

Rachel Campbell-Johnson, "The mad, sad doodles of dissent," *The Times*, June 14, 2019



THE TIMES

The mad, sad doodles of dissent

Visual art
Keith Haring
Tate Liverpool
★★★★☆

Pull off the serious hat. This is not a show for ponderous appraisal. It's an exhibition to plunge into. Then, a bit like a B-movie time-traveller, you will find yourself emerging in a bygone era, the mad, glad — and ultimately sad — world of 1980s New York. This was the world of Keith Haring, the frizzy-haired goofball with oversized glasses who became the darling of the city's avant-garde. You may not know anything about him, but you will probably recognise his work. Inspired by urban street culture, the wild DayGlo doodles that coated the subways, hip-hop, breakdancing and urban DJs, he turned the East Village into his canvas. Culture, he believed, should be knocked off its pedestal and given back to the people. His drawings, with their spots, stripes and starbursts, their squiggles, angles and squirms, work like advertising neons. They flash up on the retina and leave imprints on the brain. Haring's radiant babies, leaping dolphins and barking dogs, not to mention his ominous spaceships, flying saucers and atomic mushroom clouds, were inscribed on the memories of every New Yorker in the 1980s.

A full retrospective would be impossible. Haring was fantastically prolific. He frequently worked on a mural-sized scale. This show at Tate Liverpool can only gesture towards his range by encompassing anything from massive painted tarpaulins to fragments from scrapbooks. Installations, including a fluorescent

“**He was far from a one-hit wonder, the curators state**

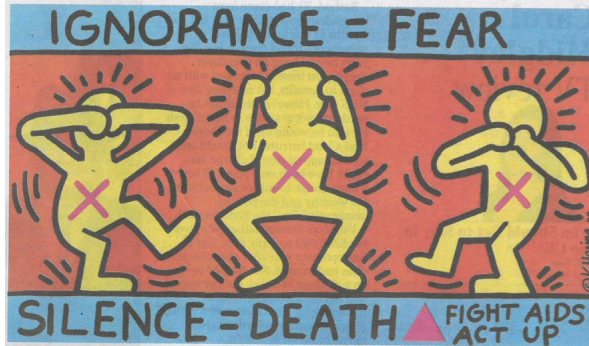
recreation of the gallery turned hip-hop club in which he staged a landmark show, capture the spirit of the era. Films document his favourite nightclub or show how he turned his practice into a performance. He was, the curators state, far from a one-hit wonder.

Yet the real focus is the political. Haring was a committed activist. He campaigned on such topics as Aids, disarmament and apartheid. He made dozens of public artworks for charities and, being openly gay, was a vociferous advocate for safe sex.

An exhibition that offers a glimpse of Haring from all sides — silly and earnest, simple and sophisticated, playfully camp and profoundly disturbing — reveals a fervently committed and impressively uncompromising character who in 1990 died of Aids aged only 31. Perhaps you had better put that serious hat on again.

Rachel Campbell-Johnson

Keith Haring is at Tate Liverpool (0151 702 7400) from June 14 to Nov 10



Ignorance = Fear, 1989, by Keith Haring