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An 88-Foot-High Keith Haring Mural Is Restored in Paris

By ROSLYN SULCAS
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"Tower," Keith Haring's exterior-stairwell painting at the Necker-Enfants Malades hospital in Paris's 15th arrondissement.

"I made this painting to amuse the sick children in this hospital, now and in the future," the American artist [Keith Haring](#) wrote in his diary in 1987. He had just spent several days leaning off a crane, as he and his boyfriend Juan Rivera painted the exterior of a stairwell at the Necker-Enfants Malades hospital in Paris's 15th arrondissement.

The 88.5-foot-high artwork, "Tower," was revealed at the hospital in its newly restored state on Thursday. But it almost didn't have a future: Heavily damaged by weather and wear, the stairwell and its exterior painting were threatened with demolition when the hospital began to plan building work in 2011. After a fund-raising operation spearheaded by the gallerist [Jérôme de Noirmont](#), in conjunction with

the [Keith Haring Foundation](#), the work has been painstakingly restored by William Shank and Antonio Rava, who also restored Haring's "[Tuttomondo](#)" in Pisa, Italy, created a year before the artist's [death](#) in 1990, at the age of 31.



The Keith Haring work. "Tower" had been heavily damaged by weather and wear. It has been restored by William Shank and Antonio Rava.

Mr. Shank, a former chief conservator at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, wrote in an unpublished essay that Mr. Haring called the cylindrical emergency stairwell at the Necker hospital the "ugly building."

Mr. Shank added: "His freehand design depicts a large pregnant woman, his signature crawling 'radiant babies,' and a handful of bouncing figures of adults interacting with children. All of the figures were applied in thick black lines, at close-range and without preliminary sketches, over free-form shapes of bright yellows, greens, blues and reds."

Mr. Shank said that in 2011, when the mural was first assessed, its condition was so bad that there was doubt it could be saved.

The conservators eventually decided to keep the original paintwork to save Mr. Haring's brush strokes, and to clean and varnish, adding new paint only when necessary. (Le Parisien newspaper [described](#) this more succinctly as a "mega-lifting.")



The restoration of "Tower" is part of a first phase of renovation at the Necker-Enfants Malades, Paris's primary pediatric hospital.

"Tower" is not the only Haring public artwork in Paris. His "[Life of Christ](#)" triptych — the last work he created before his death — was donated in 2003 by the Haring Foundation to the [Saint-Eustache](#) church in the center of the city. The restoration of "Tower" is part of the first phase of renovation at the Necker-Enfants Malades, Paris's primary pediatric hospital. A 97,000-square-foot garden will be planted around the mural in a second phase.