

GLADSTONE GALLERY

D'Arcy, David, "Polymath with a Spray Can", The Art Newspaper, February 2011

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Polymath with a spray can

How Keith Haring became a darling of the art world

CINCINNATI. Before Keith Haring (1959-90) became a global brand, he was a street artist who made illegal graffiti in the New York City subways. Before he got to the subways, Haring worked it out on paper.

"Keith Haring 1978-82" at the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center tracks Haring "as he developed his visual language," say the curators. He came not from the city streets, but from rural Kutztown, Pennsylvania. The exhibition, consisting mostly of works on paper, videos and photographs, tracks his formulation of an alphabet of symbols that he would take from the streets to the subways, galleries, museums, biennials and stores until his death from Aids in 1990 at the age of 31.

Curators present Haring as an innocent, irrepressible polymath in art and music whose New York experience transformed him from an aspiring cartoonist into an activist with a refined



Keith Haring, *Untitled*, 1980

and instantly recognisable style. Pencil journals and hand drawings, most from the Keith Haring Foundation and many never exhibited before, take visitors through that journey, as do performance tapes of the gay

club scene from the days before Aids. As Haring's symbolic vocabulary takes shape (starting before he ventures underground), so does the sexual content of his work and his mission to bring his pulsating figures and dogs—for free—to the broadest possible public.

This exhibition exploring his early years is a collaboration between the Kunsthalle Wien and the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, where the curator, Raphaela Platow, is director. Platow said the Keith Haring Foundation in New York had approached her about organising an exhibition, and that she chose the early years because they had been under-represented and under-analysed. Kunsthalle Wien came on later as a co-organiser. Platow says she sought other venues for the show, but has found none so far.

Some Haring images from the early years (men having sex with other men, angels coupling with animals) could be challenging today in Cincinnati, the city in which the director of the Contemporary Arts Center was prosecuted and acquitted in 1990 for exhibiting the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe. ■ D.D.A.

Keith Haring: 1978-82
Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati
26 February-5 September

Big show, little show

Mexican collection reaches California

SAN DIEGO/LONG BEACH. A Mexican private collection that has been touring Europe since 2008 returns to North America for its first public display in the US. The show is held jointly at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego's (MCASD) outpost in La Jolla, and Long Beach's Museum of Latin American Art (Molaa).

The installation at Molaa features smaller works "that are more intricate and have more art-historical resonance," says Lucia Sanroman, the associate curator of MCASD, which hosts larger works that are "more spectacular".

The Isabel and Agustín Coppel Collection has been amassed over 15 years by the Mexican retail store magnate and his wife. At first, they collected mostly modern Mexican art with

a focus on lesser-known artists." Now it includes international artists, and features more than 1,200 works by artists such as Francis Alÿs, Lygia Clark, Gabriel Orozco, Damián Ortega, and Maurizio Cattelan (*Untitled, Sitting Donkey*, 2004, left).

There are no plans to build a private museum, says the collection's curator, Mirera Escalante, though she adds that the collection has been in talks with institutions like the University of Guadalajara to fund a gallery that would house private collections such as the Coppel's on a loan basis. ■ H.S.

Mexico: Expected/Unexpected
Museum of Contemporary Art
San Diego, La Jolla
5 February-15 May
Museum of Latin American Art,
Long Beach
20 February-15 May

