

GLADSTONE

Marion Maneker, "Inside the Brant Foundation's New Keith Haring Show", *Puck*,
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Inside the Brant Foundation's New Keith Haring Show

It's not clear that we need another Keith Haring show, given how many have been held recently. But we're lucky to have this one, opening tomorrow at the Brant Foundation, which pushes beyond the deeply familiar aspects of his work. **MARION MANEKER** March 10, 2026

A show simply titled *Keith Haring*, which focuses on the artist's formative years in New York, opens tomorrow at the Brant Foundation in the East Village. Organized by independent Vienna-based curators **Dieter Buchhart** and **Anna Karina Hofbauer**, the exhibit is a meditation on the period from 1980 to 1984, when **Haring** was making his famous subway drawings, tarps, and a number of other innovative works relying on unconventional materials like Day-Glo paint. The husband-and-wife duo have said they wanted to focus on the formation of Haring's now-famous and universally recognized visual language, and to dig into the origins of his iconography.

Taking it a step further, they imagine that Haring's radiant baby, barking dogs, dancing figures, dolphins, and spaceships are a precursor to our emoji-driven communications culture. "We came to Haring via **Basquiat**," Buchhart told me—the latter having innovated his own emoji-like images, most recognizably the crown. The artists were friends who both died quite young, and Buchhart had worked on a number of Basquiat shows previously, including an exhibition of collaborative works with **Andy Warhol** that traveled to the Brant Foundation.

Despite their friendship and common fate, Haring and Basquiat were very different artists. (And as **I've written** previously, their markets, too, have taken divergent paths over the past several years.) Where Basquiat made heavily worked images, Haring is known for his unerring, all-over compositions. "Haring has the perfect line," Buchhart observed, noting how the artist was able to work fluidly without much preparation. "He never did sketches. He just stood before the work" and created complex but fully realized images with nary a mistake.

It's not clear that the world needs another Keith Haring show. The Broad held a retrospective in 2023; his work played an important role in the Lévy Gorvy Dayan show with **Mary Boone** last autumn; and the Keith Haring Foundation showed his work at Gladstone Gallery late last year. In a few months, Crystal Bridges will open a show of Haring's three-dimensional works—the vases and objects he painted in his quest to create art that was for everyone.

Nevertheless, we're lucky to have this show. Buchhart and Hofbauer wanted to push beyond the deeply familiar aspects of Haring's work. "We wanted to dig into those formative years," Buchhart said, especially since the Brant Foundation's building on East 6th Street sits close to many of the important venues where Haring showed his work during that period: PS 122, Fun Gallery, and **Tony Shafrazi's** space. (After the earlier Basquiat exhibitions and showing **Kenny Scharf** last year, the Brant Foundation is closing out its East Village trilogy with Haring.)

The Subway Drawings

The central hall of the Brant Foundation show features a multistory wall where Hofbauer and Buchhart have installed nine of Haring's vinyl tarpaulins—a medium all his own, for which he experimented with different types of vinyl paints to adhere to the material. The imagery runs the gamut from easily deciphered to hopelessly convoluted. Just behind that imposing wall, the curators have created a space for the Day-Glo paintings they've gathered. It turns out that the U.V. light used to activate the Day-Glo paint also degrades the artworks, so they turned the black lights on only briefly while I was there last week. The full effect is certainly more impressive, but even unlit, or under normal light, the paintings remain quite vivid.

Across from them are four carved wood pieces painted black and incised with the artist's figures in red—one of them carved in the shape of a Haring dancing dog, this one double-headed and covered with red designs. But the bulk of this main room is given over to subway drawings, which Haring first conceived in December 1980 after moving to a loft near Times Square with Scharf. Boarding the F train just below the loft, Haring noticed the ads in the subway had been torn out, awaiting replacement. What was left, according to his biographer, was "an empty panel covered in soft matte black paper." He immediately knew he needed white chalk.

The resulting drawings—Hofbauer estimates there were 12,000, based on photographic evidence, though it's unclear how many remain—are the launching point of the artist's iconography, and a further demonstration of his impressive and unerring line. Haring traveled through the subway system with his chalk and images fully formed in his head, drawing almost automatically.

The seven such works that Hofbauer and Buchhart have gathered here come in different sizes corresponding to the subway ad units. There's a rare side-by-side drawing (two panels preserved in their original subway frame) with blue paint; and, to my astonishment, one that had clearly been removed from the wall alongside an ad for *Penthouse* magazine featuring **Pia Zadora** on the cover. Zadora is a name to conjure with; she was, in many ways, a precursor to today's reality television stars. And if Buchhart and Hofbauer are making a case for Haring's influence on emoji culture, her presence is a reminder of the parallel growth of ersatz celebrity and fame. But maybe we shouldn't blame Haring for that.

The Haring Code

Hieroglyphics had a significant influence on Haring's iconography, Hofbauer said. She mentioned that Haring spent a fair amount of time at the Met, sketching in the Egyptian wing and looking at Greek and Roman vases. "It makes you sentimental thinking of it," she said.

The show riffs on this with an 8½-foot-tall terra-cotta vase installed on the third floor, effectively placing it at the center of Haring's art. It has two sections: rings of images like crawling babies, dancing figures, and wavy lines on the bottom half, and a tableau of complicated images melding into one another on the top. The vase itself is worth the trip. "The size, the stories," Hofbauer said. "You can spend hours decoding it."



Keith Haring, Untitled (Tinaja) (1982-83) Photo: Copyright © Keith Haring Foundation, Courtesy of Galerie Enrico Navarra, Paris

Buchhart also reminded me of the relevant point that Greek vases often depicted sexual imagery. For all of his genial populism—"art is for everybody!"—Haring was uncompromising in his politics, especially his sexual politics. Deeply antagonistic to the **Reagan** administration, particularly its stance on AIDS, he was unwilling to sanitize his sexuality to reach a broader audience for his art. To put it bluntly, there are a lot of dicks in Haring's art, which is what Buchhart was alluding to. But none that I could see on this vase, or almost anywhere in the show. (If you go, let me know if you see the singular unobtrusive one.)

Surrounding the vase are a number of strong black-and-white works, along with an untitled 1981 work of dancing dogs with striking red-and-green accents. That piece, which made \$4.5 million at auction a dozen years ago, was also featured in the Lévy Gorvy Dayan show and hangs not far from a 1982 drawing of a Mickey Mouse–like figure that German soccer player **Michael Ballack** acquired last November for \$1.5 million. (Two of the tarps were also recently at auction; one was purchased by the Brant Foundation.)

This is a reminder that Haring's auction market tends to wax and wane. In three different years over the past decade—2019, 2021, and 2024—overall sales for the artist's auction market reached \$36 million, only to retreat each time. No one doubts Haring's visibility or lasting influence. Indeed, it may be precisely because his iconography is so successful and indelible in the popular imagination that the work itself has never become exceptionally valuable.

