

## Keith Haring's Line: Race and the Performance of Desire

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Ricardo Montez



While Keith Haring's life was tragically short, he was a prolific artist whose universal figures can be seen in galleries and music videos, on subway platforms and t-shirts, and he has been lauded for his artistic achievements and activism. Some of Haring's most dynamic moments resulted from his collaborations with Black and Latino artists, yet these collaborations were inevitably informed by racial dynamics and desire. This tension is where New School professor of Performance Studies, Ricardo Montez begins his investigation into the complexity of Haring's neo-primitive aesthetic and personal relationships.

Montez forthrightly rejects any desire to provide chronological or even much biographical context to an understanding of Haring and instead structures his book in what he calls an "album of moments." Specific performances and works are utilized to investigate Haring's desire for Black and Latino bodies both as an inspiration or canvas in his art and as a queer man.

Collaborations with musician Grace Jones and street artist Angel Ortiz, also known as LA II, are both examined with extensive context provided for each artist. Haring's personal relationships also play a large role in Montez's research, most notably with Haring's first boyfriend, DJ Juan Dubose.

Keith Haring's Line expands far beyond Haring's life, examining other artworks and artists and how they intersect with Haring's work. Montez's use of Haring's journals is especially effective affording him the ability to build an emotional landscape and analysis of Haring's worldview. Readers are able to see images of journal entries with messy handwriting, sometimes accompanied by little doodles drawn in Haring's signature style. Montez also lovingly analyzes

black and white photographs of Haring at work or more personal photographs of him with Dubose, both of which are peppered throughout the book. The author is candid in his personal connection to these photographs and his writing is deeply emotional, yet also displays a commanding knowledge of his topic. Montez draws from a broad catalog of theorists and, to great effect, references works from an array of disciplines including pop culture, anthropology, performance, queer theory, and art history, thereby contributing to an extensive bibliography and notes section.

Montez's research adds an important layer of understanding to a widely recognized artist. However, this is not an introductory text. The writing is steeped in theory, with complex language and several references. A reader is expected to be familiar with Haring's life and work and the New York arts scene of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as possess a base knowledge of performance and queer theory. It is most appropriate for a collection that serves a robust art history or queer studies program at the graduate research level.