

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Natalie Hope McDonald, "Keith Haring's iconic Pop mural in South Philly restored," *Philly*, October 22, 2013.

Keith Haring's iconic Pop mural in South Philly restored



Malachi Floyd, a restoration assistant, paints the Keith Haring mural on the corner of 22nd and Ellsworth Streets in South Philadelphia on Tuesday, Oct. 21, 2013. "It is an honor to work on this project," Floyd says. (Stephanie Aaronson / Philly.com)

Natalie Hope McDonald

Just three years before his death – and two years shy of his 30th birthday – pop artist Keith Haring visited 22nd and Ellsworth in South Philly to paint one of his iconic murals, "We the Youth." The PA-born artist (Haring grew up outside of Reading and briefly attended

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Kutztown University) was already one of the most famous American artists by the time he began his mural project here. Inspired by his radiant babies and lyrical, almost child-like figures that first decorated the New York City subways before catching the attention of the fine art elite, the 25-year-old mural had suffered the ravages of time and weather, and was in desperate need of care or risked being lost forever.

"Brandywine Workshop [in collaboration with CityKids] brought Haring here in 1987 to do this project," remembers Jane Golden, executive director of the Mural Arts Program, an organization that won a grant from the Keith Haring Foundation to restore the mural this year. She still remembers meeting the artist 25 years ago. "I had this old undercover police car," says Golden. "We drove across town and there he was on the scaffolding."

She fondly recalls that Haring – who was at the height of his fame – was "gracious and kind," especially to the kids. He drove with them around the city to view other works of public and graffiti-inspired art. That's why she says this restoration project – one of the most intensive Mural Arts has taken on in its 30-year history – is especially important to her.

The South Philly masterpiece has been painstakingly restored by lead artist [Kim Alsbrooks](#) (along with Jennifer Procacci, Charles Newman, Laura Velez and Malachi Floyd) in time for a public unveiling on Nov. 2 (1 p.m.). It's one of 45 murals that Haring completed worldwide before his death from AIDS complications by 1990. It took a team of almost 15 artists and contractors to make this happen, including months and months of stucco work, as well as repairing the roof and wall.

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The only Haring mural left in America

"Including 'We the Youth,' Haring painted only three wall murals in collaboration with children," says Julia Gruen, executive director of the Keith Haring Foundation in New York City. "The one in Philadelphia is the only intact collaborative mural remaining on its original site."

When the chance came to save this mural, the foundation worked closely with Mural Arts. "The mission of the Keith Haring Foundation is to sustain, expand and protect the legacy of Keith Haring, his art and his ideals. The foundation supports not-for-profit organizations that assist children, as well as organizations involved in education, research and care related to AIDS and HIV," says Gruen, who was a personal studio assistant to Haring in the late 1980s. Many of his family members – who still reside in PA – are still active with the foundation. And she says Mural Arts was a natural choice to help make pop art history a second time.

"Haring was a passionate spokesperson and motivator for change and political engagement in underserved communities, and used his public art to convey messages of unity and hope," says Gruen. "There are over 30 Haring murals around the world that still exist, many of which have been lovingly preserved. While not a specific mission of the Haring Foundation, helping to guide the rejuvenation of these works nonetheless remains one very visible way in which the Haring Foundation can help bring attention back to these vibrant examples of the artist's philosophy of accessibility and democracy."

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For Golden, Haring is the quintessential example of a public artist, someone who considered public works to be just as important as those found on the walls of museums and galleries. "He believed in access to art," she says. So ensuring that the mural is sustainable (thanks to science, new construction and a wealth of preservation techniques that are available now compared to 25 years ago when it was first painted) – the mural is poised to become a focal point in the massive mural collection in Philly, the largest in the nation.

The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society has also agreed to care for the garden in front of the mural with support from local landscape architect Michael LoFurno of Composite, Inc. He's helped redesigned the garden space to be more accessible and to better showcase the mural (the owners of the home on which it reside are Haring fans, says Golden, and first approached the foundation about the mural). New landscaping and site furniture will also be implemented to complement the mural's primary colors and overall design aesthetic.

"This is a landmark," says Golden. "This is an icon, so rare and unusual. We met him, and so did our kids – many of whom grew up to be artists themselves. It'll become part of our collection."

She also says the project reflects a turning point for the Mural Arts preservation program, especially considering that an estimated 18,000 tourists visited the city last year from more than 70 different countries to view these public works of art. "It's like an outdoor museum," says Golden. "It's really the future for Mural Arts."

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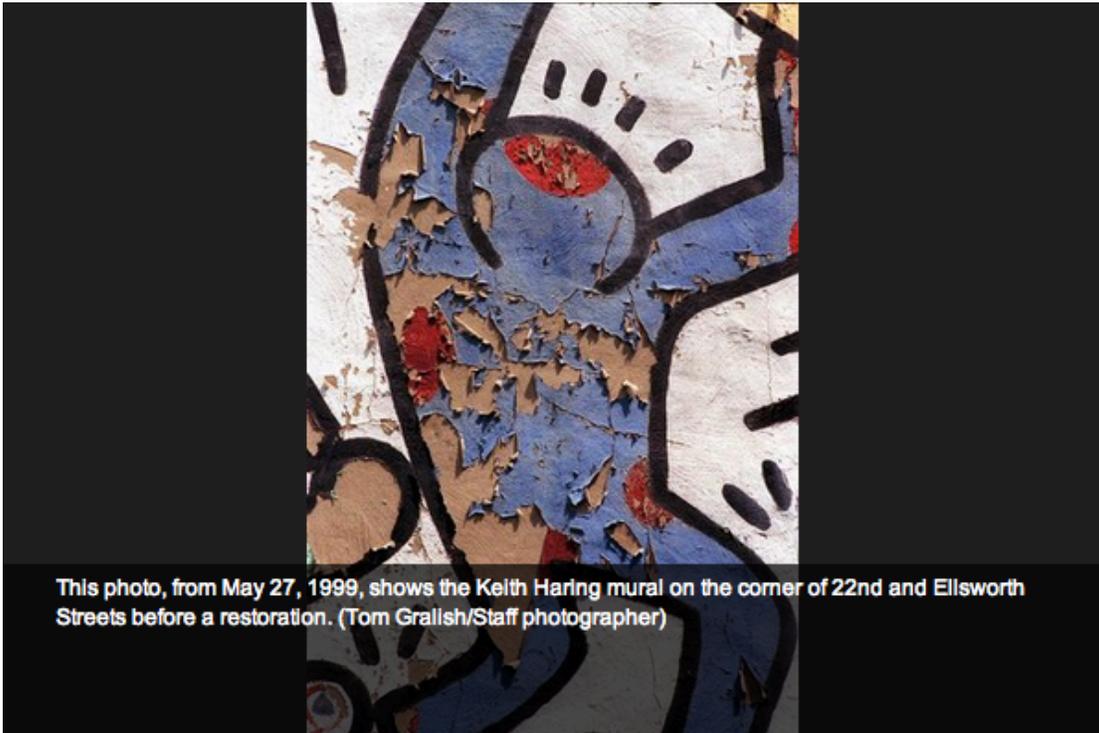
Photos of the original Keith Haring mural compared to previous restorations show major differences. Alsbrooks and her assistants plan to restore the work to bring back the original details. (Stephanie Aaronson / Philly.com)



A photo of the Keith Haring mural restoration on the corner of 22nd and Ellsworth Streets in South Philadelphia on Tuesday, Oct. 21, 2013. (Stephanie Aaronson / Philly.com)

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This photo, from May 27, 1999, shows the Keith Haring mural on the corner of 22nd and Ellsworth Streets before a restoration. (Tom Gralish/Staff photographer)



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