

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE FROM HERE

by Thom Cardwell

Missing Keith Haring, An Artist Who Broke Tradition

I miss Keith Haring. Now that all the news copy and memorials have literally vanished from our minds since the openly gay and internationally renowned popular graffiti artist passed away on February 16 from an AIDS-related illness at the age of 31.

In some ways, it may seem peculiar to you that I'm writing about him several months after his death but then again I've been allowed the luxury of time and distance. Besides, I didn't know him personally.

Still I know that he keeps cropping up in my consciousness. There are signs of him all around us. That's the gift of being an artist! There's a physical legacy that you can leave behind. As a painter of exuberant and energetic images, Haring wasn't afraid to express his feelings and opinions through the most elemental figures, primary colors, basic lines in a highly stylized yet personal way.

His human as well as animal figures were painted on billboards, walls, buttons, posters and even t-shirts in addition to canvases. His messages addressed many issues—sexuality, gayness, AIDS, drugs, apartheid, peace, the environment. He donated a large number of works (a totem sculpture for a New York ACT UP benefit sold for \$85,000). He donated his original designs for the logo for the Great Peace March, poster and t-shirt designs for National Coming Out Day and t-shirt, and poster and invitation designs for ACT UP/New York.

His intention was to create art for all people. Hence his ability to elicit

immediate response. Criticized by the art establishment for "commericalization" of his own art, he hailed a very American populist viewpoint. "If commericalization is putting my art on a shirt so that a kid who can't afford a \$30,000 painting can buy one," Haring once said, "then I'm all for it. Art is nothing if you don't reach every segment of the people."

Art critic Michael Brenson of *The New York Times* once observed, "Keith Haring's work is obviously very seductive and immensely attractive to a lot of people. But there never seems to be any edge to it. I don't care for it at all." For me, the qualities which Brenson identifies in Haring's art make all of his productivity lasting and universal.

That he was one of us (Pennsylvanian born, raised in Kutztown) and always wanting to break down barriers should give us hope and courage as we proceed forward in the face of adversity to establish our right to a gay nation. Being asked to sum up his own art, Haring replied, "All my work has to do with human life; the crawling babies signify life, energy, happiness and the positive side of humanity."

WHITE WEAR

Everyone will be wearing white outfits once again at this year's "White Party" sponsored by and for the AIDS Library of Philadelphia (1221 St. James Street) on Saturday, May 19 from 10PM until closing at the Two Four Club. Noted DJ Michael Jorda will be providing the music for "White Heat '90." Tickets are \$15 in advance

and available at Afterwards, Giovanni's Room, Woody's, Sealed with a Kiss, Two Four Club and AIDS Library of Philadelphia or at the door for \$20 per person.

A series of ten signed and framed photographs by Philadelphia photographer Joe Bowman, currently on view at Afterwards (218 South 12th St.), will be raffled off that evening with all proceeds going directly to support the AIDS Library. One from the series of Bowman's provocative studies of a nude male torso partially swathed in white gauze has been reproduced as a poster for sale as well as for use in the ads for this year's White Party.

According to Development Director Heshie Zinman, last year's party attracted more than 1,100 people and netted approximately \$9,700 for the AIDS Library which provides information to people affected by HIV diseases, caregivers and the lesbian and gay community. For more information call (215) 922-5120.

MANY WELL-LIT CANDLES

It's anniversary time for two of the more popular spots in our City of Brotherly Love as both the Venture Inn and Westbury Bar and Restaurant share the spotlight next weekend. To celebrate its anniversary, Venture Inn (255 South Camac st., 215-545-8731) will throw a "bingo/games party" on Thursday, May 17, with the special festivities beginning at 11PM. Naturally, you can dine there earlier and then partake of the evening's
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