

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Salsbury, Britany, "Critic's Picks," *Artforum*, June 2011

Keith Haring

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515 West 24th Street

May 4–July 1

Keith Haring rapidly ascended in the fever-pitched art world of 1980s New York to become a fixture of both the downtown scene and popular culture. His status as a founder of the street art movement was secured with drawings characterized by their execution in public spaces and their use of a simple, concise language of recognizable symbols. This exhibition both highlights and builds on Haring's iconic reputation. One mural-size drawing titled *Red*, 1982, for example, features the artist's trademark figures, including dancing men and animals, reduced until they border on the abstract as forms build on themselves and ink flows down the sheet. Produced in the same year as Haring's major exhibition at Tony Shafrazi Gallery, *Red* evokes the scrawling, rapid aesthetic that contributed to the artist's fame.

These large graphic works are complemented—and countered—by a series of smaller drawings taken from Haring's early sketchbooks. Produced in the late '70s, around the time Haring first moved to New York, the sketches include a group of observational, almost diaristic works that respond to various locales and impressions of the artist's adopted city. The works chronicle the development of Haring's distinctive style, as amorphous cubist forms clearly inspired by Jean Dubuffet evolve into symbols rooted in everyday life. A separate vitrine includes a selection of Haring's "Manhattan Penis Drawings," which deliberately eschew eroticism in their repetitive, decorative patterning of male genitalia. These works, also made in the late '70s, interestingly foreshadow the political turn Haring's work would take in response to the AIDS crisis. Taken together, the sketches shed new light on the concerns that preoccupied Haring during his formative years in the city that would so define his artistic practice—namely, the forging of a direct and immediate visual language and the translation of the personal and political into universal experience.



Keith Haring, *Manhattan Penis Drawings for Ken Hicks*, 1978, graphite on paper, 8 1/2 x 5 1/2".

— Britany Salsbury