Stonewall

SPOTLIGHT ON

KEITH HARING

Who are Stonewall?

This resource is produced by Stonewall, a UK-based charity that stands for the freedom, equity and potential of all lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning and ace (LGBTQ+) people. At Stonewall, we imagine a world where LGBTQ+ people everywhere can live our lives to the full. Founded in London in 1989, we now work in each nation of the UK and have established partnerships across the globe. Over the last three decades, we have created transformative change in the lives of LGBTQ+ people in the UK, helping win equal rights around marriage, having children and inclusive education.

Our campaigns drive positive change for our communities, and our sustained change and empowerment programmes ensure that LGBTQ+ people can thrive throughout our lives. We make sure that the world hears and learns from our communities, and our work is grounded in evidence and expertise.

Stonewall is proud to provide information, support and guidance on LGBTQ+ inclusion; working towards a world where we're all free to be. This does not constitute legal advice, and is not intended to be a substitute for legal counsel on any subject matter. To find out more about our work, visit us at www.stonewall.org.uk.

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Keith Haring
(he/him)

Keith Haring was born in Pennsylvania, USA in 1958. He had always loved drawing, a love he shared with his dad.

Keith learnt cartooning skills from his dad and from watching cartoons on TV.

From Pittsburgh to New York

Keith's first solo show was in 1978 at the Pittsburgh Arts and Crafts Center. He was given the opportunity after space unexpectedly became available.
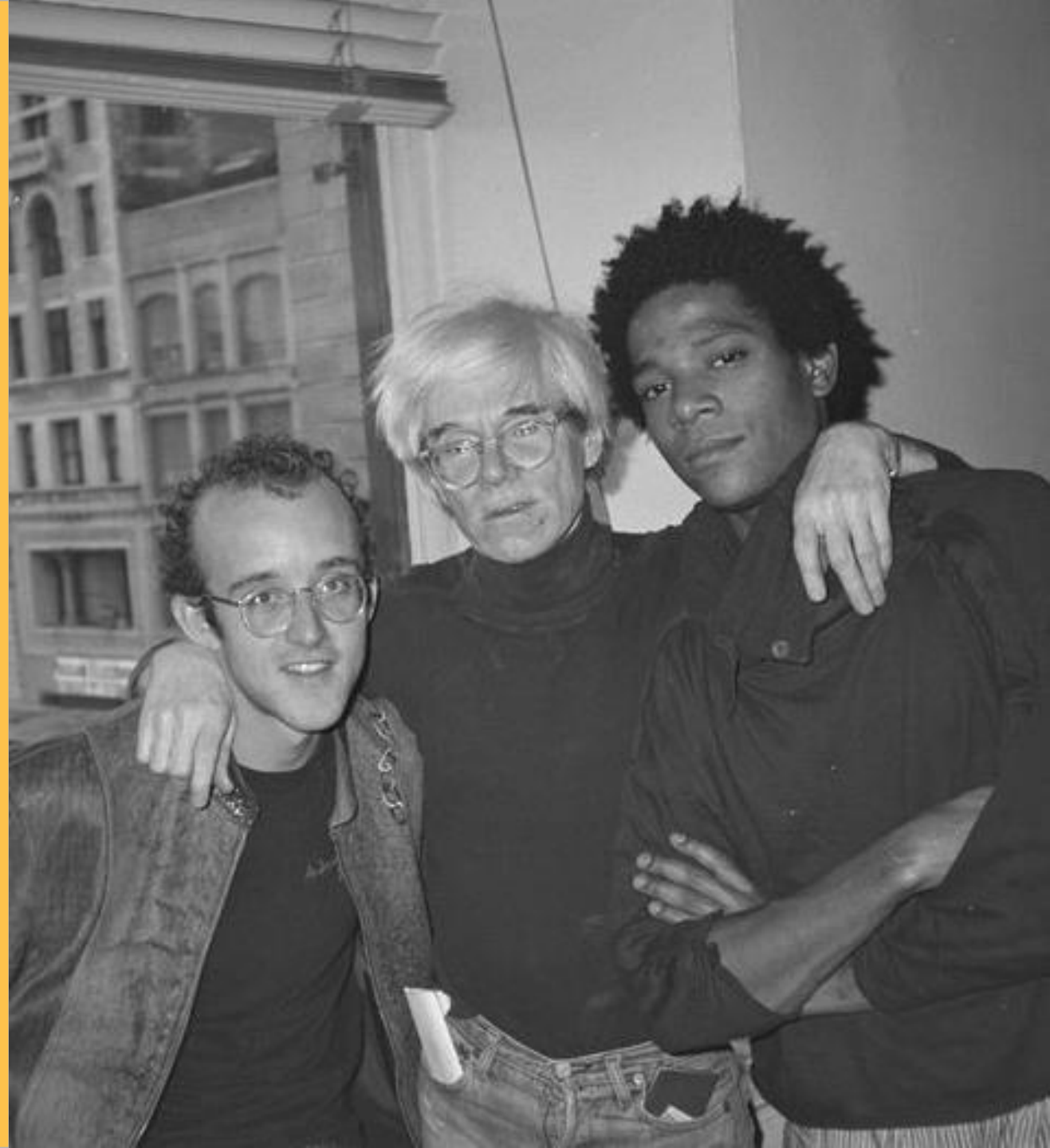
Soon after, Keith moved to New York.

"It was just exploding. All kinds of new things were starting. In music, it was the punk and New Wave scenes. There was a migration of artists from all over America to New York. "

Keith Haring

New friends

In New York, Keith quickly became part of an alternative art community. This movement developed outside of mainstream galleries and museums. He exhibited his work at interesting and unconventional venues.

He was friends with other gay artists, such as Jean-Michel Basquiat and Andy Warhol. Keith was also friends with graffiti artists, musicians and performers.

Hip hop and graffiti

Keith often worked listening to hip hop and he took his inspiration from the world around him.

Keith's first works were on unused advertising panels in subway stations. He used white chalk on the black paper panels and he produced hundreds of these works – sometimes 40 a day!

"All kinds of people would stop and look at the huge drawing and many were eager to comment on their feelings toward it. This was the first time I realized how many people could enjoy art if they were given the chance. These were not the people I saw in the museums or in the galleries but a cross-section of humanity that cut across all boundaries."

Keith Haring

Colourful and political

Keith is best known for his colourful works and iconic motifs.

Much of his work was political and responded to events happening in the world around him. Keith was gay and his work also focused on challenges faced by LGBTQ+ people.

Art for all

Keith's career really took off and he was soon exhibiting around the world, as well as completing big public projects.

He wanted his work to be easily accessible, so continued to create public art works including for charities and hospitals. He even created a mural on the Berlin Wall.

"The public has a right to art. The public is being ignored by most contemporary artists. Art is for everybody."

Keith Haring

Activism and art

Keith was diagnosed with AIDS in 1988 and shortly after, he set up the Keith Haring Foundation in order to support HIV/AIDS organisations. Towards the end of his life, his work became part of his activism and awareness raising around AIDS.

Keith died in 1990 due to AIDS related complications. His work remains popular and is celebrated around the world.