away his love of art to become obsessed with making money by doing extremely similar stick figure designs that he can pump out really quickly. His style doesn't really change at all later because he stopped exploring. Sad story.

Imani says

Keith Haring shares himself with his audience in such a beautiful way. His writing makes feel like I knew him myself, then sad because I never will. His language is not the most flowery, but his words are deeply profound. This book means the world to me. His art will never be the same for me again.

Alexander says

Incredible, fun, and at times quite saddening. Learning about Haring is learning what a fully realized life looks like, even if efficiently lived.

Bill says

I really enjoyed a lot of the entries in this book where Haring is writing about his ideas on art, life and death. It was very fascinating and inspiring to see what was going on in his mind, even as a very young artist before his rise to fame. However, nearly halfway through the book he is an internationally known artist and with that the entries are dominated with his very busy day to day life. I would only really recommend it to fans of Haring to check out as a book that you can pick up and read a few passages at a time.

Julene says

I enjoyed reading the Keith Haring Journals, I remember seeing his drawings in the subway in NYC back in the early 80s and wondering about them, then he hit the big time and everyone knew who he was. It was a great read to bring me back to my NYC days, to read about his mentoring connection with Andy Warhol and his grief at such a big loss, to the days when people were dying of AIDS, and to read his process commentary on his artwork. He lived a short intense life and was a passionate artist, that kind of passion is something to pay attention to and learn from.

Bosorka says

Žetla jsem v ukradených chvílkách, dlouhodobě, našťastí u deníků to tolik nevadí a u toho Haringova asi ještě méně. Je to soubor myšlenek, postojů, k tomu cestování po světě, setkávání se se známými (i známějšími), popisy tvorby jeho děl. Jsou to kousky jeho života - který byl ale tak krátký. Mám ráda tvorbu Keitha Haringa a jeho deníky byly k ní zajímavým doplňkem. Byl mnohdy nadřasově myslící a i když sám tušil, že zemře mladý (a to ještě dřív, než onemocněl AIDS), nebylo by vůbec špatné, kdyby tu pobyl déle. A víc toho napsal. I nakreslil.

Robin Dalla-Vicenza says

This was really a really interesting memoir (diary) in that it covered such a large period of time over a person's life, from when he was in University right up until his death. Not only do you learn a lot about Haring himself, but about the time period that he lived in through his political and social engagements. There is a lot in the book about the politics of art, particularly of Pop Art and how it is viewed by the rest of the art community. Towards the latter half of the book it goes into the AIDS epidemic that was occurring at the time, and his own battle with the disease which is very poignant but also heartbreaking, not only because of Haring's own eventual death, but reading about his reactions to all of the people around him that he sees dying. All in all a very interesting read.

Omar Rodriguez-Rodriguez says

Keith Haring's Journals give a good account of the events in his life and his reactions to the world around him. This is a close look at 1980's and the art scene of the times. His point of view on Warhol's work is enlightening as well as his point of view on "street" and "museum" art. He reviews the art (and party) scene

of NYC, questions the validity of his own work, his place in history, the business of the Art world, AIDS, his mortality, his legacy, etc, etc

KH was a Peter Pan who could write about a visit to El Prado or contemplating boys in the beach with the same level of spiritual passion.

Michael Clark says

A heartbreaking work of genius. What a gifted artist and better at words than one would expect. The early parts where he's working out his artistic philosophy gives you great insight into his process and deeper understanding of where he saw his art in the spectrum of history. Then his drive to create despite his looming death is riveting and leaves you to wonder what he would have done with a full lifetime? Might he have surpassed Picasso or Warhol? I guess we must be happy he was able to create the body of work he did in such a short time.

aryn says

p22: November 12, 1978 Drawing pictures in the snow is the most perfect example of my attempts to create a perfect form. Inevitably the snow is in constant change: There is no way to control its permanency or its form. Drawing in the snow is like trying to paint a picture that will record specific thoughts at a specific time. You draw fast and you are always aware that you are creating something very temporary, very auto-destructive, very instant. It goes quickly and there is not time to worry about it. It is important for the experience, for the time it exists and the time it has occupied in a never-ending process of creation/construction and destruction. A circle. It is possible to reach the highest levels of instantaneous response recorded in spontaneous method and representative of purest through when you are working with the knowledge that the work you create is temporary, insignificant in a broader sense, significant in an immediate sense, a perfect representation of time passing, time existing. Then you realize you are reacting instead of acting. Responding instead of contriving. Art instead of imitation. Primal response. Humanistic attempts at succeeding time.

This, I feel, is the advantage to creating art at this point in time: When we realize that we are temporary, we are facing our self-destruction, we are realizing our fate and we must confront it. Art is the only sensible primal response to an outlook of possible destruction (obliteration).

p160: June 26, 1987 Artists help the world go forward, and at the same time make the transition smoother and more comprehensible. often it is difficult to isolate the actual effect of artists on the physical world of "reality": their effect is so much a part that it is part of the interpretation or experience of "reality" itself. we see as we have been taught " to see" and we experience as we have " been shown" to experience. Each new creation becomes part of the interpretation / definition of the "thing " that will come next; at the same time becoming a kind of summation of everything that has preceded it. this constant state of flux is recorded in time by events and within events by the "things " that populate, define and compose these events. Since he creates them, these "things " are the responsibility of the artist. They must be constructed with care and consideration (aesthetics) since it is these "things " alone that will bring "meaning " and "value" to events and consequently our lives.

p158: June 25, 1987 It's really satisfying to make the things and really fulfilling to see peoples response to them, but the rest is difficult. I tried, as much as I could, to take a new position, a different attitude about selling things, by doing things in public and by doing commercial things that go against the ideas of the

"commodity-hype" art market. However, even these things are co-opted and seen by some as mere advertisement for my saleable artworks. I fear there is no way out of this trap. once you begin to sell things (anything) you are guilty of participating in the game. however, if you refuse to sell anything you are a non-entity. My decision to come to New York and be "public" artist was spurred by my desire to communicate and contribute to culture and eventually history. once I decided to be "visible " instead of merely entertaining myself (masturbating) with my paintings then I entered the game. I always believed that if I maintained (and I have) my original motivation and integrity, then I could avoid being a victim and play by my own rules.

p174-175: October 2, 1987 Photography has become such an important part of my work since so much of it is temporary. It is, after all, the phenomena of photography and video that have made the international phenomenon of Keith Haring possible. How else would everyone in the world have plugged into my information? Most information about art is conveyed through pictures now. Sometimes that's deceptive, but in my case it is the means /and/ the end. Of course, the effect of scale is lost in photo depiction, but almost all of the other information is transferable.

p192: October 17, 1987 On the train to Tama. I was discussing with Seiko how much the fundamental difference between people here and in the West had so much to do with religion. Everyone here is born a Buddhist, whether they are actively practicing or not. The basic attitude toward the world and the concept of "self" is very different than the Western idea, most of which is a result of Christianity. Somehow I think Buddhism instills a basic premise of "peace" with the world and the self and a kind of respect for the individual as well as the "whole." The basic general attitude of people here has a kind of intensity uncommon to me. The attention paid to details and aesthetic sensibility is an "understood" (unquestioned) fact. People do not think that "art" is a separate concept or pursuit in the same way as in the West. There is an unwritten understanding of respect and coexistence.

p222: July 27, 1988 Moments like this make me fall in love with this country : the subtleties and nuances of daily life and values that Western people aren't even conscious of anymore. There is a kind of poetry to all life here and every action seems symbolic.