



Untitled, 1983  
Vinyl ink on vinyl tarpaulin  
203 x 213 cm (84 x 84 in.)  
Private collection



Untitled, 1983  
Vinyl ink on vinyl tarpaulin  
305 x 305 cm (120 x 120 in.)  
Private collection



It was not the art community that helped his work to become so enormously popular, but the artist himself. And it was not least for this reason that Haring saw himself confronted with rejection on the part of the established art scene. As an artist, he had simply jumped over the museum and gallery stage, and turned directly and publicly to a mass clientele. Haring himself was the medium for the dissemination of his art, which expanded in continuous fashion. As an inventor, campaigner and manager all in one, Haring enriched the world with another art celebrity, and he was entrepreneurial enough to know how to market himself. He saw the commercialization of his works as an important component of his art, as an update of the 20th century. In reaction to the need for artistic souvenirs, without further ado he declared his art to be a tradable mass commodity. As a result, his iconic language found its way into everyday culture within a very short time. Even as early as 1983, the first unauthorized copies of his works were already beginning to appear in the form of posters and T-shirts. It was a perfectly logical consequence, then, when in 1986 Haring opened his first Pop Shop (opposite) in Manhattan, selling products bearing his own designs and those of a few select artist friends. In this way he marketed his name as an independent label, without thereby diminishing the value of his art. On the contrary, he saw it as an additional form of artistic statement. The goal was to open his art to an even broader public, to make it accessible to all, and to be constantly present in the form of everyday objects without concealing his commercial intentions. He had of course to face the charge of commercialization made by the critics. As his diaries make clear, he was perfectly well aware that the path between art and commerce that he was treading was a narrow one indeed. "What really fulfills and satisfies me is to make and see things as people react to them, but everything else is difficult. I have tried as best I could to take a new standpoint, a new attitude to selling by painting in full public view and making commercial things which ran in the face of an art-market which talks up goods. But even these things are co-opted and seen by many as mere advertisements for my saleable artworks. I fear I'll never get out of this trap." However, Haring was not primarily concerned with the commercial aspect, but with satisfying the public's ever-growing need to have a share in his art. While traditional merchandising of works of art is based on existing originals, Haring by contrast developed special motifs for his commercial products. Even today, the Haring name is a guarantee of merchandising success. Whatever he produced was distributed and marketed, and also imitated, worldwide.

Where artistic self-marketing was concerned, and how to do it, Keith Haring had the example of Andy Warhol before his very eyes. After Warhol's Factory, the establishment of the Pop Shop represented a further invention—and a brilliant invention at that—on the part of an artist who knew how to recognize and exploit the reproducibility of his own art. Haring did not want to be exclusively represented by galleries; he also wanted to act as his own dealer, not least in order to maintain his own integrity as an artist and to retain his street credibility. The fundamental difference between these two artists in this respect, and one which shows up in their very different personalities and attitudes to life, consists in the fact that Haring had a very limited interest in "making money" with the Pop Shop. He donated the majority of its profits to charitable causes.

The first meeting between Haring and Warhol took place in 1983 on the occasion of the opening of an exhibition of works by Haring and LA II at the

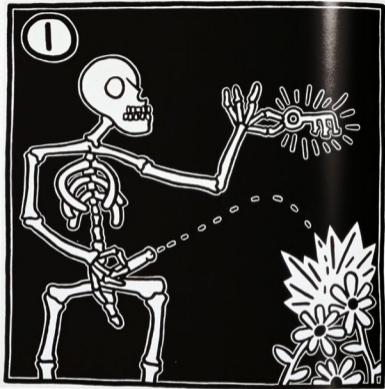


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213 x 213 cm (84 x 84 in.). Private collection



Untitled (Lil' Keith), 1988  
Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100 cm (39 1/8 x 39 1/8 in.)  
Private collection

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Haring in his Pop Shop in SoHo,  
Manhattan, New York, 1986



Untitled (for James Esser), 1989  
 Acrylic on canvas, two parts,  
 each 92 x 92 cm (36 1/4 x 36 1/4 in.)  
 Private collection



*"I live every day as if it were the last.  
 I love life."*  
 — KEITH HARING, 1987