HERE THEN GONE: 
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY 
OF KEITH HARING’S 
SUBWAY CHALK DRAWINGS

A Thesis 
Presented 
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The Requirements for the Degree 
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In 
Art

By 
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Spring 2013
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By
Rebecca Feldstein
Spring 2013

APPROVED BY THE DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES
AND VICE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH:

Eun K. Park, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Cameron Crawford, M.F.A.  Matthew G. Looper, Ph.D., Chair
Graduate Coordinator

Teresa L. Cotner, Ph.D.
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Having grown up with parents who had a passion for exploring National Parks, I was exposed to many natural wonders and man made, cultural wonders throughout my youth. I have had the privilege, thank you Mom and Dad, to continue my exploration of the world, having traveled and worked in Italy and Thailand. These experiences made me realize that I wanted to continue my education exploring the world’s many cultures, focusing on their art and artifacts.

The Keith Haring Foundation has played a significant role in the creation of this thesis by providing photographs and contact information that has expanded the scope of this thesis. I want to thank the Art Department staff and Dr. Teresa L. Cotner for their support, conversations, and critiques throughout this process. Erin Herzog, curator of the Ira Latour Visual Resource Collection, for her day to day advice, humor and continued support. In addition, the guidance of Dr. Matthew Looper has been instrumental to the completion of my Master’s Degree and the creation of this thesis. Thank you all.
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This thesis is a phenomenological study of Keith Haring’s subway drawings as understood through the eyes and memories of New York City subway commuters. The drawings were made from 1980 until 1985 using chalk to draw on empty black advertisement boards. The temporary white and black art has been written about by a variety of historians and critics. Unlike prior studies that have interpreted Haring’s oeuvre through the lens of social history, politics, artistic biography, or semiotics, this study focuses on commuters who viewed the drawings on a daily basis during the relatively short period of time of their existence. In order to gain understanding of how the intended audience remembers Haring’s chalk drawings, qualitative interviews with commuters who frequented the subway system were used to tease out meaning from his or her individual perceptions.

The data shows that each commuter spoke about the drawings in ways that led the results to be split into six categories. Each of the participants spoke about the
environment of the subways during the 1980s, Haring’s use of chalk and the blank advertisement boards, his outlined forms, and how they physically and mentally viewed the drawings. The informants also spoke about conversations they had with friends outside of the subway space. The results end with the participants expressing the importance of Haring’s chalk drawings in his oeuvre. Their comments show that subway commuters usually saw both advertisements and Haring’s chalk drawings while moving through a subway station, catching a glimpse peripherally or perhaps stopping to examine the visual information further. Phenomenology as a method allowed me to set aside personal interpretations and established information accumulated by art historians and critics, and focus on new data that contributes more unfiltered and spontaneous responses to the work. Using the commuter’s remembered perceptions, this thesis explores how the everyday commuter witnessed, encountered, and interpreted Keith Haring’s chalk drawings.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The New York City subway system is a place packed full of visual information waiting to be seen by those who pass by. Many artists take to public spaces to create art that might catch the eye of commuters.¹ This uncommissioned “street” art expresses an artist’s individuality usually using the night as cover for these illegal art exhibitions. In subways, artists often create small but recognizable tags or large mural-style pieces that transform both the walls and the exterior of train cars. In an attempt to remove graffiti that had taken over most surfaces, New York City and its subway stations went through a ‘great cleanse’ during the late 1970s. Property owners, building managers and other city authorities “understood all writing to be malicious vandalism.”² Keith Haring was one of many artists who chose to display his artwork in public venues that ordinary people frequented on a daily basis. Different from other graffiti artists, Haring used white chalk to draw on blank advertisement boards located throughout a subway station.³ These temporary drawings used his characteristic bold outlined forms in multiple positions.

Instead of working at night, Haring created the drawings during his daily transit throughout the city. Jumping on and off the train at stations that had blank advertisement

¹ The term ‘commuter’ will be used to describe a person in a subway in transit.
³ To describe Haring’s artwork produced in the subways the terms: drawings, chalk drawings, or subway drawings will be used throughout this thesis.
boards, Haring drew white on black images throughout the subway system. The large number of drawings made Haring’s work accessible to the commuters of New York City, even if a drawing was only visible for a single day. Although thousands of commuters observed the drawings in situ, very little has been written from the perspective of this intended audience.

This thesis will examine Haring’s chalk drawings from commuters’ perspectives, using his or her words to illuminate new interpretations of these subterranean chalk drawings.

The focus for this thesis grows out of a lack of information from the everyday commuter’s perspective. Past research into Haring’s oeuvre utilizes his biography, semiotic theory, and/or social history to decipher meaning in his drawings. Many studies use quotations from friends, art critics, as well as Haring’s own words to mainly explore the relationship of the artist’s personal life to the images that he created. ⁴ A semiotic approach allows researchers to interpret Haring’s drawings by identifying his vocabulary of outlined figures with generalized concepts. ⁵ More recent articles focus on Haring’s connections with gay activism,

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⁵ Barry Blinderman. “Keith Haring’s Subterranean Signatures.” Art Magazine September (1981): 164-165; Michael W. Brooks. “ Redeeming the City.” In Subway City:
the fight against South African apartheid, social problems in New York City, and Haring’s religious upbringing; each emphasizing the connections his artwork has with these issues. The emphasis has been on how the drawings relate to Haring’s life and social/political views rather than on how his drawings were perceived by the people who saw them. By concentrating this thesis on multiple perceptions given by commuters who viewed Haring’s chalk drawings in situ, new insights about the temporary and no longer existent drawings can be considered and new meanings suggested.


CHAPTER II

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As I began investigating the topic of the intended audience’s reaction to Keith Haring’s subway drawings, I came to realize the massive scope of such a project. Although the oeuvre of Haring’s work could have been discussed in and of itself, by concentrating on his uncommissioned subway chalk drawings, a specific set of participants, namely subway commuters, materialized as a rich data source. Understanding the phenomenological perceptions of everyday commuters observing public art is an important dimension of these visual displays.

In writing this thesis, the three main limitations are the narrow selection of the artist’s work, the number of interview participants and time. Commuters who saw Haring’s chalk drawings in situ during the early 1980s are difficult to find through the Internet. If I worked on this project for another year, more participants could be found which would further support the data findings. More participants could also be found, by spending an extended amount of time in New York City, where I would be able to locate and interview people through a variety of contact methods. Nevertheless, I located and interviewed seven people who viewed the drawings in situ for this thesis. They have allowed me to conduct qualitative interviews about their individual memories pertaining to the chalk drawings. A further examination of the qualitative interviews and individual participants will be discussed in the Methodology and Results sections.
The problem of time is two fold. Not only does a limited amount of time prohibit extensive data collection, but time also deals with the years that have elapsed since the drawings were made, now close to thirty years. I am asking people to describe his or her memories of temporary chalk drawings that existed, perhaps, one whole day. Many of the participants in this process had trouble remembering exactly what he or she saw. Each of the participants’ life experiences and knowledge of Haring’s work influenced the way that he or she spoke about their personal observations. Further discussion of the participants and their memories will be discussed in detail in the Methodology section and their comments will be explored in the Results section.

An observer is needed for art to be meaningful. Isolated from an onlooker artwork does not make meaning on its own. By emphasizing how individuals experience art, future research relating to this project could focus on how people interpret individual chalk drawings. It could also examine the phenomena of wearing Haring’s art on T-shirts and other attire. Both of these projects would allow the people who observe or wear Haring’s art to explain how the images that an individual wears relate to his or her personal lives. This examination would delve more in depth into the participants’ background, personal beliefs, and visual perceptions in considering Haring’s chalk drawings.

Participants in such a study people who are wearing a Keith Haring design would be found on the streets and approached with a few questions about their decision to wear an image created by Haring. A picture would be taken of the person in his or her Haring wearable art and they would be used throughout the study to explore how age, race, and gender relate to interpretations of Haring’s work. Because of Haring’s widespread appeal
in countries around the world, this project would allow for multiple cities and countries to be visited to collect data from diverse populations. Much like my current study, an individual’s personal perceptions and background will influence how each person expresses his or her opinions about the choice of wearing Haring’s work.
CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

Keith Haring was a prolific artist who used multiple types of public and private space as venues to display and produce art during the twelve short years he lived and worked in New York City. Haring created both commissioned artwork for private and local groups as well as uncommissioned street art. Both use Haring’s characteristic outlined forms and figures creating a variety of pictorial scenes. The larger commissioned works, which were usually painted in vibrant colors, were found in diverse locations including hospitals, churches, schools, and public swimming pools. At each location Haring adapted his outlined figures to fit the spirit and function of the venue. The artwork that this thesis concentrates on are his noncommissioned chalk drawings, created from 1980 until 1985, located mainly throughout the Manhattan subway system, using white chalk on wait platforms and transfer hallways on blank advertisement boards.

Many sources can be found covering Haring’s oeuvre; however very few concentrate on the subway drawings. Numerous books by Haring himself, photographs, personal journal entries, newspaper and magazine articles, biographies, and works by art historians briefly explain how Haring began as an artist in the streets and subways of New York City. While there are some sources that focus on his subway chalk drawings,

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this study goes more deeply into this body of work. Research has focused on Haring’s personal life, explaining how he decided to create chalk drawings and how the subway drawings brought attention to the artist. His body of artwork has also been studied by dissecting social history, the politics of the time, the artist himself, and by reconstructing its semiotic vocabulary and syntax.

Haring created individual white chalk drawings on black parchment paper that covered blank advertisement boards, which line each subway station in New York City. These works were never given an established meaning by Haring, but many have attempted to interpret them. Within two years, newspaper reporters knew Haring’s name and the chalk drawings had become a noticeable part of the average New York City commuter’s daily transit. Having this recognition created notoriety for the young artist, over the next two years Haring began to show his work in galleries and began traveling abroad. His works were written about in newspapers and magazines, and the drawings were captured in situ by photographers, tourists, and in Haring’s own book, Art in Transit.

Published in 1984, Art in Transit is a compilation of photographs taken of Haring’s subway chalk drawings. Haring created the book with help from his friend and fellow artist Tseng Kwong Chi, a photographer. The book’s only text is an introduction written by Henry Geldzahler, a modern art historian and art critic. The short introductory page explains that Haring’s work may appear “goofy,” however; it has a “tuneful

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8 Haring stated, “The drawings are designed to provoke people to think and use their own imagination. They don’t have exact definitions but challenge the viewer to assert his or her own ideas and interpretations.” Keith Haring, “Haring in Transit: Keith Haring Subway 1980-1985.” http://www.haring.com/!/selected_writing/haring-art-in-transit#.UXA0HKtoRR4; Accessed January 10, 2013.
celebration of urban commonality.”⁹ All of Haring’s artwork uses a very characteristic graphic style and symbol system about which Galdzhaler writes, “each term in [the] language can be read as subject, verb, or object.”¹⁰ The images in the book capture moments that were only meant to be temporary. Each page displays a single photograph allowing readers to focus on each image independently. The information extracted from these images, exposes how the drawings related to the subway space and in relation to a commuter. A drawing’s proportions, physical location, and surroundings can be used to explain how a commuter could have experienced a drawing.

The complete collection of images captured by Kwong Chi has been archived by the Keith Haring Foundation located in New York City. The Foundation has allowed me to download copies of the complete collection of images to understand the multitude of subjects, characters, and locations Haring ventured to when drawing throughout the subway system. In the almost three hundred images compiled in the archive, Kwong Chi was able to document a variety of Haring’s chalk drawings created shortly after he began his pictorial project in the subway system. Kwong Chi spoke of the experience in the book Keith Haring: The Authorized Biography stating, “I wanted to be a part of [the subway drawings] and I volunteered to photograph his work.”¹¹ In the beginning Kwong Chi explored the subway using his own resources to photograph, develop and record the images. He stated:

At first I went down into the subways only once in a while. But then, the drawings were just everywhere! Finally I said, ‘Keith, you’ve got to tell me where the drawings are. I can’t just ride through the entire subway

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¹⁰ Ibid.
system looking for them.’ So after that, he called me to say where he had made the drawings.\textsuperscript{12}

At the beginning of his project Kwong Chi was like the everyday pedestrian, discovering Haring’s drawings throughout the city by chance. Once Haring gave Kwong Chi a guide to follow, the photographs were no longer taken as if Kwong Chi had just happened upon them, rather the documentation became orchestrated by Haring. Most of the photos have very little reference to people being present in the stations. However the photographs provide information about location prompts (i.e. station signs, exits, and telephone booths), the size of the drawings compared to the space, and Haring’s variety of symbol configurations.

The next source of information comes directly from the most personal of spaces, Haring’s private journals. Beginning in 1978, Haring started writing practically every day in a journal. The entries ranged from conversations with friends, reviewing class lectures, artistic style revelations, and small drawings in the margins. His own words, especially those written from 1980 to 1985, shed light on his thoughts, techniques, and daily routines while producing the subway chalk drawings. The entries are most frequent in the first three years of the subway drawings. At this point Haring began expanding his artistic horizons by making art for more conventional venues, such as the Tony Schefrazi and Fun Galleries. He also began having international shows in 1983 traveling to Japan, Italy, and England to produce art for one-man shows.\textsuperscript{13} Journal entries pertaining to the subway drawings offer some insight into Haring’s process, feelings, and interest in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Ibid.
\item[13] A list of Haring’s one-man and group exhibitions are located at: http://www.haring.com/!/exhibitions/one-person.
\end{footnotes}
creating diverse groupings of artwork located in unusual location. This source has clarified Haring’s basic thought process before and after creating drawings that might be seen for only one day.

Newspapers and magazines including *New York Times, Newsday* and *People Magazine* began running articles about Haring’s subway drawings soon after he began creating them. These documents mention his beginnings as a street artist, his move to gallery spaces, and his characteristic outlined forms. One of the earliest articles focusing on the subway drawings was published December 5th, 1983, written by Michael Small for *People Magazine*. In the article, “Drawing on Walls, Clothes and Subways, Keith Haring Earns Favor with Art Lovers High and Low,” Haring is interviewed by Small with questions about his rise to fame, symbolism, and wide spread appeal of the subway system drawings. Haring explains a little about interacting with the public while in the subways in this article. He states:

> I get the most incredible comments... I drew a picture of a man with his head opening up. Someone said it looked like a guy pounding his head on the sidewalk looking for a job. When I drew pregnant ladies in May, because my friend’s wife was pregnant, someone said, ‘I love your Mother’s Day drawings.’

Using articles from the 1980s as sources allows me to understand how Haring explained his own drawings and how reporters represented the drawings. Journalists would ask

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Haring about his beginnings as a ‘tag’ artist, the meaning of his work and compositions. Many articles were written after Haring stopped creating the subway drawings, and how Haring spoke about the many meanings they could have. However, the information is still helpful in understanding how art critics and journalists wrote about his drawings in articles.

Sources such as book chapters have been written that quickly review Haring’s rise to fame as a street artist in the subway systems of New York City. These sources use his chalk drawings as a springboard to show how Haring used a variety of surfaces to create art. Barry Blinderman, John Gruen and Jeffrey Deitch are three examples of the many historians and friends who have researched and written about Haring’s pictorial world. Each historian has used quotes and formal descriptions of Haring’s artwork that reiterate how his œuvre can be interpreted through style and symbolism, as well as social history and artistic biography.

Natalie E. Phillips analyzes Haring’s works concentrating on images that have a potential religious meaning. Throughout her article “The Radiant (Christ) Child: Keith Haring and the Jesus Movement,” Phillips addresses Haring’s past affiliation with the United Church of God and how many of the images he produced used symbols that associate with Christian beliefs. Throughout the article Phillips draws from social history this surrounded the church during the 1980s, including the ‘Jesus Movement,’

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which Haring was a part of during the 1970s.\textsuperscript{18} In her discussion, images that show crosses, radiant babies, and nativity scenes are analyzed for possible connections and meaning within the Church.

Alison Pearlman has viewed Haring’s artwork in a similar way, interpreting Haring’s combination of outlined forms while using multiple research methods. Pearlman writes in her book \textit{Unpacking Art in the 1980s}, about the many influences Haring drew from to produce individual creations. She states that Haring’s work “indulge[s] in multiple layers of art historical allusion and analogies, complexity of imagery and composition, imagery depicting extremes of horror and depravity, and more graphic and elaborate depictions of sexual activities.”\textsuperscript{19} Pearlman focuses on Haring’s sexual orientation as a way to decipher his imagery, stating that “Haring’s painting[s] suggest that there is a deep-rooted cultural link between the official politics of rulers, their code of law, and regulation of male sexuality.”\textsuperscript{20} She is by no means the only historian to create a connection between Haring and sexual politics.

Robert Farris Thompson and Polina Mackay have both found that Haring incorporated concepts from literature that he was reading into his artwork. \textit{The Third Mind} written by William S. Burroughs was a book that Haring read during the early part of the 1980s. The book encourages people to produce art through literary means. Pulling context from everyday life, Thompson in his \textit{Artforum} article, “Requiem for the Degas of the B-boys,” explains that Haring was “composing from deliberate fragmentation and being antic, having fun, using humor to work conservative values out of his system. All

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{19} Pearlman. \textit{Unpacking Art of the 1980s.} 80.  
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. 90.
of which carried over directly into his subway art of 1980-1985.” 21 He goes on stating, “you get a sense of the humanity to Haring’s politics when reading his subway drawings.” 22

Mackay reiterates this point in her article “The Naked Apocalypse of William S. Burroughs’ Naked Lunch.” She states that Haring provides images that conceptualize Burroughs’ descriptions of an apocalyptic world by using symbols of atomic explosions and religious condemnations. 23 His artwork sometimes depicts

obessions with all kinds of viruses, extraterrestrials, government conspiracies, and addiction to everything and anything; the artistic experimentations; the paranoid search for ways out; the displacement of the so-called American dream; the homosexuality; [and] the trance like parties. 24

Pearlman, Thompson, and Mackay each demonstrate how personal and social issues impact Haring’s imagery. The individual interpretations of Haring’s work are very relevant today. Exhibitions reflecting his political and social agendas have been in constant rotation throughout galleries and museums. Currently, from April until August 2013, one-man exhibitions at the Musee d’Art moderne de la Ville de Paris and Le Centquatre, both located in Paris, display “Keith Haring: The Political Line,” which focus on Haring’s artwork that displays potential threats, controversies, and world issues.

Haring continually stated that he did not want to have a set meaning for his artwork and that he wanted the public to create individualized meanings, this thesis

22 Ibid.
24 Ibid. 7-8.
supports Haring’s want. Having stated this, very little has actually been written about
the meaning of his work from the public’s point of view. Haring wanted his drawings to
be viewed by the public and for them to create individualized meanings to the artwork.
The intended audience has not had a forum to express how his chalk drawings influenced
or enhanced the usually banal commute. By interviewing New York City commuters
who frequented the subway system, insight into how a person observed, internalized, and
acknowledged Haring’s work can be found. Past articles focusing on the chalk drawings
have used little from the commuter’s point of view, but have instead extracted meaning
from established quotes in biographies, from friends, and social history that surrounded
Haring’s personal life.

Past investigations relating to Keith Haring’s artwork have used an artistic
biography, the social history, and semiotics as methodological strategies. The life of an
artist is often considered an important factor in regards to the work that he or she
produces. Focusing on the artist relates all possible meanings to his or her personal life
and experiences. Social history relies heavily on what an artist and society has been
experiencing in a specific place and time. Deciphering Haring’s code of characters
through a semiotic analysis has been attempted by scrutinizing the forms that are
combined to create a composition. The interpretations of Haring’s work put forward
through these projects are substantial and relevant to this project. However, what has
been written uses Haring’s artistic biography as the main focus.

25 “The drawings are designed to provoke people to think and use their own
imagination. They don’t have exact definitions but challenge the viewer to assert his or
her own ideas and interpretation.” Keith Haring. “Art in Transit,” online Haring Kids:
CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

By using phenomenology and qualitative inquiry as a research method, new information about Haring’s subway chalk drawings can come to light. Although the work created in the subway may have been inspired by Haring’s personal need to create, it is the placement of the work in public spaces that invites a phenomenological study. Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology, aimed to “discover how consciousness forms a system of being and meaning.” Commuters’ thoughts on seeing the drawings during their daily lives offers new insight into his or her individual conscious experiences. Perception is first defined as "the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses," and secondly as, "the state of being or process of becoming aware of something." Different understandings can be determined from the point of view of the commuters who saw the drawings in situ on a daily basis in the dirty, dark subway.

I wake up, my dog licks my face, I stretch and I open my eyes. These are
the first moments of my morning. This is when the world wakes up to me
and my conscious existence begins.

To be conscious means that a person has the ability to take in information from
the things that surround them. In those first moments of my day, when my eyes open I
see billions of particles making up the objects in my room. Particles come to me as
images that construct the world around me.

Perception, in the case of this thesis, denotes how Keith Haring’s works were
viewed and analyzed by the millions who frequented the subway stations. The
pedestrians of New York City rely on visual information when going throughout their
daily commute. Haring’s chalk drawings share characteristics with advertisements
because of the locations chosen by Haring. By relating his chalk drawings to
advertisements I do not suggest that he is advertising something; rather, that he
strategically placed his drawings in locations that could be viewed by the mass public,
similar to the positioning of advertisements. Many people could overlook the drawings
as they would advertisements, while others were drawn to them. Much like
advertisements, Haring’s work remained in locations for a limited amount of time and the
subject matter changed. Whenever Haring rode a subway train, he took a stick of chalk.\footnote{John Gruen. “Subway Drawings: Drawings,”
www.haringkids.com/art/subway/doghead02.html.}

Because of this, his oeuvre of chalk drawings was seen throughout the five boroughs of
New York City.

Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Martin Heidegger each practice within the field of phenomenology. They build on each other’s ideas creating a comprehensive method of looking at the world that surrounds every person. Husserl explains that phenomenology is a study of our experiences and how we experience a given situation. He emphasized that being conscious of one’s surroundings means to have consciousness of or about something. In order to be in a phenomenological state, Husserl proposes that “bracketing” out one’s personal conscious experience will allow a person to reflect more openly on other’s perceptions. Both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger use these concepts; however, both highlight the necessity of the body as a perceiver. Merleau-Ponty’s theories stress the role of the body and its significance in our daily physical bodily activities. Heidegger also implies that the body must be conscious and receptive to its surroundings. He further accentuates the point that our observations are directed towards things only through particular concepts, thoughts, ideas, and images that we have processed through prior knowledge. Heidegger also agrees that a process of bracketing must occur, however he believes that a person’s personal knowledge cannot be unknown to him or herself, therefore a person can interpret external information by looking to contextual relationships with things in the world. All three philosophers present a clear view of how a person looks at the world and process the visual information being projected to them. This thesis looks to these philosophers as building

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blocks for how individual perceptions are created when looking at visual arts.

Robert Sokolowski and Chris Nagel have used Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger’s groundbreaking research to explain phenomenology and its relation to perception and the visual arts. To fully understand the phenomenological nature of the visual arts, it is important to analyze how one looks at art. I will first discuss the phenomenological ideas of perception followed by how a person perceives an object physically. These discussions will lead to subchapters that expose how a phenomenological analysis of New York City commuters’ perceptions can occur.

Art in phenomenological terms, and in relation to this thesis, has focused on the visual, rather than tactile, aural, or olfactory senses. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, phenomenology in relation to the visual arts is driven by,

inadequacies in our understanding of the perceived world… pictorial acts can function like a description of perceptual experience; art gives us insight, not into how our experience of the world is produced, but into what it is actually like.\(^{30}\)

This statement deals directly with the phenomenological nature of perception. In his book *Introduction to Phenomenology*, Robert Sokolowski describes perception using a cube as an analogy.

I see the cube from one angle, from one perspective. I cannot see the cube from all sides at once. It is essential to the experience of a cube that the perception be partial, with only one part of the object being directly given at any moment. However, it is not the case that I only experience the sides that are visible from my present viewpoint. As I see those sides, I also intend, I contend, the sides that are hidden. I see more than what strikes

the eye. The presently visible sides are surrounded by a halo of potentially visible but actually absent sides...\textsuperscript{31}

This description allows one to understand an initial phenomenological perception of the visual world. That is, every individual will have a different interpretation or will create unique filters associated with the visual cues that make up everyday experiences.

The world is comprised of things and we see them all as images. These images become personalized by those who intake the projected information. Merleau-Ponty stated that things and images are "revealed only if we look at them from a certain point of view," meaning each perception is unique experience relating to an individual's ethical and social background.\textsuperscript{32} My personal interactions, knowledge, position in life, and past history influence how I will observe and internalize visual information throughout my day. Essentially two people standing in the same location looking at the same object at the same time will have two different ways of interpreting, contemplating, or speaking about the same visual information. In New York City pedestrians have an excessive amount of information given to them in a visual format. Words and symbols are scrawled across billboards, in flashing lights, and on advertisement boards; each displays to the masses but it is up to the individual to determine their meaning.

It is impossible for a person in any environment to observe nothing. Even if a person deliberately attempted to be absent from perceiving his or her surroundings, it


would be impossible. Going through the day, head down, for example, provides no respite from viewing one of the largest image bases on Earth. Advertisements relate to the visual arts in both content and artistic expression. Although all art is not advertisement, many advertorial documents use artistic techniques to direct the spectators’ gaze to train on certain areas. “Art” is usually deliberately placed in galleries, museums, or well-lit areas. This is much different than the placement of most advertisements; their only need is to be placed on a surface that will be seen by many. In New York City, ads are placed in the sky, on walls, and underground. Each location creates separate relationships with its viewer. The perception cannot be created by the advertiser, or producer of any visual art, it depends on the individual viewer to generate his or her own perception.

In his book *Phenomenological Approaches to Popular Culture*, Chris Nagel uses phenomenology to interpret the truths of advertising. "Phenomenology, Authenticity, and the Truth in Advertising" aims to clarify advertising as a cultural artifact. Nagel explains that the meaning of advertisements is not for informational purposes, but rather is a cultural artifact, which has little to do with making the true statements to persuade consumers to buy certain products. Rather, advertising is most essentially an intersubjective practice upheld by a set of tacit agreements, that is, an element of the social construction of reality.33

This intersubjective practice relates to the individual experience of the viewing process. Each advertisement and other forms of visual arts express multiple meanings to their broad audience. The independent gaze of the naturally voyeuristic masses must interpret the meanings for themselves. What must be remembered about advertising is "the

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audience is not a homogenous mass; different audience members belong to different social and class groups."\(^{34}\) In other words, the millions of people who see advertisements on a daily basis use their own background and other influences as a filter when viewing images that are placed before them. These works by Nagel and Sokolowski expand and clarify the lens of phenomenological perception. Questioning subway commuters who viewed Keith Haring’s chalk drawings placed on black parchment paper covering advertisement boards *in situ* will allow a phenomenological analysis of perception to occur that relates to how the public thinks about visual information.

Advertisements and written signage are a part of American culture. Images of commodities are placed on any surface that can sustain tape, glue, thumbtacks, staples, or magnets. Nagel states that there are two intended phenomenological purposes for any advertisement.\(^{35}\) One, without a spectator an image or advertisement will wait to be completed, and two, the information displayed within ads has no meaning if no one is looking at it. A phenomenological analysis occurs once a person is drawn to and evaluates individual advertisements in association with his or her personal lives.

Nagel explains that there are two motives of advertisements; the first motive is “in-order-to” advertisements. The idea of this is to relate the printed image to a person’s need for something in the future. An ad that uses “in-order-to” motives addresses needs an individual may have; it attempts to persuade an onlooker that the message presented within the advertisement can fix a presumed problem. In opposition are the “because”

\(^{34}\) This is also essentially what Heidegger communicated through his studies of people’s perceptions relating to their backgrounds; Dyer. *Advertising as Communication.* 76.

\(^{35}\) Nagel. “Phenomenology, Authenticity and the Truth of Advertising.” 244.
motivations, which rely on a potential buyer’s past experiences in relation to the advertorial information. The viewer’s analysis of the optical properties of an advertisement or visual artwork is formed in terms of his or her past experiences.\(^{36}\) The potential to buy or look at signage relies on the connection between the image and viewer.

Nagel explains that there are three basic constructs of society that relate to the study of advertisements as phenomena. Face-to-Face-, We-, and They-relationships are interpretations of social interactions that occur on a daily basis.\(^{37}\) Although these terms are not used directly by Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, or Heidegger the concepts are echoed in their individual works. A Face-to-Face situation is one in which another person and I share a common space at that given time. Although we are two separate people, our experiences of place is shared, but our consciousnesses of place are separate experiences. I cannot know what another person will focus on how he or she will decipher the same surroundings.\(^{38}\) Certain images located in a shared environment will attract and have specific meanings for certain populations, while others may not react to those same images or have sentiment towards them.\(^{39}\)

The We-relationship is dependent on the Face-to-Face-relationship of space.

\(^{36}\) Sokolowski. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. 30.


\(^{38}\) Dyer. *Advertising as Communication*, 87; Sokolowski. *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 30.

\(^{39}\) Haring’s drawings used a combination of figures and symbols that different ethnic and cultural groups could be drawn to his symbols. Associated with church (cross), technology (computers and televisions), or animals (dogs, dolphins, and pigs), etc. His images could attract different ages, people of various education, and economic standing allowing different people to create their own interpretations and perceptions of the variety of images that lay before them.
Unlike a Face-to-Face-relationship, the We-relationship involves a shared or directed consciousness between more than one person. By sharing an environment with another person in a We-relationship everyone is participating in the moment and directing their attention at the same object. The shared focus of viewers’ surroundings creates the opportunity for conversation or discussion about the object. Merleau-Ponty states, “our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world.”40 This We-relationship occurs when individuals acknowledge the existence of the other participants’ similar observations of their shared environment.41

At the opposite end of the phenomenological spectrum are They-relationships. They-relationships lack the interaction of both the Face-to-Face- and the We-relationship. This type of interaction involves two parties that are not connected in consciousness or within an environmental location. Nagel calls these relationships "inauthentic" because they are one sided and use "typificator schemes" that classify individuals as observers of advertisement.42 The connection is created anonymously, disconnecting, for example, the advertiser from the potential buyer. It is the responsibility of the audience to participate, to be involved in the shared understanding and interpretation of the media that they are presented with. Once an onlooker has viewed advertisement and art, these objects can have meaning, but without a viewer they

41 The subway system in New York City is not exactly a place where strangers make small talk. However, in the case of Haring’s drawings, communication occurred in more subtle ways, a wink, nod or slight smile when two people stood and saw a chalk drawing. The connections made between the pedestrians might not have been verbal at the time, but conversations occurred once commuters reached their destinations and talked with friends.
have no meaning.\textsuperscript{43} The artist and advertiser project their vision without knowing what meanings the public will actually make of their work.

Face-to-Face, We-relationships, and They-relationships are all associated with the typical environments in which advertisements and visual arts are located. Nagel looks at television ads, and he suggests that these relationships between viewers exist throughout all environments in which advertisements can be viewed.\textsuperscript{44} In general,

[all] advertising plays upon cultural information that has been established as a general social structure of reality. The intersubjectively constructed meaning of the medium of an ad – that is socially pervading meaning of media – is fundamental to the constitution of the ad.\textsuperscript{45}

This individualized interpretation or perception pertains directly to how a consumer or viewer of advertisements and visual arts processes the information embedded in the image. In the case of Keith Haring’s subway drawings, thousands of people witnessed the quickly drawn forms; however, each person used his or her own experiences to influence perception of the drawings.

Husserl, observed that art is a conscious activity that involves allowing one’s self to experience the image as an individual entity. Advertisements and the visual arts may have different purposes intended by their creator. However, the ways in which people perceive advertisements and visual arts, according to phenomenology is the same. According to the individualized phenomenology orchestrated by Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, our interactions with the world are embedded in our individual beings. These memories from past experiences and present day activities are contained within us,

\textsuperscript{43} Dyer. \textit{Advertising as Communication}, 77.
\textsuperscript{44} Nagel. “Phenomenology, Authenticity and the Truth of Advertising.” 246.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. 250.
influencing how we read, see, or analyze the world around us. Heidegger sums up this method stating:

These primary phenomena of encounter… are of course seen only in the original phenomenological direction of vision is assumed and above all seen to its conclusion, which means letting the world be encountered in concern. This phenomenon is really passed over when the world is from the start approached as given for observation or, as is by and large the case even in phenomenology, when the world is approached just as it shows itself in an isolated, so-called sense perception of a thing, and this isolated free-floating perception of a thing is now interrogated on the specific kind of givenness belonging to its object.\(^{46}\)

Heidegger points out that when we make assumptions or form perception about a particular visual object, “we overlook the features of the world that are moving our pre-reflective, pre-conscious mode of being in the world.”\(^{47}\) Phenomenologically, perception has been broken down by many scholars. Most agree that people need to think about the different ways they interact with the world. An object can “only exist with regard to my interaction with it…my perception begins from my point of view.”\(^{48}\) Perception can only occur once an individual has looked at a thing, place, or entity. Place or location is a “composite” of objects that are linked together by their surroundings.\(^{49}\) Places can be temporary, much like environments of rapid change. “The F train is a thing unless I am riding in it. When I am occupying it, it forms the place where I am.”\(^{50}\)


\(^{49}\) Ibid. 7.

\(^{50}\) Ibid. 7.
We-relationships are created in the places that commuters occupy, allowing multiple perceptions to be simultaneously in one space. This happens through the first definition of perception, "the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses." Our senses react in direct communication with our topographic or geographic location.

Vision plays a large part in how one perceives. What we actually see is not a direct result of one process. Reflections of color fields bounce from an object; this reflected light becomes what I perceive as color, texture, or tone. All objects are created by either the absence or presence of color, “it can only exist when three components are present: a viewer, an object, and light.” Light is the energy that our eye detects when we see; without it our vision is debilitated. Light is reflected off of an object entering the eye through the cornea. The cornea refracts the rays as they pass through the pupil, which regulates the amount of light passing through. The lens changes shape further bending light rays to focus them on the retina in the back of the eye. Cells in the retina convert light into electrical impulse, which travel through the optic nerve to the brain where images are formulated.

The concepts of perception of place, personal interaction, and vision relate to the phenomenology of visual arts, especially Keith Haring’s subway drawings, as art is an intersubjective experience. The place in which his chalk drawings were located was a

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52 “Tutorials: Color Perception”
53 Thanks to Erin Herzog for explaining this concept to me.
space of constant Face-to-Face and We-relationship interactions created by a person who was not a typical They-relationship entity. Haring was “anonymous” in his They-relationship position, however he created a constant flow of Face-to-Face and We-relationships when people looked at his drawings.

*Natural and Phenomenological Attitudes*

According to Sokolowski, there are two ways of looking at the world according to a phenomenological analysis of visual occurrences, natural and phenomenological attitudes. On any normal day people usually do not analyze their every action, I get on my bike and ride to school. En route, for example, I view my surroundings through a natural attitude, looking at the trees, flowers, and cars that I pass by. I know that I see trees, flowers, and cars, however, I do not analyze them. I receive visual information but do not really look at or think about the individual objects themselves. This natural attitude allows people to move throughout their day seeing and remembering things that are in their presence. In this attitude I am able to move around the tree and avoid the cars as I move down the street.

En route to school on my bike in a phenomenological attitude, I actually analyze what I encounter. To observe or analyze an environment, a person engages with the visual objects that surround them. So, on my bicycle ride, I can, for example, differentiate between the oak, poplar, and almond trees. Not only do I see that there are
different species of trees, but I also notice the health, and seasonal status of the organism. This manner of viewing the world around ones self actually analyzes what is being presented. A person reflects inwardly and through this process of including new and past experiences can dictate what they know about the visuals surrounding them.

An individual’s personal visual perception relies on being in a natural attitude because one must have a basic awareness of the visual cues that surround us. Robert Sokolowski explains the transition from the natural to the phenomenological metaphorically; we “crawl out of the natural attitude, rise above it, theorize it, and distinguish and describe both the subjective and the objective correlates that make it up.” In this process we utilize the information that is known and gain new visual information to correlate with past observances. It is in the phenomenological attitude where people develop and can share mutually understood perceptions. In this attitude people tell us what we already know and yet his or her perception illuminates new points of view.

Qualitative Inquiry:
Thirty Years in the Making

The phenomenological attitude is reached by moving past the natural attitude by analyzing personal visual perceptions, and in the case of this thesis, what was observed

54 Sokolowski. Introduction to Phenomenology. 50.
thirty years ago. To do this, interviews seeking qualitative data were conducted with New York City commuters who saw Keith Haring’s drawings in situ. These interviews allow Haring’s drawings to be analyzed differently than ever before. Haring stated: “the drawings are designed to provoke people to think and use their own imagination. They don’t have exact definitions but challenge the viewer to assert his or her own ideas and interpretations.”

Previous investigations of the drawings have neglected the everyday commuter’s perceptions. Through this interview process and review of these phenomenological experiences of commuters, the intended audience of the art work, data will begin to fill this gap in the research.

A qualitative research interview is an attempt to “understand something from the subject’s point of view and to uncover the meaning of their experience.” By exploring an individual’s perceptions of the chalk drawings a better understanding of the drawings can be had. Having a controlled set of questions that guided the interviewee to remember specific details about his or her encounter with the chalk drawings allowed me to explore how the drawings related to their individual lives. Allowing interviewees to extend their remarks beyond the questions allowed me to see beyond what may have been just my own pre-conceived expectations. In order to create an inviting environment for all interviewees an interview packet was created and given to the participants. Inside were three documents, first an information sheet explaining how the interview would be conducted and why, a consent form allowing me to use the data received during their

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participation, and, a form with the questions allowing the interviewees to begin thinking and remembering before the actual interview.

The four interviewees were contacted via Craigslist, a website that permits free advertising. I also attempted to create connections through other websites such as artcrimes.com, the Keith Haring Foundation, the Keith Haring Facebook page, and various web based bulletin boards. However, these sites proved unresponsive to my inquiries. The other three participants were found at California State University, Chico. A total of seven participants were located and agreed to participate in the interview process.

The interviews were set up through e-mail correspondence with all participants. I allowed the interviewee to decide the time and date of the interview. At that time, I reminded them of the relevant procedures. Through our conversations I explained that our interview would be recorded with a digital audio recorder through a loudspeaker phone or in person with the local participants. Each interview would be conducted using the set list of questions as a guide, even though different questions did arise when a participant and I began our interview. At the end of the conversation I also reminded them that I would transcribe the data collected and send them a copy for their review.

A person’s memory is unique to his or her lived experiences, and one’s perceptions of an original account come from the first encounter with a visual event. The qualitative interviews necessary for this thesis required participants to remember what they experienced visually thirty years ago. When people create memories they are not creating images in the mind, but rather, they “store up the earlier perceptions” about the
event in question. What is communicated by the seven interview participants is relived and reactivated explanations of their perceptions from the early 1980s.

Each person has a different background, view of the drawings, experiences interacting with visual arts, and ways of describing their own perception of the chalk drawings. The individual descriptions of the subway environment, conversations that the chalk drawings provoked, and interesting personal meanings are much different than what has been written about by critics or historians. Informants were also challenged to remember events that occurred over thirty years ago - a difficult task, to say the least. Common in each interview is a degree of uncertainty about specific facts. The interview questions are designed to guide informants back to moving through the transit system in the early 1980s, viewing the drawings, and communicating about the drawings with other New York City commuters.

A New York City commuter’s insight emerges directly from his or her perspective, the viewpoint through which Haring wanted his artwork to be ‘read.’ The information collected from these interviews will produce understanding of how the everyday commuter interacted with the chalk drawings, spoke about the environment, and interpreted the symbolic compositions created by Haring. Although the process of recollection was sometimes challenging for informants, the information that each participant remembered is invaluable to this thesis project.

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57 Sokolowski. *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 68.
In order for a phenomenological analysis to occur it has been established, in the sections above, that one must move from the natural to the phenomenological attitude. For a researcher using the method it is also important to suspend any presumptions about the subject. Edmund Husserl introduced epochē into the process of conducting phenomenological investigations. By “refrain[ing] from judgment until the evidence is clear” a researcher can illuminate information that had never occurred to them.\(^{59}\) The practice of “bracketing” out or suspending personal beliefs allows the researcher to view an object in a new light.\(^{60}\) In this thesis, the process allows the research to show what a pedestrian commuting throughout the New York City metro system thought about the subway chalk drawings created by Haring. It is through their perspective and perception of events that the research will ensue.

For the phenomenologist [me], to do this, knowledge of the world and perceptions must be reawakened. By bracketing out my prior research, personal opinions, knowledge of social history, or experiences viewing the images online and in books; I can experience Haring’s drawings in a new way. Although I give up my own presumptions about the subject, “I can not deny their existence.”\(^{61}\)

When viewing visual arts and advertisements the “‘producer-meaning’ approach

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\(^{59}\) Sokolowski. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. 49.

\(^{60}\) Ibid.

\(^{61}\) Ibid. 51.
allows author to create their own meaning for a piece. However, Haring did not want to impose a definite meaning on his combinations of outlined figures. The way I view an image on my computer or even in person will be different than a 1980s New York City subway commuter. My knowledge of the drawings was nonexistent at the time because I wasn’t even born yet. The interviews allow me, the phenomenologist, to explore how different people ‘read’ and interpret what they observe.

I first witnessed Keith Haring’s artwork when I was 18 on a trip to New York City with my parents. It was only a post card that depicted a large orange mural with a skeletal human figure with bold writing, ‘Crack is Wack’ in the upper corner. After ten years I can vividly remember that image and my perceptions of the event. I was drawn to the graphic simplicity of a long fluid line he used in his artwork. I was drawn to the graphic simplicity and yet sometimes complex imagery that Haring created. I also remember my mother thinking that it was a bad image and that somehow the words meant that crack was good; I had to explain what it meant. Since this original encounter with his work, my perceptions have expanded because of extensive research about the 1980s in New York City, Haring’s background, semiotics, and potential artistic influences that may have impacted his work.

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62 Dyer. Advertising as Communication. 87.

63 Once people began to notice the subway drawings were reoccurring many of drawings were torn down and individuals kept them as their own. These drawings are not authenticated by the Keith Haring Foundation anymore because many people have tried to copy Haring’s characteristic outlined figures. Some have been authenticated and have been shown in gallery and museum exhibitions.

64 Dyer. Advertising as Communication. 87.
CHAPTER V

RESULTS

The participants involved in this phenomenological study each have different backgrounds, associations with New York City, and personal observations of Keith Haring’s chalk drawings produced in the subway from 1980 until 1985. Seven subway commuters agreed to participate in interviews and to express their observations of Keith Haring’s chalk drawings thirty years ago. The names of the participants have been replaced with pseudonyms. Three of the participants lived in New York City or a surrounding borough since birth, while four were transplants or visitors, Americans who came during the early 1980s. Each person who responded to my search for participants was involved in art, as a student, practicing artist, curator, or gallery director in the early 1980s.

Alex was born and raised on the island of Manhattan, grew up in Midtown and later moved downtown to the East Village. During the 1980s he worked at a toy company, Mego Toys, and was an aspiring artist. Casey was also born and raised in Manhattan, but went away for college in the early 1980s. He continued to return home to visit friends and family throughout the decade. Ira commuted by train from Long Island to Penn Station where he transferred to the subway on a daily basis on his way to work at the Ted Bates Gallery. Native New Yorkers accumulate years of memorable experiences
and visual information while traveling through the subway. Their statements about the subway environment contain vivid descriptions of what the subway looked like before and after Haring’s chalk drawings appeared.

The following four participants are a mixture of New York City transplants and visitors. Lois moved to New York City in 1981 and began working a couple of odd jobs around the city; she was an aspiring artist and also worked as a model. Greg, originally from San Antonio, Texas, moved to New York City in 1984 to work at the Tony Shafrazi Gallery. Tim worked at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York and commuted by train into the city to visit friends. John went to New York City twice during the early 1980s for art conferences. As transplants and visitors to New York City, these interviewees looked at the subway walls using a different lens then that of the native New Yorkers, each saw the visual information from more of an outside point of view.

In their own words, each expressed memories of walking down subway transfer hallways, observing a plethora of visual information, and coming across Haring’s chalk drawings. As many of them expressed, his work was graffiti but it seemed to have purpose and artistic integrity that was notably different from other graffiti. Many of the participant’s comments are recorded in this study verbatim allowing their personalities and observations to be understood through their individualized perceptions.

The conversations with each interviewee led this study to be split into six different topics of discussion. These six, after countless hours spent transcribing and reviewing the interview data, clearly stood out as the most meaningful topics for discussion. First, Monotonous Habitats explores how the environment of the New York
City subway is visualized and remembered by the interviewees. Second, *The Importance of Chalk and Location* are discussed by interviewees talking about Haring’s use of chalk and the paper covered advertising boards that lined the subway walls on which he drew. Third, *Haring’s Magic Line* and distinct style of art and forms are discussed. Fourth, *Perceptual Observations* by participants express how they saw Haring’s chalk drawings in the subways, what they initially thought of the drawings, and their temporary nature. Fifth, *Conversations* that participants had with friends or strangers focusing on Haring and his artwork are discussed. Last, *Ending Notes* by all seven participants express poignant observations about the importance of the chalk drawings.

By breaking the discussions up, focus can be put directly on how each participant experienced Haring’s subway chalk drawings. Their Face-to-Face-, We-, and They-relationships created by viewing the chalk drawings and the subway system allows us to learn more about the everyday New York City commuter’s personal observations of their surroundings. Their remembrances have been compiled to document what the visually minded New York City commuter experienced on their daily subway transit.

*Monotonous Habitats:*

New York City battled against vandalism and filth in the subways during the 1980s. They did this by increasing the police presence and attempts at continuous clean up projects. The participants in this study describe the environment and the
overwhelming array of graffiti painted throughout the subway system.

In the beginning, this was the era when New York City was plastered with graffiti everywhere. And, so, you would get off on subway trains where there would be scribbles everywhere and you would walk through the station [and it] would be filled, on all the walls. So, I didn’t pay much attention. The thing that called his work to my attention was that it was always on the black panels where the poster people ripped off an old poster and left the black paper up...

- Ira

The subways of New York City are a system connecting Manhattan with the five boroughs and cities further North, South and East. The beating heart of the city is located underground where commuters speed on subway trains from station to station. Moving effortlessly from Long Island to the Bronx, and then off to Times Square, a person could ride and transfer between subway lines to arrive at their destination. Today, the New York City subway system is the seventh largest in the world, helping local and visiting passengers move about the city. A visitor may be struck by the unkempt state of the subways, while a native may think little of their surrounding’s appearances.

I remember getting on one subway car, and it looking really cool as it pulled up, that someone had graffitied the entire car. You know, from the outside all the windows were painted over and I felt that it was sort of a graffitied landscape, a pictorial landscape. But, I got in the car and the doors closed and I realized that I couldn’t see out. I don’t know the lines well enough, so I don’t know how many stops [until my destination]. As a visitor it was a little unnerving to be on this train and not know where you were or where you are going. But, the graffiti was just all over the place.

- Tim

It was pretty grungy and it was pretty dark. It wasn’t well lit and clean like they are now. And I don’t know if it was the specific line that I was

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on, or if that was my attitude from me coming from the pristine Dutch Mid-West.\textsuperscript{67}
- John

I just started commuting from Long Island into Penn Station and subwaying it from there to Times Square station every morning. New York City was going through a difficult period in the 80s and the subways were sometimes a threatening place, potential muggers, panhandlers, litter and grime. At the start I was conscious of “scribbles” on the black surfaces that usually held advertising and lined the passages of the subway station.\textsuperscript{68}
- Ira

So, it was an exciting and vibrant time. Especially because the city was coming out of a depression, New York was sort of in a depression in the 70s, the city was highly depressed and bankrupt... So, there was so much of the city that was totally bombed out, the subways were dirty and completely covered with graffiti, [and] kind of threatening. As exciting as it was, it was still really threatening. So it was just such an experience to go walking down in the subway to come across a Keith Haring subway drawing. That was like, so wild.\textsuperscript{69}
- Greg

In an attempt to clean the subway stations and train cars the Metropolitan Transportation Authority began a new regiment of cleaning in 1984, however it was not completely in effect until 1986, leaving the subways in a constant state of alternating visual arts.\textsuperscript{70} Any surface area that could hold pigment was used by subway artists to display their artwork. This allowed their tags to be seen by people from all over the city. Much of the graffiti was located on the subway trains themselves. As Tim pointed out, an entire train car could be graffitied by one artist. This made their distinct tags viewable

\textsuperscript{67} John Kapp, Interview by Rebecca Feldstein, Ayres Hall CSU, Chico, March 14, 2013.
\textsuperscript{68} Ira Sherman.
\textsuperscript{69} Greg Hass, interview by Rebecca Feldstein, by phone, March 30, 2013.
\textsuperscript{70} “The New York Transit Authority in the 1980s.”
www.nycsubway.org/wiki/The_New_York_Transit_Authority_in_the_1980s.
to commuters throughout that train line.

The Importance of Chalk & Location, Location, Location

Unlike other graffiti artists, Haring created art that stayed in place, temporarily. He chose to draw in a location that would disappear within a day or two. Instead of relying on subway cars to move his artwork throughout the city, Haring used his own daily commutes to produce his drawings under the city.71

“Everywhere, they were everywhere!”72
- Lois

I had grown up noticing being aware of the thing, the empty, blank pages in the subways. So, I think, it certainly caught my attention when someone started doing something with them. I mean with chalk, doing drawings on them. I think, you would notice anyone else doing something to them. But before, they were really crude, carving, tearing into it, you know someone’s tag, or some other kind of words but nothing was as, um, compositionally considerate as that.... Seeing the empty space, seeing that blank canvas for so long, that blank page growing up, that black hole. You know, walking by for 18 years and seeing nothing there or maybe only seeing scrawl. To seeing someone actually use it as a canvas well something that is artistically sensitive. I was like, WOW, someone is trying to figure out what to do, genius. Well, I don’t know if I said genius, but in a sense now, I would say something along those lines. You know,

71 “After the first drawing, things just fell into place. I began drawing in the subways as a hobby on my way to work. I had to ride the subways often and would do a drawing while waiting for a train.” Keith Haring. “Art in Transit.” www.haringkids.com/art/subway/arttransit_haring.html.
someone actually thought about it.\textsuperscript{73}

\textit{- Casey}

I would often be in the subway on the number six train, the Lexington Avenue local. I remember seeing Keith, I think this was 1982, seeing Keith doing stuff in white chalk or white marker. He did this on what had been subway advertisement slots, but which had been covered over with black paper. The transit authority, the MTA, when an advertisement had gone through its cycle, they would put black paper over slot, so that they wouldn’t get free [or] extra time displaying their marketing. He would use those as his background, as sort of the blackboard for his work.\textsuperscript{74}

\textit{- Alex}

He was doing subway graffiti, but he was doing it in locations where he had essentially a framed piece of art that would disappear, that was another thing. The fact that it would disappear, he knew that what he was doing was perishable. It would become or be covered by a poster the following day.\textsuperscript{75}

\textit{- Ira}

He knew that they would just disappear, because it was just chalk on black paper. So, there was no longevity, it is kind of amazing that some of them have survived. But, that is only because some people actually saw the value in them.\textsuperscript{76}

\textit{- Greg}

Advertisements were and are still plastered on the walls along every walking path in New York City; no wall is left to stand alone, including those in the underground tunnels that connect the city. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority sells advertising on subway cars and station walls, urban panels at subway entrances, and on billboards.\textsuperscript{77}

At each of these locations pedestrians commuting on their way to somewhere are given

\textsuperscript{73} Casey Camdon, interview by Rebecca Feldstein, Ayres Hall CSU, Chico, March 29, 2013.
\textsuperscript{74} Alex Adams, interview by Rebecca Feldstein, by phone, March 3, 2013.
\textsuperscript{75} Ira Sherman.
\textsuperscript{76} Greg Hass.
\textsuperscript{77} “Advertising and Telecommunications.”
www.mta.info/mat/realestate/ad_tele.html.
information that they must either accept or reject, either acknowledge or ignore. As stated in the methodology section an audience has the ability to react to the visual information that surrounds them or ignore images because it either relates to their lives or does not. As Casey, John, and Tim pointed out, being able to see Haring’s drawings observers needed a keen eye.

I see myself walking in a herd of people, you know, maybe getting the five seconds that I tell my students about. “You’re lucky if you get a person to slow down for five seconds to look at your work.” I think that as simple as his stuff is as easily as it can get written off as kitsch or simplistic, I think that it had staying power, the site and location, and they were just black and white.78
- Casey

I just thought that it was some more graffiti...but it was something that was noticeable. It wasn’t regular graffiti, but it was graffiti...I thought it was unusually distinct, it was enough different from other graffiti that I had seen that it was unique, and the black and white quality of it.79
- John

My friend, Rebecca, had actually pointed out those figures they seemed almost sequential. They remind me almost of Burma-Shave that was something back in the 50s that they did along the highways with little signs. Basically they were prose or little poems. They were to sell a shaving cream or something like that, but they would be spaced out every quarter of a mile, it was almost something to look forward to in the tunnels.80
- Tim

Whether his drawings were walked by or pointed out by people who were conscious of Haring’s work, once noticed. The commuters interviewed saw there was something different about Haring’s chalk drawings. They began to see his unique

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78 Casey Camdon.
79 John Kapp.
80 Tim Parson.
placement that mimicked their transit and exposed his commute as well. When Haring decided to use the blank black advertisement boards as a backdrop, he brought new life into the usual subway ambiance, as Casey points out,

He took over those empty spaces, neglected, blacked out things giving them a function. Here are these black holes that he breathed life into. You know bringing art into this place that is grim; the other ads are for liquor, cigarettes, and plays. And, suddenly there was something unusual.  
- *Casey*

Not only did the participants express that Haring used advertisement slots in a new way, but they also understood the ephemeral nature of the drawings.

They were like gifts to the city of New York, and that any of them survive is a miracle. They were so ephemeral, you know they were made of chalk so you would rub up against them and they would be gone. Or they would put up another advertisement you know within the same day, or people would go down and steal them. I just think there is something fantastic about that, that they weren’t meant to survive. They were only meant to be out for a short amount of time, I think there is something very remarkable about that. Rather than saying this is such a precious sort of thing or my artwork is so precious and valuable. That wasn’t the nature of it, it was just quick. But Keith was so sure and such a great artist that this quick 20-second drawing was like a masterful artwork. Pretty remarkable stuff if you look at the images.  
- *Greg*

I think its ephemerality, as I remember they are chalk, but that might have been just the way I read them. Maybe they were white marker, but in my mind I just saw them as crisp white lines or white paint… And they weren’t gonna last because they were constantly changing, I don’t think I ever saw one more than once. Each time I came through I only have one image of them being there. So that attitude, of you were lucky to see them, I don’t know if that was part of his reasoning.  

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81 Casey Camdon.  
82 Greg Hass.  
83 Casey Camdon.
- Casey

Both Greg and Casey used the word ‘ephemeral’ to describe the temporary nature of Haring’s drawings. The time that Haring took to produce the drawings was almost equal to the amount of time the drawing would be visible. Using chalk as an art medium in a busy subway, where people are rushing or squishing past each other, one would think that the drawings were even delicate. Haring made the temporary drawings on a temporary surface. Both the location and medium, as Ira pointed out was “essentially a framed piece of art that would disappear.”

Having the opportunity to see one of Haring’s chalk drawings was somewhat left up to chance. Both the placement and medium used to create the drawings were temporary materials that could be covered or wiped away at any time. The non-permanent nature of Haring’s drawings did not matter to the New York Police department who arrested Haring on multiple occasions for vandalism. As Greg explains Haring’s ability to draw consistent figures quickly allowed him to create new images during the hustle and bustle of subway stations.

He was so fast, and that was kind of the nature of those things, because it was against the law. Keith was arrested a bunch of times, it is documented where Keith is handcuffed and taken out of the subways by a couple of officers. Well, he was doing graffiti, but everyone would say that he’s not spray-painting; he’s just using chalk you can just wipe it off. But, the fact of the matter is he was making a mark, whether of not it was paint it didn’t matter. So, in the early days they were really quite hard on Keith. After a while when they realized Keith’s notoriety and how famous he was they kind of left him alone, even maybe the powers that be put their foot down a little to leave him alone. Keith knew the danger so he could draw very quickly and he would just go down there and draw, you know I said 15 or 20 seconds he could finish a drawing, then jump into a train. He knew the

84 Ira Sherman
train was coming step out and see a black billboard, in those days billboards were there and when their time ran out they would be covered with black paper. So, Keith was sort of brilliant to see them as blackboards. SO, he would do the drawings in them, and they had frames and everything, you know a blank canvas just waiting to be drawn on. He could draw really quickly and just jump on the train and disappear. That was the nature of it; he could do it then just leave. The possibility of being arrested was very real and he did get arrested a couple of times. You know, actually knowing the amount of art that he was doing in those years and knowing the danger involved and that he could be arrested, people were stealing them, knowing that all of these things were happening. But he kept doing them.85

- Greg

Haring had an ability to create a multitude of noticeable drawings that stood out in a new way. As many of the participants stated, it was graffiti, but it was different. By using a temporary medium and a location that disappeared within a few days Haring was not trying to create lasting graffiti that needed to be cleaned up. The ephemeral quality of the drawings made them an elusive treat to the visually aware subway commuter.

_Haring’s Magic Line_

Haring had complete control over the characters created in each individual drawing. The surface on which Haring drew was unimportant because his line was fluid and constant. In an environment of perpetual change Haring’s drawings also constantly rotated through the system dictated by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority placement and removal of advertisements.

85 Greg Hass.
I think it was generous of him to draw down there. But, that was his remarkable talent, he could do these huge drawings really quickly, his line was so sure. He could finish one of those drawings in 15 or 20 seconds.  

- *Greg*

The opportunity to witness his unnerving, steady-handed drawings only came a few times a day. According to those who I interviewed, the outlined forms were the same fluid stroke every time in every drawing.

The sort of things that I heard about was primarily about Keith’s magic line width. The width of the line was, like, perfect for the image that he was drawings. And, it seemed kind of a novel thing. Anyone could have thought that up, that particularly thick line. But, nobody had, and it seemed like a new graphic sensibility. I liked it, I didn’t think of it as having any particular philosophical meaning.  

- *Alex*

I don’t think that his line quality has changed a lot. But, certainly there were manifestations of his work. But the line was, I don’t want to say a non-expressive line. But, his line didn’t very much in thickness. I think that deals with an overall idea of flatness, in space and with objects. I think that is one of the qualities of his work. I think that, I recall seeing or reading an article about his work, painting on 3-D forms such as bodies. And, in the line there doesn’t vary there either. But, there is form to it. So that was a very interesting enigma.  

- *John*

“I was blown away by Haring’s ability to repeat these symbols perfectly under duress from board to board.”  

- *Ira*

“I wasn’t so aware of that work at the time. I couldn’t say ‘oh there’s a Keith Haring,’ although, once you have seen his work it is recognizable.”

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86 Ibid.  
87 Alex Adams.  
88 John Kapp.  
89 Ira Sherman.  
90 Tim Parson.
- *Tim*

Using this ‘magic line,’ Haring created a variety of forms to fill the unattended advertisement spaces. His diverse characters had no specific meaning, but commuters were able to admire the finished product and create their own interpretations. When looking at various drawings, Ira and Lois both saw Haring’s images as part of a larger vocabulary.

There was the crawling baby, ah, the barking dog, ah, the little TV sets what had a head on shoulders that were always talking out to you and explosively blearing, spewing information... I found them satirical of what was going on [in] our world. The attention on the TV set got in those days, the TV set blaring ... The dogs barking, to me, was reminiscent of the noise of the city and as a cause of tension that lingered in New York City while walking the streets.\(^1\)

- *Ira*

I loved seeing the changing linguistic elements of the artwork, as he would adopt new ideas into his personal dialect, vernacular. He would draw the dogs, then the dolphins, then the dominant people with subservient people. You know, there were things that would come through in waves. And, we would wait to see what he was saying through his drawings...I’m glad they were everywhere too, I can’t over emphasize enough, the ubiquitous nature of the radiant babies.\(^2\)

- *Lois*

Many people could have interpreted the chalk drawings using contemporary social context as a guide to the individual characters and their combinations. As stated previously, this is how past historians have attempted to decipher the images. When a person is able to view a number of Haring’s chalk drawings on the computer an observer could quickly create their own translation of his ‘vernacular.’ Just like advertising,

\(^1\) Ira Sherman.
\(^2\) Lois Adams.
Haring’s drawings were viewed by a diverse population of people seeing or overlooking the images. If they actually looked at the drawings they might have seen what Casey or Alex observed.

I didn’t try to get a sense of what they were about. I just sort of saw them as expressions of joy and, sort of a relief, you know, giving the visual viewer a break from the monotony of the everyday experience... He was kind of able to create this iconic image, that was so simple but elegant. Simple, but you might say crude, but really I think not. I think clear and stripped down; they kind of branded themselves in my brain.93

- Casey

I didn’t think of it as having any particular philosophical meaning. And, in fact, when Keith started to go more ‘streety’ graffiti, like the Crack is Wack sort of stuff. I liked when it was nice and plain, and recurrent. The idea of recurrent images, like the dog or the baby or whatever. The fact that lots of people would try to come up with a novel style, and most of it wouldn’t work. But his stuff worked immediately.... I didn’t think that he had an idea; I did see that he did it quickly. But I thought that it was graphic and pleasant... The 80s were sort of the last era before computer graphics took over the world.94

- Alex

Perceptual Observations

The participants in this study each have expressed how Haring’s graffiti is unique from the other subway artist’s styles. John, Tim, Casey, and Ira each described their perceptions of finding Haring’s drawings throughout the subway system.

The style was distinctive enough that you could say, ‘this one dude,’ we

93 Casey Camdon.
94 Alex Adams.
didn’t know his name, but you could tell that this one ‘dude’ was making these pieces.  
- John

I couldn’t tell you if there were mimickers or not... Although, once you have seen his work it is recognizable. But, to me it didn’t mean that there wasn’t a whole group of Keith Haring’s out there, doing it.  
- Tim

I believed I personally had discovered a new talent. At the start, admiring this artist’s work was a sort of inside thing, where some passers-by grumbled about graffiti. While a few of us stopped and smiled, understanding yet not quite understanding the whimsy this artist was injecting in our trip to work.  
- Ira

I saw it more as he was getting out, that’s what people did. He was trying to become a recognized name. As graffiti artists they are trying to get it to that point where your name or tag is ubiquitous so that it is everywhere. Then you are seen as the ‘King of the A Line,’ or something like that.  
- Casey

Graffiti artists create tagging styles that are distinct and recognizable to the everyday pedestrian. Both John and Tim recognized the distinct style created by what seemed to be one man, even though they were only visitors to the city. Ira and Casey understood that the person producing the drawings was ultimately promoting himself and his artwork throughout the city.

I picture them in the places where you are transferring from one line to another, and it wasn’t quick transitions. You are walking through these tile corridors with this harsh florescent lighting for a while, you know, down one hallway and across another one. Then you, you are kind of disoriented and don’t quite know where you are. The ads are constant

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95 John Kapp.  
96 Tim Parson.  
97 Ira Sherman.  
98 Casey Camdon.
these things are spaced out every, you know, ten feet or something there is another one and breaks. And suddenly breaking up the assault of advertisements that you would have seen before would be this unexpected thing. And then after the fact we came to find out that this was a Keith Haring.\textsuperscript{99}  
- Casey

New York City subway trains take 24 different routes, moving 6,311 subway cars around the dozens of tunnels that crisscross the island. In 1982 the average subway car traveled 7,145 miles between repairs and graffiti cleanings. This enormous web of underground tunnels has 468 subway stations, which allow commuters multiple ways to get from point A to B.\textsuperscript{100} Many of these stations have transfers between subway lines, however, as you can see from the New York City subway map and by Casey’s description, many connections can be extremely long. (Image 1)

The subway I would ride was the R train, and I would get off on Prince Street or the Broadway Lafayette stop, which I think was the D train also. Keith did do drawings there, so I didn’t really ride the subway a lot, but it was more of a way of coming into work...So it was either Lafayette or Prince Street that I would see them. But I don’t remember specifically the one that I saw, but I remember seeing them. And it was magical, because the subways were dirty and dark and they were kind of threatening. Then to come across these beautiful chalk drawings was just magical. It was really generous of Keith to do that also, actually go down there and do it, because there were like gifts to the city.\textsuperscript{101}  
- Greg

They were around, in the early 80s... I had a job at the time, in Midtown. So, I would take the Spring Street subway station, and it is entirely possible that I saw them around or uptown.... I never actually saw Keith finishing the drawings, but on more than one occasion I got there soon after they were put there. But in that era, they would put black paper as a place marker for where advertisements were going to go up soon, and he

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{100} “Subways.” www.mta.info/nyct/facts/ffsubway.html.  
\textsuperscript{101} Greg Hass.
would come and draw on it. And maybe he was actually putting the black paper up himself. That is how I was interpreting it at the time.\(^\text{102}\)

- Lois

Commuting by train is a daily occurrence for many people in the five boroughs and their surrounding areas. According to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, trains run every two to five minutes during rush hour, every five to 10 minutes during both mid-day and evenings, and in 20 minute gaps overnight.\(^\text{103}\) Today, thirty years after Haring produced his drawings, the subways have a daily average ridership of 3,681,182 commuters traveling throughout the city.\(^\text{104}\) The number of commuters taking the tubes in the 1980s was an all-time low, because of commuter’s anxieties due to crime, poor subway performance, and general filth accumulation in the subways. In 1982 there was a 60 percent jump in crime; therefore, uniformed police officers rode the subways from 8 PM to 4 AM trying to counteract the rise in criminal activity.\(^\text{105}\) Tim remembers a particular night in the subways:

You know, it was late at night, and there is this eerie light in there anyways...I don’t want to say we were alone, we were mostly alone. There was a gang at the other end of the tunnel, it was a little unnerving, and we could hear them before we could see them. So, we were walking through and we realized that there was potential danger here; we just went silent and walked really swiftly. But it was the Keith Haring pieces in that tunnel, you know other than that it was a little frightening that night...I don’t want to say that [the drawings] relieved our fears, but it gave us something to look forward to.\(^\text{106}\)

- Tim

\(^\text{102}\) Lois Adams.
\(^\text{103}\) “Subways,” www.mta.info/nyct/subway/howto_sub.htm.
\(^\text{106}\) Tim Parson.
Although millions of people travel through the subways everyday, commuters sometimes do not look at their surroundings. The subway tunnels are lined with a seemingly never-ending amount of tile and advertisements. For the daily commuter the subway trains are a means to getting to a person’s destination. Lois, Ira, Casey, and Tim explain how they remember seeing Haring’s drawings while on the move.

New Yorkers, there is a little bit of that, hustle and bustle of being on a deadline or on their way to a destination. That was a bit of the quality of it, where you would see a glimpse of one when you were getting on the train somewhere.  
- Lois Adams.

Generally, I was alone. But, what would happen was, in the early days people passed by and kind of frowned at the graffiti.  
- Ira Sherman.

Usually [you would see them] on your way to work, so it was more of a peripheral view of them. That’s why I even question my memory. You know, did I really see these things, because I feel like I did, and knowing their environment so well.  
- Casey Camdon.

The first one that I remember, it was on an advertisement across the tracks and it wasn’t really big. Again, my friend Rebecca pointed it out, I want to say it was an advertisement for a play. But, it just had a little figure on the bottom of it...I couldn’t see it that well, but I was interested in what she was telling me. So, I think it was that day or maybe the next that we were getting on the subway and we were in a place that we were close up so I did look at them closer then.  
- Tim Parson.

Always on the go, New York City commuters are pushed from the subway

107 Lois Adams.  
108 Ira Sherman.  
109 Casey Camdon.  
110 Tim Parson.
platform, to trains, and then through endless hallways connecting the city underground. The ephemeral nature of the drawings kept five participants of this study constantly on lookout for new drawings throughout the city. Although most of the interviewees explained that they would look at the drawings on their way to work, Greg and Lois stopped to observe the chalk drawings.

Did I stop? Oh, absolutely, are you crazy, of course I did. If I did come across them, I definitely took the time to look study them and enjoy them. I never, you know, took them down; I always respected them as what they were and what the intentions of them were. You know, to stay down there, remain in the subway so that people could enjoy them.\footnote{Greg Hass.}

- Greg

It was a good feeling to walk down stairs into the subway and realize that there was a fresh recently created batch of Keith drawings. And if I had the time, then I would stay and look at them. You know, maybe making myself even later for work. But, you know, it was a bit of a thrill.\footnote{Lois Adams.}

- Lois

Haring used spontaneity and temporality to his advantage. Usually, artists want their artwork to be seen by many people in gallery spaces, to be sold for money, or to be preserved for a lifetime. Haring took a different approach with his subway art campaign; the spaces that he chose to draw on were in a constant state of change. When advertisements had finished their run on Metropolitan Transportation Authority billboards and posters spaces, the spaces were covered with black paper. This paper could stay up a day or maybe only a few hours, making Haring’s chalk drawings visible for a short amount of time. Lois and Casey pointed out the drawings were usually observed while they were on a deadline or headed to work. Lois would attempt to revisit
a drawing on her way home, but would find them covered up. The drawings were supposed to disappear; Haring knew that they would not last. This kept subway commuters waiting and always looking for the next white chalk drawing in the subways of New York City. The subway’s visual information is constantly changing and so are the people who use it for transportation.

Conversations

Notorious for being in a hurry, New York City pedestrians speed walk their way around the city. For commuters, the only goal is to make it to their destination moving along in what Casey described as a ‘sea of people,’ and, as many of the interviewees pointed out, if you don’t know someone, you don’t talk to them.

“New York City is a place where strangers don’t talk very easily.”
- Ira

But, ah, there is kind of a less, likely to have conversations among New Yorkers, generally, when they are coming through subway stations... New Yorkers, there is a little bit of that, hustle and bustle of being on a deadline or on their way to a destination.
- Lois

“Ha, in New York City people don’t really talk to each other, elevator etiquette.”
- Casey

Although interactions with random subway commuters was highly unlikely

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113 Ira Sherman.
114 Lois Adams.
115 Casey Camdon.
conversations about Haring, his style and forms did occur between friends and acquaintances outside of the subway system.

It wasn’t as though that was as likely to happen, as we would speak of him in other settings. New York lifestyle is such that, typically speaking, is one of people running through the subway station to make a train. If the train wasn’t just pulling in then maybe we would stop and look. And, if the train was there, then you would make a mental not to look later... We went clubbing a lot in that era, and there and then, [Haring] was one of those people that we would speak of. People would talk of their favorite pieces of artwork.  

- Lois

People who were in the New York art scene were more likely to know the artist’s name and be in his social sphere. As Lois points out:

The early buzz on Keith as a character and as an artist presence making this prolific street art was as follows: ‘He studied Semiotics at SVA.’ That was the gossip about Keith.... I thought that it was fascinating that he had done such a good job after studying semiotics at SVA, which was sort of the tag line for Keith as an artist.

- Lois

Artists create small communities within the larger cities by supporting each other’s artwork. Conversations about the Haring might not have occurred during the participants commutes, however, many people would comment on the chalk drawings in other situations.

I would talk to other creators that I worked with about it. And, I guess that is when I first heard the name Keith Haring. I think until then it was some stray guy that as doing this...

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116 Lois Adams.
117 SVA refers to the School of Visual Arts located in New York City; Lois Adams.
118 Ira Sherman.
I had friends who stayed in New York and were part of the art scene. So they know him, maybe didn’t like him but still, that was their problem not his.... My friends that were in New York were a part of the Fun gallery and talked about it. I was more about “you know that Keith Haring blah blah blah.” I would say I saw a really cool piece, and my friend was sort of like this Archie Bunker sort of fellow. He was my age but just grumpy, so he would begrudge other people’s success. I didn’t try to change his mind and say ‘no, no, no.’

- Casey

I had a long conversation with my therapist about whether this unknown artist’s work would be as brilliant if we knew his name and he was exhibited in a gallery, as it was begin created spontaneously and on the run, in subway stations.

- Ira

Interviewees made it clear that very little interaction occurred while in transit, a nod or smile were the only forms of acknowledgement between strangers that they had observed a drawing and somehow approved. As Ira stated:

As time went by, there would be other people that would stop when I [did]. You know, we would smile at each other, but nobody really talked.... But we gave recognition to each other that something amusing going on.

- Ira

Each of the participants except for Tim and John discussed Haring’s work outside of the Subway system with acquaintances. Their interaction with the drawings was not as intimate because they were only visitors to the city. Above ground the other five participants did talk to people who had seen a drawing that day or week. These conversations focused on the drawing, the artist, and sometimes on how they didn’t like

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119 Casey Camdon.  
120 Ira Sherman.  
121 Ira Sherman.
him or the fame he was getting for drawing with chalk on blank advertisement boards.

Ending notes

The importance of Haring’s chalk drawings was clear to the interviewees. Casey and Tim stated that by using the advertisement posters Haring utilized a location that commuters usually would see blank.

He was kind of doing a service, I guess, I also see it as sort of a social practice in that he was providing a little visual relief for people who paid attention and looked up even if we didn’t stop.\textsuperscript{122}
- Casey

I guess the idea of appropriations that we started to learn about later. Rather than appropriating and reusing something, he’s using something that is already there and applying marks to it and making it something a little different.\textsuperscript{123}
- Tim

Observers of Haring’s chalk drawings might have constructed them as a public service or as reusing the advertisement spaces, as Greg and Ira point out the location and temporary nature of the drawings made them an important to Haring’s total body of work.

But you know, I personally think that these were a part of Keith’s best artwork, ever. It was made not to be sold, it wasn’t about making money. It was just a pure act of art making. Just going down there to do these pieces, then jump on a train and ride away. And they were just very powerful, just fantastic. I think that it also helped Keith develop his skills,

\textsuperscript{122} Casey Camdon.
\textsuperscript{123} Tim Parson.
even though at that point he was a full, his talent was full blown. He had the vocabulary and everything already. You know, it allowed him to create in this arena that wasn’t about a commercial venture.  

- *Greg*

I didn’t believe that were he showing [in] a gallery it would be as...good as I felt it was. Somewhere around that time, Andy Warhol came to meet him and suddenly he was catapulted into enormous fame, and his work started appearing in galleries and he opened up the shop downtown selling his work. And frankly, I’ve always felt that the work never was at the same level as when he was making the chalk drawings. I felt that he had suddenly become a ‘Pop’ artist instead of being anonymous doing what he was doing and became a guy doing very commercial [work] trying to sell.  

- *Ira*

Happening upon one of the chalk drawings could brighten a person’s daily commute. Greg explains that some people took advantage of Haring’s gifts to the subways.

There was no longevity; it is kind of amazing that some of them have survived. But, that is only because some people actually saw the value in them. Ultimately that was why Keith stopped producing them because they didn’t last very long. But he did them for a number of years; I think up until 1985 he did them. He stopped doing them because as soon as he put them up they would be gone, and it was sort of like free artwork for people, and it became something other than what they originally were intended to be. Which were artworks for people, to expand their aesthetic experience, to experience art for people that normally would not go out of their way to look at art. Or even want to look at art, and suddenly they would come across these great drawings. I think that some people didn’t even see them or didn’t really care, but others saw them as these wonderful pieces by some crazy artist who was down there doing chalk drawings.  

- *Greg*

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124 Greg Hass.
125 Ira Sherman.
126 Greg Hass.
Ira sums up Haring’s use of outlined forms to create complex images.

I am a great believer that if I could say it in words then it wasn’t worth him doing it. The charm of his work was that he was saying things that we couldn’t say in words. 127

- Ira

These poignant statements show how Haring’s drawings effected people’s daily transit. Casey grew up in New York City and was aware of graffiti since his childhood, but he called Haring’s drawings a “social practice.” 128 Tim thought that the re-appropriation of advertisement boards awaiting a poster was innovative and unique compared to other graffiti placement or styles. Both Greg and Ira agree that the chalk drawings were a powerful project that connected the public with the artist, even though Haring was not present when they viewed the drawings. Tim’s statement reiterates the sentiment:

It was like, ok so here’s this figure and maybe another thirty yards until the next advertisement but here’s another little figure there. And it was kinda fun, because I’m walking along where he has walked along and added marks there. 129

- Tim

In the moments when a commuter walked through a subway station or transfer hallway he or she could technically be walking alone. However, seeing the repetitive chalk drawings created by Haring during his commute made people feel not so alone. He had walked through that station or that hallway and had left his mark showing that his commute was not so different than his or her daily transit.

127 Ira Sherman.
128 Casey Camdon.
129 Tim Parson.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This project has allowed Keith Haring’s chalk drawings to be analyzed in a new way. By putting aside what I had previously researched, the participants in this study have illuminated how everyday 1980s commuters observed and thought about the chalk drawings. Each person interviewed described the environment, how they viewed Haring’s drawings, and how they felt about his early uncommissioned chalk drawings located in the New York City subway system. Each of their individual daily experiences of riding the subway and happening upon a chalk drawing adds to the important body of research already established. Haring repeatedly stated:

The drawings are designed to provoke people to think and use their own imagination. They don’t have exact definitions but challenge the viewer to assert his or her own ideas and interpretations.\textsuperscript{130}

Now seven individuals have been allowed to share their ideas and interpretations of viewing the drawings.

By creating categories each discussion with the participants could be analyzed through separate lenses. First, looking at the environment of a New York City subway allowed participants to express the condition of the location in which Haring was producing art. Following with sections about his use of medium, location, and drawing

\textsuperscript{130} Haring. “Art in Transit,” online Haring Kids: Art: Haring in the Subway.
style created a forum for the participants to express their personal insight into Haring’s use of a temporary location with a distinct style all his own. This led to discussions of how a commuter actually physically and mentally viewed Haring’s drawings and conversed about them while in transit or above ground. Once the participants had expressed his or her understanding of the drawings, more poignant statements about the drawings were expressed. Their individual perceptions created the need to separate this discussion into six topics.

Although Haring’s personal life and social context are extremely important, many of the participants in this study did not know who Keith Haring was in the early 1980s. The participants were commuting to work or traveling late at night on their way to somewhere else. The drawings added to the commute a new purpose, something else to look forward to. The environment in which Haring chose to produce temporary drawings was constantly changing and busy with people. Each of the visitors to the city remembered how dirty, “grungy and dark” the subways were.  

Tim, a visitor to New York City observed that although the graffitied environment looked “really cool” once he stepped inside the subway car that feeling ceased. It was indeed, an unusual venue for art.

All seven of the participants made comments about seeing the drawings while on their way to work or while on a deadline. Lois and Greg both stated that they would stop and look at the pieces, even if they were going to be late to their destinations. They observed that when they stopped to look at the drawings, sometimes people would stop or

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131 John Kapp.
132 Tim Parson.
look as they passed. The interviewees made it clear that in the busy subway stations New York City commuters do not talk to each other if they are not already acquainted. As Casey stated, using “elevator etiquette” is the only way to move about the city. The Face-to-Face connections that people made in the subway might have been small, but they acknowledged the existence of something new. Haring and his subway drawings were the topic of conversations elsewhere when friends were meeting in homes, clubs, or over meals. These interactions were varied in experience; however, the temporary chalk drawings had a lasting impression on the participants.

The We- and They-relationships also come into play in this analysis of the interview data. Tim remembers looking across to the platform opposite of his train and seeing the outlined figures from a distance. They were small but noticeable, and made him want a closer look. He also explained that while he walked, he felt that Haring was mimicking his steps with his sequential images that were drawn on the blank advertisement boards. This refers back to how people observe advertisement and visual arts according to a phenomenological study. Although Haring was drawing from a They-relationship perspective, because he was creating art anonymously, he created We-relationships. It was as if he was walking with the subway commuters. Tim understood that in order to produce the drawings, Haring had to physically travel through the same subway station that he was commuting through. He created art on the go, which is much different then creating an advertisement then sending it out into the world or creating fine art for a gallery, museum or private collection. The drawings were like a trace or tracks of his movements. His commute was recorded temporarily on the black boards. Tim’s

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133 Casey Camdon.
commute followed Haring’s, or did Haring follow Tim’s route?

The repetitive nature of Haring’s drawing style allowed people to recognize that “one dude” was creating the drawings around the subway system. Haring used the subway as an extended gallery space using “locations where he had essentially a framed piece of art that would disappear.” The locations Haring chose for his drawings had been used by other artists, for, as Casey pointed out, “The empty, blank pages” had been drawn on before. However, “before, they were crude, carvings, [or] tearing” into the paper, Haring’s chalk drawings were “compositionally considerate.” The seven participants in this study, even the visitors to the city, understood that one guy was making the drawings and that they would disappear within a few days. Being visual people, the participants saw that Haring’s work was graffiti, but it had a very different style and meaning. The variety of characters and symbols used throughout his drawings allowed each of the participants to be drawn to images that related to each participants personal lives.

The line Haring used was the only constant element throughout the chalk drawings in the subway stations. His speed, as Greg pointed out, and the “magic line,” as Alex called it, allowed commuters to make connections between the drawings. Although many visiting commuters couldn’t say, “oh, there’s a Keith Haring,” subway commuters recognized his ‘ability to repeat’ forms from board to board. John might

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134 John Kapp.
135 Ira Sherman.
136 Casey Camdon.
137 Ibid.
138 Alex Adams.
139 Tim Parson; Ira Sherman.
have been a visitor to the city but because of Haring’s ability to produce a “line [that] didn’t vary much in thickness,” he knew that “one dude” was creating the drawings throughout the city.\textsuperscript{140}

To the people interviewed, Haring’s chalk drawings had an ephemeral nature, where the drawings were visible one moment, then covered the next time they arrived in the same station. Greg and Casey both touched on this point in their interviews, but Ira, Lois, Alex, Tim, and John all understood clearly that these images wouldn’t last forever. All saw that both the material used and the placement of the drawings would not last. As Greg stated:

There was no longevity; it is kind of amazing that some of them have survived. But, that is only because some people actually saw the value in them… He stopped doing them because as soon as he put them up they would be gone, and it was sort of like free artwork for people.\textsuperscript{141}

The temporary nature of the pieces was universally understood.

For thirty years the participants of this study have kept their observations of Haring’s chalk drawings hidden in their memories. Common throughout the interviews were statements about the importance of the chalk drawings. Greg, Ira and Alex each described how if the pieces were made for a gallery the drawings would not have been as powerful. They described the drawings as “gifts,” a “social practice,” and as “saying things that we couldn’t say in words.”\textsuperscript{142} Haring created these drawings as non-

\textsuperscript{140} John Kapp.
\textsuperscript{141} Greg Hass.
\textsuperscript{142} Greg Hass; Casey Camdon; Ira Sherman
commercial, uncommissioned public art, which gave pedestrians the ability to see graffiti that had, as Casey put it, ‘artistic sensibility’ on a daily basis.143

Haring gave the everyday commuter new images that could have been noticed or disregarded by people on the move. Most of the participants stated that they didn’t try to create meaning from the drawings. However, Haring’s barking dog reminded Ira of the city’s noise. He was not thinking about Haring’s personal life or social issues. But rather, his thoughts about the image connected with the environment through which he was commuting. His personal perception of the drawing came from his knowledge of New York City as a loud place.

It is not surprising that commuters did not try to interpret the drawings. Commuters look at advertisements because they are drawn to an image or word; the same maybe true for Haring’s chalk drawings. The participants of this study stated that certain figures caught their eye because they like what was depicted. For Lois it was the three-eyed smiley face and Ira remembers the TV sets that had a head and shoulders. Whimsical at times, Haring’s drawings could captivate commuters on their way through the dark and monotonous environment of the subway system.

This thesis has shown that the people who commute through the subway system were inundated with many types of visual information. While in the subway on their way to work they weren’t thinking about all of the social issues that might have prompted Haring’s drawings. Today, they appear to read the images differently. This study documents and examines the everyday commuter’s opinions and observations about Haring’s work, originally created thirty years ago. The participants and Haring’s Face-
to-Face-, We-, and They-relationships formed because the chalk drawings created an altered experience of walking through a subway. Haring was essentially an artist creating They-relationship drawings, but, as shown in the participants’ interviews, the commuters had personal Face-to-Face experiences and they also had We-relationships with the drawings because they felt that Haring walked beside them on their daily commute.
APPENDIX B
Instructions to Interviewee

1. Interviews will take place during a mutually agreed upon e-mail or phone conversation. If conducted over the phone, the interview will last about 30-45 minutes.

2. The interviews will be recorded. Each interview will be transcribed into written format.

3. You will be asked some questions about your experience viewing Keith Haring’s drawings in the New York City subways between the years 1980 and 1986.

4. Once I transcribe the audiotaped interview, I will contact you by e-mail and provide a copy of the transcription. You can then add anything else that you may have forgotten to add or clarify any memory further.

5. This study will look at the commuters’ observers of Haring’s chalk drawings that were produced in the subways of NYC. I have read many opinions of critics and information from Haring’s own observances, but I want to hear from you (the people who took the subway on a daily basis). Your perspective and your ideas of what Haring’s pieces meant has not been written about.
APPENDIX C
Informed Consent Form
Title of the Study: *Here then Gone: A Phenomenological Study of Keith Haring’s Subway Chalk Drawings*

1. I agree to allow Rebecca Feldstein to ask me a series of questions on my experiences related to seeing Keith Haring’s chalk drawings in the New York City subway system. This study is part of a thesis process to obtain a Masters degree in Art History.

2. After receiving an instruction form that will explain this study, I will participate in a 30-45 minute interview with Rebecca either over the phone or electronically through an e-mail questionnaire. I understand that this interview will be recorded if conducted over the phone.

3. The phone conversation will be conducted at a designated time that is agreed upon by both the participant and me. Once Rebecca completes the interview, she will translate the conversation, writing everything verbatim. If I chose to answer the questionnaire via e-mail I will send it to Rebecca once I answer all of the questions.

4. The purpose of this study is to understand the commuter metro users insight and opinions on Keith Haring’s chalk drawings produced from 1980 to 1986.

5. I am aware that I may contact Rebecca by calling 661-747-1586.

6. Participation in this study is voluntary.

7. I am not receiving any compensation for participating in this study.

Signed: _______________________________ Date: ________________

Please sign and either e-mail a copy back or mail to
Rebecca Feldstein
1125 W. 9th St.
Chico, CA 95928
Keith Haring’s Chalk Drawing Questionnaire/ Prompts

Name: ________________________________

Career in the early 1980s _____________________________

Phone number / e-mail address: _________________________
(Where can I contact you for follow up questions?)

If you prefer to have an e-mailed conversation with me, please use these questions as a guide. (If any comments need to be clarified I will contact you directly). If we have a conversation over the phone I will allow you to talk and only prompt you with questions like the ones below.

I want you to use these questions to think back to when you experienced seeing Haring’s chalk drawings throughout the city.

Remember back to the first day you saw a Haring drawing in the subway system...

    Where were you? (Which station)
    What feelings did it bring out of you?
    Can you remember what the piece looked like?
    Did you try to interpret it?
    How did you do this?
What did you think it meant?
    Did you stop and look at it?
    Do you remember other people stopping?

--I’m trying to reconstruct the experience of viewing these drawings in situ…

-Once you began seeing his drawings on a regular basis...
    -What did you think about Haring’s frequent subway drawings?
    -What did you think he was trying to do or communicate?
    -Did you know about the Pop Shop?
What did you know about Haring at the time?

-What was the ambience in the station when you looked at the pieces?
  -How did you interact with the images spatially?
    (I.e. viewing from afar, passing by, etc.)?
  - Did anyone stop and look with you?
  - Did the drawings inspire any conversations?
  - Did you notice anything specific about the placement of the images?

-Did you ever witness Haring producing a piece?
  -How fast did he draw the piece?
  -Did he stop to talk to people? To you?
    -Did he enable you to engage with the work in any way?

-Explain any other reactions you had to these works?
  -When you were above ground did the drawings inspire conversation with others?
  -What types of conversations did you have?
Informed Consent Form

Title of the Study: *Haring's Subway drawings: Pedestrian Perspective*

1. I agree to allow Rebecca Feldstein to ask me a series of questions on my experiences related to seeing Keith Haring’s chalk drawings in the New York City subway system. This study is part of a thesis process to obtain a Masters degree in Art History.

2. After receiving an instruction form that will explain this study, I will participate in a 30-45 minute interview with Rebecca either over the phone or electronically through an e-mail questionnaire. I understand that this interview will be recorded if conducted over the phone.

3. The phone conversation will be conducted at a designated time that is agreed upon by both the participant and me. Once Rebecca completes the interview, she will translate the conversation, writing everything verbatim. If I chose to answer the questionnaire via e-mail I will send it to Rebecca once I answer all of the questions.

4. The purpose of this study is to understand the pedestrian metro users insight and opinions on Keith Haring’s chalk drawings produced from 1980 to 1986.

5. I am aware that I may contact Rebecca by calling 661- 747- 1586.

6. Participation in this study is voluntary.

7. I am not receiving any compensation for participating in this study.

Signed: _____________________ Date: 4/4/2013

Please sign and either e-mail a copy back or mail to Rebecca Feldstein
1125 W. 9th St.
Chico, CA 95928
Interview #1

Rebecca Feldstein - RF
Lois Adams - LA
Alex Adams - AA
March 3, 2013

RF: I am just going to go down those questions, wanting to speak to you if possible individually. Then I can get both of your opinions, separately.

LA: Sure

RF: Ok, that sounds good. So, I just want you, Lois, to state your full name (and I’m recording this right now) and your occupation in the early 1980s, and what you were doing in New York City in the early 80s. A little background.

LA: Ok. My name is Lois Sternberg Adams. And, in early 80s I was working regularly as, oh gosh, I had a couple of odd jobs. Like at a restaurant called Foo in SOHO, and a paint supply store, and a typography house for a little while, and I did a bit of work for a couple years as an artist model. I began also to create and produce cartoons and comic art, because i’m an artist myself.

RF: That’s great. So, In the little bit that we have e-mailed back and forth, you said you remember these Keith Haring drawings. Do you remember the first time you ever saw one?

LA: Well, they were around, in the early 80s. I moved here on my 21st birthday on June 29, 1981. So, it was a little while before Keith’s drawings were so well known. Although, I did moved down to Downtown Manhattan, early in 1982. Well, actually it was just this time of year, so that would have been, 31 years ago, I moved to Stanton Street. And I had a job, at that time, in Midtown. So, i would take the Spring Street subway station, and it is entirely possible that I saw them around or uptown. And they weren’t only in the subways because he was tagging the streets then too. So, probably the most impressive, recently completed art I had seen, would have been going on my way to work in the Spring Street Station, on the #6 train. I never actually saw Keith finishing the drawings, but on more than one occasion I got there soon after they were put there. Because in that era, they would put black paper as a place marker for where advertisements were going to go up soon. And, he would come and draw on it. And maybe he was actually putting the black paper up himself. That is how I was interpreting it at the time. So, either on the street or on the sides of buildings, because there were radiant babies everywhere.
RF: Yeah

LA: And, they were kinda hard to miss. And, Keith was one of the original prolific
tagger of certain images. Especially the radiant baby, it was all over the place
eyed early on.

RF: yeah, above and underground.

LA: Yeah, the drawings in the subway would be more complex. And the tag art would
be just a radiant baby. And, if it was a bigger piece it might be the big three eyed
smiley faces. Those I think were on stickers that were available in florescent
colors, at the early Shafrazi shows, on Woster Street.

AA: No.

LA: Oh, on Mercer street.

RF: Yeah, that’s right he was doing all of that. Now, when you were seeing these images
on the black parchment paper, what were you thinking that they were? Did you read into
them at all? What did you think of these pieces?

LA: Well, I thought they were really great street art. I had the interesting background, of
having gone to school for a year at Kuntztown State college, which now calls
itself Kuntztown University, I think. That is the town that he hailed from. So, he
was talked about and there was Keith buzz early on. And, I remember hearing
things about him from people. It was interesting that he was from Kuntztown, his
family had a Haring printing company. This might have contributed to him
having posters early on. But, I would go sometimes, in that era, back to
Kuntztown, for among other things to a big wedding or weekend flea market,
which I think still exists. But, Keith’s family printing company was right there,
and the sign was right there, and I pointed it out to my husband a few years later
when we drove through town, and we stopped in. These are the things we kind of
knew about.

RF: So, you saw the drawings on a regular basis, but did any stand out to you? Do you
remember or can you picture in you mind one in particular, on that particular day just
really spoke to you?

LA: I liked the three-eyed smiley face a lot. And I liked just seeing the radiant baby
around a lot. I liked his art style. I can tell you right now, the early buzz on Keith
as a character and as an artist presence making this prolific street art was as
follows: ‘He studied Semiotics at SVA.’ That was the gossip about Keith. Oh,
and he worked as a bar back at Bar Tuttiaria. Then gossip about when he ‘went
gay.’ I think I might have even heard from someone about some gossip from a
girl who talked about dating him. But at one point, he started running around
with all kinds of guys, and it was all very street level and hip-hop culturish.
Probably before that term actually existed. But, I thought that it was fascinating
that he had done such a good job after studying semiotics at SVA. Which was
sort of the tag line for Keith as an artist. Its possible, but I would have to look it
up and find it around here, but I might have been in a photo shoot for a magazine
called New York Talk. Which had him on the cover, back in the mid-80s. I was
told, portraying Botticelli’s Venus, of all things. In the era before Photoshop, with
a lightly touched up photo, I think. I think we were in the same issue of New York
Talk in the mid-80s.

We would also see Keith around, he was very accessible. He was the downstairs
neighbor of our friends, we would go visit on a Saturday night. There would be
this incredibly loud music and festive noises coming from down stairs. Nothing
troublesome in anyway, but we knew that Keith was having a good time and they
were having parties and they were popular. There were all kinds of people there,
quite festive. And we approved of this, generally speaking. But he was sort of
the character on the scenes. We knew him enough to nod hello to. In fact, I
supposed I could say this on tape. When the Palladium night club was fairly new,
one night my husband said, ‘hey, wanna smoke a joint.’ And he was thinking
about maybe rolling one and at that moment Keith had a whole bunch of them,
and he threw one to us. So, yeah we had pleasant interactions with him.

RF: Keith was going down to the subways creating these drawings on a daily basis while
doing all of these activities at night. So when you were looking at these drawings in the
subways, do you remember anyone stopping and looking with you? Or did they make any
conversation? When you were looking at the drawings.

LA: Well, it wasn’t as though that was as likely to happen as we would speak of him in
other settings. New York lifestyle is such that, typically speaking, is one of
people running through the subway station to make a train. And, if the train
wasn’t just pulling in then maybe, we would stop and look. And, if the train was
there, then you would make a mental note to look later. But, ah, there is kind of a,
less likely to have conversations quality among New Yorkers, generally, when
they are coming through subway stations, then in other settings. We went out
clubbing a lot in that era, and there and then, [Haring] was one of those people
that we would speak of. People would talk of their favorite pieces of artwork.
For a while I was taking a white paint marker...I decided to do imitations of his
artwork, signing them ‘Red Haring’ because I’m a red head. So, I did a few
imitations of his dogs and the style of his people. I’m sure I could be a good
forger of his work. If I had nothing better to do, but fortunately that is not the
case. So, but i had fun drawing these things. In recent times there is a person
who prints various images of celebrities on t-shirts and I was trying to convince
them that they should do a different version of the ‘Red Haring’ trope. By
stenciling an image of Keith onto a red shirt with red paint. Unfortunately i haven’t sold them on it completely, unfortunately. I think it would be a great idea. But, I don’t know what the KH Estate would think of that.

RF: I think that is a good idea, you should keep pushing that.

LA: Well, if they ever did. I would applaud them at listening to my great advice.

RF: So, you said, people on the subways are really just trying to get to work or places they had to go, not really stopping.

LA: Well, Its possible that in some stations, like the ones uptown and midtown. There would be a greater possibility of people stopping and talking and chatting with each other. New Yorkers, there is a little bit of that, hustle and bustle of being on a deadline or on their way to a destination. That was a bit of the quality of it, where you would see a glimpse of one when you were getting on the train somewhere. So, its not as though this could never have happened. Its just that it wasn’t happening for us as much as conversations that were happening in other places.

RF: When you were talking to people in the other settings what was the general conversation about, when you were talking about the drawings? Were you or others analyzing them?

LA: Well, I think that everyone approved of his artwork, you know. That was the thing, it was accessible and friendly. There was kind of this great tragedy of his later era. When he was in that great societal, fall through the cracks historical moment of the not being, the light at the end, the hope for a person with HIV. There were a number of characters in that early to late 80s historical window that in various ways would get sick and die, or arguably check out as happily as they could. Whether or not they got on the party band wagon, to some extent we knew this was the case for Keith. I think he probably was hanging around Grace Jones and doing a lot of Ecstasy. At the La Vi En Rose restaurant in SoHo... in some measures he was celebrating his life as he could in various ways. And, we would see him sometimes, and worry about him. But we could see that he was having a pretty good time doing these other things. Wether they were questionable or not in legal terms. But, that was part of the tragedy of it. I feel kinda bad that Keith didn’t try harder to hang around, and try to make things turn around. I understand his choices, but gosh, that’s rough and sad that is how history went for him.

RF: Yeah, like you said his works, especially in the subways but his other works as well. Began to have a different tone, than in the previous years.
LA: Yeah, he went. He began doing this kind of brush strokish thing. That was quite different in his later works. You know, his much later works.

AA: And the Wall.

LA: Oh, Yeah. There was this famous wall close to where we lived. Maybe 5 or 6 blocks from where we lived.

AA: More like 3

LA: Yeah, more like 3 big blocks. But, we are on 2nd Ave. between 3rd and 4th and Houston Street is like 0 st. you know. 2nd Ave, is one block away from Bowery, which at Houston and Bowery there is a gigantic wall that was quite famous. It was recently reproduced, not perfectly i should add. I think, let me try it, or something. It needs to be just a little bit closer to the way his work was. Cause, they reproduced the Keith Haring wall from years ago, but now they have been rotating images from various graffiti artists and street artist types. For a little while there was a very nice Kenny Scharf piece, not all that long ago. But, none of it looks quite as good as the original Keith wall did. All that time back then.

RF: Is that the *Crack is Wack* wall?

LA: No, this is the three eyed smiley face wall. it was day-glow orange. You can find it if you look for Keith Haring Houston and Bowery original wall mural. The original had that spirit. I moved in with Alex in 1985 and at that there was a beautiful three eyed smiley face outside across the street from our apartment. It was on a wall at a restaurant and just smiled back at us. I always loved that one a lot, if I had to choose a favorite. Certainly, it was nice seeing him produce powerful pieces on behalf of his causes.

RF: I do know that piece.

LA: yeah, the Houston and Bowery wall. It was one of the early things that he did. He got all over the place, but I think that was probably one of the earlier big murals.

RF: Yeah, I think you are right, it was a piece that he created early in his New York career. So, these pieces, above and below ground, they all have this tone of jovial or darker images. But then he created the PopShop. What did you think about the shop, in NYC? Did you associate the shop with the subway drawings.

LA: I though the PopShop was nice. And in some ways there is always that, cranky litany among old time New Yorkers. And my husband, he’s had this apartment for 43 years. But, yeah, he was here through the hippy era, punk era, and there is that kind of feeling of ‘Oh, here goes the neighborhood, feeling.’ When waves of
gentrification come along. The PopShop was regarded by some folks as representing that to some extent. But we also, in our mid-1980s era personally, we had friends who, both through mutual friends who, were in the Church of the Sub-genius. And we had both been on the scene when, Greenwich Village had their ‘rock-hour,’ Psychedelic Solutions. It was run by a guy, Hasker, an authority of art rock stuff. Those topics, he was the first person to break the Robert Williams as an artist in New York. And Robert today is with Tony Shafrazi himself. I remember once, Keith being there to sign things, I don’t remember if he was part of a group show, but he was there. One of our friends went there, teasing him asking if he [Keith] was Andy Warhol. Just being a real jerk, thinking he was quite funny. We were just rolling our eyes.

But, you know, that was the thing Keith was so much a part of the scene. If we were to go out night clubbing, he would probably be out too. Or he had just left, or what have you. this was the era when we would take taxi cabs from one event to the next. Going to three parties in a night, and God only knows what we were thinking at the time. We were certainly on good drugs if we were on drugs. But, I liked that we would see him around, that he was a part of the scene. He was very cordial too. A very friendly person, if you knew him to say hi or give him a nod to. We felt that he was one of New York’s resources. A national treasure, who was living amongst us.

RF: His being there with you, and knowing that at any moment he could be drawing something in the underground when you were there. Did you think about that, or anticipate if you saw him what you would say to him?

LA: Actually, it was a good feeling to walk down stairs into the subway and realize that there was a fresh recently created batch of Keith drawings. And if I had the time, then I would stay and look at them. You know, maybe making myself even later for work. But you know, I, it was a bit of a thrill. - - - Link to James De La vega -- Chalk drawings. It kind of has the same feeling as Keith’s stuff was everywhere. People would have leather jackets that he would draw something on the back for them. Alex, my husband, is an old friend of the artist Peter Max, presumably you’ve heard of him. He’s kinda well known. I remember distinctly that his being in Peter’s company one night. And, Peter wanted to know everything about Keith, he was quite interested in his career and the magnitude of his success. it was nice that Peter, was curious about the success of Keith.

Another friend of ours, you can see him in the movie Mondo New York, doing his popular song was Dean Johnson. He was all over New York, but he died a few years ago. He related a story, and told a story to us about how pleased he was one day when he was at a Shafrazi opening on Woster Street....no Mercer Street. Keith’s early show, these were big events producing a whole room full of stuff. The rooms were full of stuff all marked in his style. There was a stoop across the street, and he sat on down with some guy chatting about Keith Haring’s work. Just this and that, and then he finally realized that he was talking to Keith himself. But it was
like that, people have their ‘Keith Haring’ story. In some measures, I don’t think that I am completely out of place to say that he had a sort of ‘I’m taking over the world’ kind of momentum, maybe from the club kid tropes, before the term existed. Like with Madonna. Who had also worked downtown, and would take guys upstairs and bang them etc. But those were the people that people talked about. It’s very true that they were not together, but they were people that were talked about for their momentous rises and iconic magnitude.

RF: You know then that Keith Haring actually did hang out with Madonna. And was influenced by her and people like Andy Warhol.

LA: Yeah, well we would see Andy around a few times too. Alex had seen him at Max’s Kansas City, back in the day. We all went to Area, an interesting night club that I investigated. We went one night to a group show, did Keith have anything there? He might have, it’s possible. It was a sort of ‘Emperor’s New Clothing’ piece that Andy had in the show. An invisible sculpture with a label on it. And, but Andy was there, and at that time we kept an invention of my husband’s with us. An atomic mushroom lamp, that we tried to get some marketing for. So we would just take it to night clubs and shows and plug it in. The top glows in the dark, and we would just have fun with this mushroom cloud. So we walked into Area holding this mushroom cloud lamp, and Warhol took my picture that night, I was so pleased. But these were the kind of events and places that Keith probably stopped in at some point. You know, he might not have been there all night, but he would have been around. Madonna was on the scene too. These were the characters that were on the town, or would be there later, had been there, etc. The World, which was a punky club way over on the east side Winchester Mansion type hall, that had turned into this very odd night club. I think the Talking Heads filmed Burning Down the House there. These were the sorts of places that we frequented and we were pleased to hear that those kids had been around too.

RF: It sounds like that 80s were a blast in New York City

LA: Definitely, we had a heck of a lot of fun, I wish I could remember even more, even better.

RF: Well, is there anything else that you can remember, or would like to say about these chalk drawings that KH did in the subways?

LA: Well, um, I loved them a lot. I loved seeing the changing linguistic elements of the artwork. As he would adopt new ideas into his personal dialect, vernacular. He would draw the dogs, then the dolphins, then the dominant people with subservient people. You know, there were things that would come through in waves. And we would wait to see what he was saying through his drawings. It was quite intriguing, a lot of fun. I’m sorry that I didn’t get to see more of the
subway art, I probably took too many cabs back then. I probably would have seen more great art if I would have taken more trains. I’m glad they were everywhere too, i can’t over emphasize enough. The ubiquitous nature of the radiant babies. It was a fat black marker, and sometimes in white, he would draw radiant babies everywhere, they were Everywhere! You would look around, and see them in new places, even after his death we would see ‘old’ Keith Haring drawings.

RF: what a great surprise.

LA: I’ll tell you something interesting about the place at 328 Broom Street. Keith moved out of there, his idiot landlord painted over all of the paintings that Keith had drawn on the walls. Only recently, someone has come along with common scene to restore the paintings. Because, that upset me greatly when I found out about what had happened to his residence at 328 Broom Street. And i’m so pleased that someone had a clue, and began restoring the images. I wondered how it had looked, our friends who were his neighbors had witnessed it. But it vexed me to know that happened to the place.

RF: its a historical site, and that is upsetting. Lois, thank you so much for talking to me about your experiences. i am going to transcribe this information and i will be sending you back a document so that you can review the information and add or change anything that you see fit.
Informed Consent Form
Title of the Study: Haring’s Subway Drawings: Pedestrian Perspective

1. I agree to allow Rebecca Feldstein to ask me a series of questions on my experiences related to seeing Keith Haring’s chalk drawings in the New York City subway system. This study is part of a thesis process to obtain a Masters degree in Art History.

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5. I am aware that I may contact Rebecca by calling 661-747-1586.

6. Participation in this study is voluntary.

7. I am not receiving any compensation for participating in this study.

Signed: [signature]
Date: 4-22-13

Please sign and either e-mail a copy back or mail to
Rebecca Feldstein
1125 W. 9th St.
Chico, CA 95928
RF: Hi Alex, could you introduce your full name, and give me a little description of what you were doing in New York City in the 1980s.

AA: my name is Alex Adams. I was born and raised on Manhattan island my whole life. I grew up in Midtown and later moved downtown, to the east village. Back in the 1980s I was working in the toy business. I was working for Mego Toys, which was an amazing company, it fell down soon afterwards, but, I knew a lot of people in the toy business. By 1982, I was no longer working for Mego, but I came up with what was one of the sequels to the Rubrics cube. Manufactured by IDEO toys, it was called Alexander’s Star. It was a similar puzzle, but a more intricate geometric shape. you can look it up on Wikipedia, but a lot of toy business stuff was happening in the toy center which is on Broadway and 23rd St. And, I would often be in the subway on the number 6 train, the Lexington Ave. local. I remember seeing Keith, I think this was 1982, seeing Keith doing stuff in white chalk or white marker. He did this on what had been subway advertisement slots, but which had been covered over with black paper. The transit authority, the MTA, when an advertisement had gone through its cycle, they would put black paper over the slot. So that they wouldn’t get free extra time displaying their marketing. He would use those as his background. As sort of the blackboard for his work. And I remember seeing... Now I had heard about him, because I knew people at the Club 67 which was at 67 St. Marks Place. I actually knew the guy who had started the club, and I heard a bit about him from that. I saw the show at Shafrazi, and at the opening of the Kenny Scharf show. At the old Shafrazi on Mercer st. And, that was sort of where I heard about him. The sort of things that I heard about were primarily about Keith’s magic line width. The width of the line was, like, perfect for the image that he was drawing. And it seemed kind of novel thing. Anyone could have thought that up, that particularly thick line. But nobody had, and it seemed like a new graphic sensibility. I liked it. I didn’t think of as having any particular philosophical meaning. And in fact, when Keith started to go more streety graffiti, like the Crack is Wack sort of stuff, I didn’t like that. I felt he was trying to turn his work into a good deed. Which is sort of like, taking away from the image that was perfectly well drawn. I didn’t like the messagey stuff. I liked when it was nice and plain, and recurrent. The idea of recurrent images. Like the dog or the baby or whatever.

But I was at the Mud Club, which was on White Street, in an alley. The alley ended just two blocks before Canal Street. And the Mud Club was thought of as a early club land. The Mud Club was for non-celebrities, unlike Studio 54, which was like wealth and celebrity. And the Mud Club was for American ex-pats. Just like
New York is a place for ex-pats. And if you didn’t have a lot of money, you hung out at the Mud Club. I’m not sure if I ever saw Keith there, but that was part of the orbit, the night life of the late 70s and 80s. I heard that Keith was a phenomenon, early on because of being in places like that.

RF: So you mentioned that you didn’t like it when Keith’s work had more of a pointed view, or trying to make a cause known. Did you think that of any of his chalk drawings? Did you think that he was trying to put forward any message?

AA: No. I didn’t see those as having any particular message. I felt it was more of an essay about a certain kind of graphic sensibility. And, that’s what I liked. The fact that lots of people would try to come up with a novel style, and most of it wouldn’t work. But his stuff worked immediately. And I remember seeing his paintings, the murals of three eyed smiley faces (like the one Lois talked about). He actually painted it like an architectural ornament. I saw him doing it. I thought that was pleasant. That this person who got really well known later on, I saw him do it right across the street.

RF: What did you think when you saw him paint, did you think he had an idea set out in his mind?

AA: I didn’t think that he had an idea, I did see that he did it quickly. But, I thought that it was graphic and pleasant. This was the era of SAMO...

LA: Oh, yeah we were friends with Suzanne Mallouk, she is a physiotherapist now, but she was Jean Michelle Basquiat girlfriend back then and a performance artist under the name Ruby Desire.

AA: But I knew her because she worked behind the counter of this great little eatery called the Benny Bom. And it’s where Jack Henry Abbott, the prison author, stabbed the waiter. And ruined the Benny Bom. Later on I ran into her at the Munson Dinner, which was also an undergoundy place. Then some hipsters took it over, this was way west on Spring Street, and Suzanne Mallouk worked there. For a while Dan Ackroyd, from Saturday Night Live, was thinking about buying the place, but I saw him there a couple of times. It was Keith, Kenny, and Basquiat. There were a few others like Larry Fuentes, but he wasn’t doing street art as much as the others. But, they were all part of that orbit. The 80s were sort of the last era before computers graphics took over the graphic world. So, you know, there were publications from the 80s that had the pre-computer look. And sometimes they would even use computer effects, but it wasn’t like modern Photoshop techniques. But, Keith certainly belongs to the just before computers era.
RF: That’s true, and in some of his pieces he used technology as a form that he would draw... Did you see any of those in the subway? Or any others that were different than the smiley faces or radiant babies.

AA: Not off hand that I remember. You have to understand. I wasn’t watching everything that hit the walls. Although we live close to where CBGBs use to be. And there were many posters that were up around there. People would make a poster, then go to a Xerox shop to make a few hundred. The graphics were sometimes amazing. I didn’t go to CBGB very often, but I did like the graphic sensibility that emanated from it. I heard about so many bands b/c of the ads on the street. Often the posters would have great graphics and typography. It was the end of the punk era.

I have to say that this neighborhood has had more eras: we have had the hippie, punk lat 70s early 80s, club land 80-90s, and then the gentrification era which is what we are in now.

RF: so people have been coming and going

AA: Yeah, this use to be a cheap neighborhood. By the 90s it started going up, and now this is one of the most desirable neighborhoods in Manhattan. Spending thousands a month or a few million on a whole building. There are a lot of old guard people that don’t like it. But, this is a city and that is what it does.

RF: yeah, it evolves and changes with the times.

AA: One of my phrases goes...Gentrification use to be just a warning, now it is just a description.

RF: Do you have anything else that you haven’t mentioned that you would like to add?

AA: I remember Lois and I were walking around late one night and we saw Keith with Grace Jones. And we just gave a nice eye contact and a nod, we didn’t try to do or say anything. But, that was the last time that we saw him.

RF: I want to thank you so much for having these conversations with me about Keith’s works.
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Signed: [Signature] Date: 4/22/13

Please sign and either e-mail a copy back or mail to
Rebecca Feldstein
1125 W. 9th St.
Chico, CA 95928
Interview #3

RF: Rebecca Feldstein
JK: John Kapp
March 14th, 2013

RF: HI, Could you first say your name, and what you were doing in the early 1980s... Just a small descriptions.

JK: My name is John Kapp, and in the early 80s I went to NY multiple times. Once for a conference, I can’t remember who ran the conference. And another time with a friend, and each time I was there for possibly a week.

RF: Ok, so you mentioned to me that you saw these Keith Haring Drawings in the subways during those visits. The first time you saw them, what did you think they were.

JK: I just thought that it was some more graffiti. It is really hard for me to remember back then, but it was something that was noticeable. It wasn’t regular graffiti, but it was graffiti.

RF: Why was it not ‘regular graffiti’? Why was it different?

JK: I thought it was unusually distinct, it was enough different from other graffiti that I had seen that it was unique. And the black and white quality of it.

RF: True, many graffiti artists use multiple colors or just one. So, did any of the pieces stand out to you, or do you remember one in particular? Or, did you read anything into the images?

JK: No, it is too far back for me to remember.

RF: OK.

JK: In fact, sometimes I think i might confuse some of what I have seen since then with what I saw back then. I can’t remember if they were basically patterns, or if they were figurative. And then there were those times that he would go back and forth with those. But the style was distinctive enough that you could say, ‘this one dude,’ we didn’t know his name, but you could tell that this one ‘dude’ was making these pieces.

RF: He was anonymous at the time?

JK: Yes, he was anonymous to me at the time.
RF: You spoke a little bit about the line that he used? Can you speak about his technique and his use of line?

JK: You know, I have been looking at his work since we talked. I don’t think that his line quality has changed a lot. But, certainly, there were manifestations of his work. But the line was, I don’t want to say a non-expressive line. But, his line didn’t very much in thickness. I think that deals with an overall idea of flatness, in space and with objects. I think that is one of the qualities of his work. I think that, I recall seeing or reading an article about his work, painting on 3-D forms such as bodies. And, the line there doesn’t vary there either. But, there is form to it. So that was a very interesting enigma.

RF: That’s true, he used the same line almost all his works, but it created so many different feels. He was so prolific... Can you talk a little bit about the environment of the Subway system at the time.

JK: It was pretty grungy and it was pretty dark. It wasn’t well lit and clean, like they are now. And I don’t know if it was the specific line that I was on, or if that was my attitude from me coming from the pristine Dutch Mid-West. It could have just been my reaction, pretty relative. Like I said, It is a foggy memory.

RF: It is very difficult thinking back this many years.

JK: But, I also remember, seeing them down there. But i also remember them appearing in art magazines. I saw that, back then. That is a unique thing, an interesting thing. People, ah, like Berry McGee, you see it on the street, then all of a sudden it is in a museum. I don’t know how Haring transitioned from being a street artist to being a fine artist.

RF: He kind of exploded. He used the subways as a sort of testing ground, in a way.

JK: Do you think he had a plan of moving from graffiti art to fine art?

RF: I personally think that he did. He opened the Pop Shop in about ’86, and he stopped making these at the end of ’85. He was friends with gallery owners and other popular artists. So he was in that scene. I also think that they influenced him.

JK: Is there a paradigm of graffiti artist moving from low art to high art? Art there other examples of these street artist doing more fine art?

RF: At this time, there were a lot of shows where they would bring in street artists to do group showing. It was a big deal back then, at the end of the 1980s. They (gallery owners) began to do a lot of the high art/low art at the end of the 1980s. And he died in
1990, so he was still in the mix. He began traveling a lot during the late 80s, being commissioned to produce art in other countries and cities.

JK: He died from AIDS.

RF: At the end of 1990

JK: Was that a part of the idea or imagery that he produced.

RF: Some people read into the images in that way. But that was the thing, Haring created these images using this symbol system that he created. Making different scenes

JK: How did Andy Warhol’s claims about fame for 15 minutes affect him.

RF: I’m not sure exactly how it affected him, but I am sure that it did. Because it seemed that he took every opportunity to get his name out there. And it wasn’t just his name, but it was the symbols of the babies and barking dogs. But really the radiant baby was his call line, his call to fame.

JK: You think that Andy Warhol affected him?

RF: Is there anything else that you may have remembered thinking about Keith.

JK: Just that thing about the patterns, and the abstracted works. Similar to the patterns of the Shippapo Indians, I think they are from Panama. They had these really long lodged shaped images. That’s about it. It is a long time ago. I wonder also, about when he was drawing down in the subways, what he drawing when people were watching him.

RF: Yes.

JK: So it was a form of performance art piece.

RF: that’s right, he was different than the other graffiti artists who went out in the middle of the night tagging. He was going out at rush hour or on his way to work in the morning. You know, getting on and off at various stations, whenever he saw a blank space. He wasn’t afraid of being arrested, he was and he got fined for it. $10 each time.

JK: I’m sure that people would have gladly paid the fine for him.

RF: Also, it has been written that he would be arrested and taken to the precinct. Keith would pay the fine, and the police officers would pat him on the back, telling him how much they liked the pieces that he created. But they had to arrest him.
JK: Wouldn’t it be cool to find some reports about him being arrested...

RF: Yes, I didn’t even think about that...I should look into that.
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Signed: _______________________ Date: _3/1/13_______________

Please sign and either e-mail a copy back or mail to Rebecca Feldstein
1125 W. 9th St.
Chico, CA 95928
Interview # 4

RF: Rebecca Feldstein
IS: Ira Sherman
March 19, 2013

RF: Could you start by telling me your full name and what you were going in NYC in the early 1980s. Just a small description...

IS: Ok, my name is Ira Sherman, and at the time I was the Art Director at Tim Bates Advertising. I had written and illustrated a children’s book and was a serious artist of my own.

RF: Ok, So you mentioned that you took the subway a lot in the early 1980s and you noticed these drawings. Can you explain the first you saw the drawings and your reactions to them?

IS: Well, in the beginning, this was the era when NYC was plastered with graffiti everywhere. And, so, you would get off on subway trains where there would be scribbles everywhere and you would walk through the station would be filled, on all the walls. So, I didn’t pay much attention. The thing that called his work to my attention was that it was always on the black panels where the poster people ripped off an old posters and left the black papers up. Before they would put new posts up. And, in the beginning I just kind of passed them by and didn’t pay close attention. After a while, I began to notice that they were very well designed with additive figures and these panels, so I began to stop to look at them. I began to see the humor and whimsy of his work.

RF: What were these figures that you were seeing?

IS: OK, there was the crawling baby, ah, the barking dog, ah, the little TV sets that had a head a shoulders that were always talking out to you and explosively blearing/spewing information.

RF: Did you read into the images?

IS: I found them satyrical of what was going on our world. The attention the TV set got in those days. The TV set blaring. And the dogs barking, to me, was reminiscent of the noise of the city. And as a cause of tension that lingered in NY while walking the streets. I guess that’s about it.
RF: Now, when you stopped to look at the images, did anyone else stop to look with you? Or was this a singular activity?

IS: Generally, I was alone. But what would happen was, in the early days people passed by and kind of frowned at the graffiti. As time went by, there would be other people that would stop, when I stopped. You know, we would smile at each other, but nobody really talked. NYC is a place where strangers don’t talk very easily. But we gave recognition to each other that something amusing going on.

RF: SO, you didn’t talk while you were in the subway, but did his work come up in conversations above ground? Did they become a conversation piece?

IS: at some point, I would talk to other creators that I worked with about it. And, I guess that is when I first heard the name Keith Haring. I think until then it was some stray guy that was doing this. At the time, I think I mentioned in my written piece, that I was in therapy at the time. And as many creative people, wind up being in therapy begin to wonder why they aren’t more successful as other people are. I spoke to my therapist, because I had started doing corrugated structures that I still create today. I had spoken to the therapist about how Haring was doing this stuff, and he began to attract attention. And, I personally thought that it was the spontaneity and the daring style of prowling the subways at night, looking for boards to draw on, while trying to avoid police confrontation. I thought that was what made it all so appealing. And the fact that he meticulously repeated some of the figures that he created, and which seemed very symbolic to me. And, I had said that I didn’t believe that were he showing a gallery it would be as, his work wouldn’t be as good as I felt it was. Somewhere around that time, Andy Warhol came to meet him and suddenly he was catapulted into enormous fame, and his work started appearing in galleries and he opened up the shop downtown selling his work. And frankly, I’ve always felt that the work never was at the same level as when he was making the chalk drawings. I felt that he had suddenly become a ‘Pop’ artist instead of being anonymous doing what he was doing and became a guy doing very commercial trying to sell.

RF: Did you think anything about the placement of the drawings? You mentioned where they were put, but did that have something to do with the art?

IS: I think, that question is obvious. Yes, he was doing subway graffiti, but he was doing it in locations where he had essentially a framed piece of art that would disappear, that was another thing. The fact that it would disappear, he knew that what he was doing was perishable. It would become or be covered by a poster the following day.

RF: He was creating these at all times of the day... What do you think about that?
IS: Well, my impression was that he was mainly doing this at night. Keith Haring was not a famous person when he first started doing this. He was, you know, nobody wrote about him in the newspapers when he started, nobody knew his name when he started. He didn’t sign his work. You know, he became famous somewhere along the way. Just by people seeing his work and the coverage that he got.

RF: Very true, is there anything else that you could say about the drawings, feelings, what drew you to them?

IS: Well, I am a great believer that if I could say it in words then it wasn’t worth him doing it. The charm of his work was that he was saying things that we couldn’t say in words.

RF: I agree...Thank you so much for your time.
It was the 1980s. I was an art director at Ted Bates. I’d won a number of art director awards and had written and illustrated four books for Harcourt Brace. So I considered myself a sort of art expert, though I knew little of the emerging art scene that followed Warhol, Lichtenstein, and “Pop Art”. I was vaguely familiar and sometimes enjoyed the graffiti that covered the exteriors of our subway cars and the street art that proceeded Banksey. I thought it inventive and creative, but I didn’t regard it as Art with a capitol A.

I just started commuting from Long Island into Penn Station and subwaysing it from there to Times Square station every morning. New York City was going through a difficult period in the 80s and the subways were sometimes a threatening place, potential muggers, panhandlers, litter and grime. At the start I was conscious of “scribbles” on the black surfaces that usually held advertising and lined the passages of the subway station. Some were just the usually graffiti, curse words, tags, etc., but over the days, I grew aware of one artist who used consistent symbols, crawling babies, barking dogs, blaring TV sets perched on human shoulders. This was all before the time newspapers gave the artist a name, Keith Haring and I almost believed I personally had discovered a new talent. At the start, admiring this artist’s work was a sort of inside thing, where some passers-by grumbled about graffiti while a few of us stopped and smiled, understanding, yet not quite understanding the whimsy this artist was injecting in our trip to work.

It was apparent that the symbols he created had satirical meaning, the blaring TV set, etc., but they also had the flavor of Don McLean’s “Bye Bye Miss American Pie”, so popular around that time, where the audience was invited to puzzle over meanings. I was also blown away by Haring’s ability to repeat these symbols perfectly, under duress from board to board. As I understood the legend, few people ever saw him creating his work as it was done late at night, to avoid police interference.

At the time, I was also making art, in a different, unexpected medium and was at that time, in therapy. I had a long conversation with my therapist about whether this unknown artist’s work would be as brilliant, if we knew his name and he was exhibited in a gallery, as it was being created spontaneously and on the run, in subway stations. I admit that I believed his work was superior with the anonymity of the black and white scrawls and believe that the work that came after, though charming, never reached the heights of his originals.

Ira Sherman
Informed Consent Form

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Signed: __________________________ Date: __4/1/13__

Please sign and either e-mail a copy back or mail to
Rebecca Feldstein
1125 W. 9th St.
Chico, CA 95928
Interview # 5

CC- Casey
RF- Rebecca Feldstein
March 29th, 2013

RF – Can you first state your name and what you were doing in New York City in the early 1980s?

CC- My name is Casey Camdon, and I grew up in New York City. So, I went to high school there, and then I moved out of NYC and returned for visits during the time that Keith Haring was doing his graffiti.

RF – Now, if you can remember back to the first time you remember seeing the subway drawings... Can you talk a little bit more about them and seeing the drawings.

CC- I had grown up noticing, being aware, of the thing; the empty, blank pages in the subways. So, I think, it certainly caught my attention when someone started doing something with them. I mean with chalk, doing drawings on them. I think, you would notice anyone else doing something to them. But before, they were really crude, carving, tearing into it, you know someone’s tag, or some other kind of words but nothing was as (um), compositionally considerate as that. So, I’m having a hard time exactly pinpointing when it was. I really felt like it was earlier in a regular part of my experience of visiting home. But, in terms of the chronology that doesn’t hold any exact memory. So it must have been when I was on a visit home.

RF – OK, Can you think about any of them and what they actually looked like?

CC- Sure, the two that I remember are simpler one, I know that I have seen pictures of more elaborate ones, but these are the ones that maybe he had less time. There was a figure arched over, kind of stretching, like a cat. A human figure but on all fours hunched over like a cat. Just a standard one inch line and then probably some other things in there, but not totally filled in areas. I don’t know if he had stopped in the middle of it or what. And then, a separate one was the barking dog. That one was also not as, you know, the sound lines and you just kind of key in, what burns itself in the main image, not all the stuff in the background. It wasn’t all filled in, there was a lot of black space. You know, some of the ones that I have seen in pictures where it is really elaborate and filled in where he must have spent hours working on it. So, those are the two that have kind-of stayed with me.
RF- And why do you think that those have stayed with you? What do you think about those images?

CC- I think, I’m kind of going back to the, seeing the empty space. Seeing that blank canvas for so long, that blank page growing up, that black hole. You know, walking by for 18 years and seeing nothing there or maybe only seeing scrawl. To seeing someone actually use it as a canvas, well something that is artistically sensitive. I was like, WOW, someone is trying to figure out what to do, genius. Well, I don’t know if I said genius, but in a sense now, I would say something along those lines. You know, someone actually thought about, this could be something to… This is something you have to remember, your down in the bowls of the. This is something I was saying off tape, it was always in a place where it wasn’t on a subway platform. But it was, I picture them in the places where you are transferring from one line to another, and it wasn’t a quick transition. You are walking through these tile corridors with this harsh florescent lighting for a while, you know down one hallway and across another one. Then you, you are kind of disoriented and don’t quite know where you are. The ads are constant, these things are spaced out every, you know, 10 feet or something there is another one and breaks. And suddenly breaking up the assault of advertisements that you would have seen before would be this unexpected thing. And then after the fact we came to find out that this was a Keith Haring. I had friends who had stayed in New York and were part of the art scene. So they knew him, maybe didn’t like him but still. That was their problem not his.

RF- Did you try to interpret these, or what did you think about them?

CC- I think I thought of them as fun. I didn’t try to get a sense of what they were about. I just sort of saw them as expressions of joy, kinda thing. And, sort of relief, you know, giving the visual viewer a break from the monotony of the everyday experience.

RF- So you didn’t try to read into them. You just thought they were more…

CC- Yeah, well, I guess I didn’t try. I don’t think that I stopped and really looked at them spending hours. But I think that it was more of, in New York, well I’m a fast walker. And I think that probably comes from growing up there. You don’t, you are on a mission kinda thing. Going through the subways you are kind of in a sea of people, moving through when you are changing trains. You know usually on your way to work etc. So, It was more of a peripheral view of them. That’s why I even question my memory. You know, did I really see these things. B/c I feel like I did, and knowing their environment so well. It was sort of like, any repetitive work thing. You know, you have done something so much that in your dreams you can imagine yourself doing that thing. So, I know I have been down in those spaces, I know where he was doing the drawings, I have a recollection of
them, but now it is all these years later. You know, thirty years later, I question, do I really know this, or do I think I know this.

But looking at them, I guess I should say this. I grew up in the New York in the 70s. I’m 53, so graffiti was happening, and we were aware of it as kids. From the simple little tags you know tacky 183, to the large pieces on subway cars. I had friends that did that, I was affiliated with all that culture. That was an evolution of that. In a sense I didn’t really try and read into it, I wasn’t an art educated person at that point. I like art, I guess I shouldn’t say that, I grew up going to museums and galleries, but I hadn’t been in academia in for it. I guess I sort of feel like, I just took them as a form of personal expression and they made you smile. They made me smile anyway. So that was when I was in my early 20s, going back, and I would have just been like “cool.” I wasn’t thinking that he was trying to change our perception of the world.

RF – So you didn’t stop but did you notice other people stopping?

CC- You know, I don’t remember seeing a crowd forming around it. The pieces that I remember were not very elaborate, so they didn’t really cause a stir.

RF – Once you started seeing these on a regular basis, what did you think of the frequency of the images? The number of them around the city?

CC – I guess I didn’t see that many, but historically I know that they are. But, I don’t feel qualified to answer that one.

RF – OK, Do you think that he was trying to do something? Or say some kind of statement something?

CC – No, I read it more as, I mean today I would. But at the time, I saw it more as he was getting out. That’s what people did He was trying to become a recognized name. As graffiti artists they are trying to get it to that point where your name or tag is ubiquitous so that it is everywhere. Then you are seen as the ‘King of the A Line’ or the, something like that.

RF – Do you feel that he was trying to promote himself.

CC- Did I see the things in the subways as advertising for the Pop Shop, No. I didn’t make that connections.

RF – Did you have conversations about the pieces with people in the subways.

CC – Well, in New York City people don’t really talk to each other, elevator etiquette.

RF – When you were above ground, did you talk to anyone?
CC – No. I mean as far as talking about them it was more about, My friends that were in New York they were apart of the Fun gallery and talked about it. I was more about “you know that Keith Haring blah blah blah.” I would say I saw a really cool pieces, and my friend was sort of like this Archie Bunker sort of fellow. He was my age but he was just grumpy. So he would begrudge other people’s success. That is what we would talk about, and I didn’t try to change his mind and say, ‘no no no.’ Because, well, when you are in your late teens early twenties, you’re not really willing to give up your belief for a differing opinion.

RF – Are there any other feelings or comments? - Difficulty of remembering.

CC- He was kind of able to create this iconic image, that was so simple but elegant. Simple, but you might say crude. But, really I think not. I think clear and striped down, they kind of branded themselves in my brain. So that even after you ask me and we talked a little bit about it the other day. I thought ‘oh yeah, I remember those,’ but then I would say, “how much do I really know.” But I’m pretty sure I’ve seen two. That he could make a situation that you are so, he took over those empty spaces, neglected, blacked out things. Giving them a function. Here are these black holes that he breathed life into. You know, bringing art into this place that is grim, the other ads are for liquor, cigarettes, and plays. And suddenly there was something unusual. But that has stayed with me, to the point where I wonder if I really saw that or not. I guess that the reason that I believe that I have seen them is that I don’t think I’ve seen photographs. I see myself walking in a herd of people. You know, maybe getting the five seconds that I tell my students about. “you’re lucky if you get a person to slow down for five seconds to look at your work.” I think that as simple as his stuff is and as easily as it can get written off as kitsch or simplistic. I think that it had staying power the site and location and they were just black and white. I think, those original works have incredible staying power.

RF – What you do think about the temporary nature of the pieces.

CC- I like that part of them. I think it’s ephemerality. As I remember they are chalk, but that might have been just the way I read them. Maybe they were white markers or something. But in my mind I just saw them as crisp white lines or white paint. Just the strikingness of them. And they weren’t gonna last b/c they were constantly changing, I don’t think I ever saw one more than once. Each time I came through I only have one image of them being there. So that attitude, of you were lucky to see them, I don’t know if that was part of his reasoning. But, also there was a chance that he got caught, he could have been arrested. He was kind of doing a service, I guess I also see it as sort of a social practice in that he was providing a little visual relief for people who paid attention and looked up even if we didn’t stop.
Informed Consent Form

Title of the Study: Haring's Subway drawings: Pedestrian Perspective

1. I agree to allow Rebecca Feldstein to ask me a series of questions on my experiences related to seeing Keith Haring's chalk drawings in the New York City subway system. This study is part of a thesis process to obtain a Masters degree in Art History.

2. After receiving an instruction form that will explain this study, I will participate in a 30-45 minute interview with Rebecca either over the phone or electronically through an e-mail questionnaire. I understand that this interview will be recorded if conducted over the phone.

3. The phone conversation will be conducted at a designated time that is agreed upon by both the participant and me. Once Rebecca completes the interview, she will transcribe the conversation, writing everything verbatim. If I chose to answer the questionnaire via e-mail I will send it to Rebecca once I answer all of the questions.

4. The purpose of this study is to understand the pedestrian metro users' insight and opinions on Keith Haring's chalk drawings produced from 1980 to 1986.

5. I am aware that I may contact Rebecca by calling 661-747-1586.

6. Participation in this study is voluntary.

7. I am not receiving any compensation for participating in this study.

Signed: [Signature] Date: 4-22-13

Please sign and either e-mail a copy back or mail to
Rebecca Feldstein
1125 W. 9th St.
Chico, CA 95928
RF – Could you say your name and what you were doing in NYC in the early 1980s.

TP – My name is Tim Parson, I was in New York in 1982-1983. I actually taught at Skidmore College in upstate New York. It was about a two hour train ride into New York City. I had a girlfriend in New York, so I was down there most weekends. She actually lived in Brooklyn, so we traveled into the city and took the subways all over the place. Usually I was tagging along, kind of following her. So I couldn’t really tell you what line we were on. But she was more aware of Keith Haring then I was, so she pointed them out to me, the pieces. Basically as I remember, they were mainly figures running or walking figures. I would say, rather than chalk they were done with marker, I remember them as black. But, mostly on subway advertisements on posters. They had billboards down in the subways and some of them were sort of on that. So sometimes you would be waiting for the train and you would look around and you would see these figures sort of, essentially, running across the advertisements. That’s mainly where I saw them. I do remember one of the subway lines were there is sort of like this long tube. And when I say that it was like two blocks long, where you would have to walk from one subway train to another. But you are doing this all underground and periodically they had advertisements there. And I remember, my friend, Rebecca had actually pointed out these figures, they seemed almost sequential. They remind me almost of bermashe, that was something back in the 50s that they did, along the highways with little signs, basically they were pros or little poems. They were to sell a shaving cream or something like that, but they would be spaced out every quarter of a mile it was almost something to look forward to on the advertisement.

But I remember it was late at night when we were doing this and it was a little eerie down there anyway. But indeed, they were highlights in that two block tunnel. Whether I would have noticed them if she hadn’t have pointed them out to me and had some awareness of who he was. You know, this was a friend who was sort of in the New York art scene. There was so much graffiti in general there, and in particular in the subways.

I remember getting on one subway car, and I remember it being looking really cool as it pulled up that someone had graffitied the entire car. You know from the outside all the windows were painted over and I felt that it was sort of a graffitied landscape, a pictorial landscape. But I got in the car, and the doors closed and I realized that I couldn’t see out. I don’t know the lines well enough, so I don’t know how many stops. As a visitor it was a little unnerving to be on this train and
not know where you were or where you are going. But, the graffiti was just all over the place. If I would have picked out Keith Haring’s work on my own I’m really uncertain. It was her that made me aware of them.

RF – And she knew his name?

TP – She knew his name, it wasn’t anonymous. You know, I couldn’t tell you if there were mimickers or not. In other words, I wasn’t so aware of that work at that time. I couldn’t say ‘oh there’s a Keith Haring.’ Although, once you have seen his work, it is recognizable. But to me it didn’t mean that there weren’t a whole group of Keith Haring’s out there doing it. And they were all over the place. Again, I didn’t see them anywhere but the subways. And I don’t recall seeing them anywhere but on advertisements. I don’t remember them on the walls or floors, or what have you. But, mainly again on advertisements, and if that is me simply not seeing other pieces or not really being aware of it or memory, I don’t know.

RF – Do you remember the first one that you ever saw?

TP- Well, maybe, the first one that I remember. It was on an advertisement, across the tracks and it wasn’t really big. Again, my friend Rebecca pointed it out, I want to say it was an advertisement for a play. But it just had a little figure on the bottom of it, she pointed it out. I couldn’t see it that well, but I was interested in what she was telling me. So, I think it was that day or maybe the next that we were getting on the subway and we were in a place that we were close up so I did look at them closer then. But did it leave a lasting impression, it was more of the situation. Then it was, something new at the time. I think that has a little to do with being ignorant in a way of that style of working. I just thought ‘oh graffiti’ and didn’t think much else of it. So the fact that she was pointing it out to me as this is a guy that people in New York know and that he was recognizable. The element in a way of public art, but also performance. Cause he certainly didn’t want to be caught in the subways and get arrested and fined. But certainly there were enough people who didn’t get caught, because there was so much graffiti down there. My more recent trips to New York, its cleaner much less graffiti, at that time graffiti was all over the place.

RF – Once you started seeing these images, did you start reading into them? Did you stop to look at them?

TP – Stop to look at them, yes. Read into them, I felt that they were pretty symbolic and not that hard to grasp. So, did I think about them a lot as symbolist art, no more than what immediately grabbed me. But I did become aware of who he was, I started to see his work around the subways. There were other graffiti artists who were recognized by style.
When I wasn’t in New York, but I was in Philadelphia, there was this guy named Jazz. And that was kind of the first graffiti effort that I had ever seen and you just saw Jazz all over the place. It had a very distinctive writing style, so I had been aware of graffiti art in a way. I actually met that guy, Jazz, and he was just a kid maybe 16 or 17. A Philadelphia kid that went all over the city, tagging and marking all sorts of things. It was really new then, but it wasn’t like you didn’t see it. It was more of a mark that showed that you had been there. It wasn’t marking territory or anything, just placing them there.

New York, was overwhelming in the 80s with graffiti. So, besides Keith Haring there wasn’t anyone that I recognized. I think that it was unique in that it wasn’t just his name or some sort of symbol. He varied what he drew, he seemed to draw different things in different places. If they related to those locations I don’t really remember.

RF – Did your friends talk to you about the drawings outside of the subways? Is that something that you and Rebecca talked about?

TP – I don’t remember that, but I remember her pointing them out to me. I partly remember b/c soon after that we started hearing his name and he started to get national fame, and he started marketing a little bit. So I remember there were little Keith haring buttons that you could pick up. But that was after that. I’m not sure exactly when it happened. But, it was just one of those things that she pointed out that seemed interesting, it seemed a little different. I certainly didn’t think about it all that much, but you know I sort of became aware of it. It left enough of an impression on me that I remembered his name and who he was, etc. But was he a topic of discussion, with my friends with me, no. But my friend Rebecca, she lived in Brooklyn in a large warehouse studio with about five other artists. So, we didn’t hang out with them but sometimes at night we would have dinners together, or they would come back from where ever they would have been and we would sort of hang out and chat. And b/c everyone was an artist they were talking about the latest shows that they had seen. My guess is that they talked about it. But I have no recollection of having a direct conversation about him.

RF- Ok, What did you think about the placement, being in the advertisement slots?

TP – I actually kind of liked it. B/c in some sort of ways, the advertisements are often garish and there to get your attention. Its not what any of us want to look at, so here was someone turning them into something else. And, when I say that they were maybe six or eight inches as I recall, an Ad maybe five by seven feet or two by three feet, not really overpowering what was there but a noticeable little area, that someone was obviously using as their canvas. That’s what I liked about it, and I guess the idea of appropriations that we started to learn about later. Rather than appropriating and reusing something, he’s using something that is already
there and applying marks to it and making it something a little different. So the times that I looked forward to seeing it, like in the tunnel from one line to another. It was like, ok so here’s this figure and maybe another thirty yards until the next advertisement but here’s another little figure there. And it was kinda fun, because I’m walking along where he has walked along and added marks there. You know, it was late at night, and there is eerie light in there anyway. But I don’t want to say we were alone, we were mostly alone. There was a gang at the other end of the tunnel, it was a little unnerving, we could hear them before we could see them. So, Rebecca and when we were walking through that we realized that there was potential danger here, we just went silent and walked real swiftly. But it was the Keith Haring pieces in that tunnel, you know other than that it was a little frightening that night. You know, as it turned out as we came up to these six or seven kids, they weren’t up to anything good but they just completely ignored us. So our fears were more in our heads. But I do recall that they were markers on these advertisements. At that point we just wanted to get out of there. In a way, I don’t want to say that it relieved our fears, but it gave us something to look forward to.

RF – You remember them on the advertisements?

TP – Yes, that’s how I remember it.

RF – Is there anything else that you have been thinking about?

TP – I hadn’t thought about it in recent years, until I got your e-mail asking me about him. I can’t think of anything else. And again, I haven’t done research on him. I’m talking from memory. I didn’t take pictures of them at the time. But indeed, it was recognizable and light hearted which I liked about them. You know instead of tagging with your name or some sort of symbol. The fact that they also varied was great, and also the stylistic figures might be doing something on one then something else on another. There was more of a thought process rather than just tagging.
Informed Consent Form

Title of the Study: Haring’s Subway drawings: Pedestrian Perspective

I agree to allow Rebecca Feldstein to ask me a series of questions on my experiences related to seeing Keith Haring’s chalk drawings in the New York City subway system. This study is part of a thesis process to obtain a Masters degree in Art History. After receiving an instruction form that will explain this study, I will participate in a 30-45 minute interview with Rebecca either over the phone or electronically through an e-mail questionnaire. I understand that this interview will be recorded if conducted over the phone.

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I am not receiving any compensation for participating in this study.

Signed: [Signature] Date: 3.30.13

Please sign and either e-mail a copy back or mail to Rebecca Feldstein
1125 W. 9th St.
Chico, CA 95928
RF – Can you start by saying your name and what you were doing in New York City in the early 1980s?

GH – Greg Hass

I was living in Chicago, but I am originally from San Antonio, Texas. I used to run a gallery in San Antonio, it was called the San Antonio Museum of Modern Arts. It was sort of a store front gallery run by a few friends of mine, opening up in 1976. It is actually being celebrated in San Antonio right now at the SA museum of art b/c it was the first artist run gallery in San Antonio. That came about by just going to New York in the 70s, to see what was going on in the art world in New York. We wanted to see the possibilities of what an art gallery could be, we always thought that they needed to be a certain thing, and operated a certain way. But coming to New York, the galleries were store front of bombed out buildings with beautiful artworks in them, challenging art works. We kind of realized that we could do that, so by 1979 I got a scholarship to go to Chicago. To go to the University of Chicago to do my graduate studies, so I moved to Chicago for a number of years and working at the Museum of Contemporary Art at the time. I got a job offer to work an Art Fair, and they really liked me so they offered me a job and that was the summer of 1984, and that was the Tony Scherazi gallery. So I moved to New York in the summer of ’84 and I have been here ever since, working at the Tony Schefrazi gallery. He was the one who kind of discovered Keith, and championed him. SO that’s where I was, I was actually working for the gallery that actually championed Keith Haring. So I knew Keith, and I met him of course b/c he was coming by the gallery, he was great. That was a time when the art world was quite different, and changing. Coming out of the 70s abstract, extreme abstraction and conceptual mode. It was turning into this expressionist art and the East Village was in full bloom. Galleries in the East Village were opening and artists were coming upon the scene, Jean Michelle-Basquette and Keith Haring and Kenny Scharff, etc. And a lot of these artist were artists that our gallery championed and were friends of Keith’s.

So it was an exciting and vibrant time. Especially b/c the city was coming out of a depression. New York was sort of in a depression in the 70s, the city was highly depressed and bankrupt. There was that famous headline Ford said, ‘drop dead New York,’ So I think that NY was trying to borrow money from the government or something. So, there was so much of the city that was totally bombed out, the subways were dirty and completely covered with graffiti kind of threatening. As exciting as it was, it was still really threatening. So it was just such an experience
to go walking down in the subway to come across a Keith Haring subway drawing. That was like, so wild.

RF – So when you were down in the subways, do you remember the first time that you ever encountered a Haring drawing?

GH – Not really, I don’t. B/c you would just see them pretty often. I was kind of a, the subway I would ride was the R train, and I would get off on Prince Street or the Broadway Lafayette stop, which I think was the D train also. Keith did do drawings there, so I didn’t really ride the subway a lot, but it was more of a way of coming into work. I would go to the gallery to open it up, then stay for the day then ride the subway back home. So it was either Lafayette or Prince Street that I would see them. But I don’t remember specifically the one that I saw, but I remember seeing them. And it was magical, b/c the subways were dirty and dark and they were kind of threatening. Then to come across these beautiful chalk drawings was just magical. It was really generous of Keith to do that also, actually go down there and do it, b/c there were like gifts to the city. He knew that they would just disappear, b/c it was just chalk on black paper. So, there was no longevity, it is kind of amazing that some of them have survived. But that is only b/c some people actually saw the value in them. Ultimately that was why Keith stopped producing them b/c they didn’t last very long. But he did them for a number of years, I think up until 1985 he did them. He stopped doing them b/c as soon as he put them up they would be gone, and it was sort of like free artwork for people, and it became something other than what they originally were intended to be. Which were artworks for people, to expand their aesthetic experience, to experience art for people that normally would not go out of there way to look at art. Or even want to look at art, and suddenly they would come across these great drawings. I think that some people didn’t even see them or didn’t really care, but others saw them as these wonderful pieces by some crazy artist who was down there doing chalk drawings.

RF – When you saw the images in the subways did you stop to look at them?

GH – Oh, absolutely, are you crazy, of course I did. I mean first of all b/c I knew Keith, but also b/c I was working at the gallery, and I was an artist myself and I knew Keith. I knew what he was doing when he was going down into the subways. So it wasn’t something that I was unfamiliar with or something that I would just come across. I knew what they were, so I never really had that experience. I always knew Keith and I always knew that he was doing drawings in the subways. So, if I did come across them, I definitely took the time to look study them and enjoy them. I never, you know, took them down, I always respected them as what they were and what the intention of them were. You know, to stay down there, remain in the subway so that people could enjoy them.
RF – So, when you stopped to look at them, did anyone else do the same? Or, did you have a conversation about them with anyone while you were in the subways?

GH – Oh, boy, you are talking about something that was 25 years ago so I’m really sure. I mean probably, I don’t remember really, that is such a hard thing. I’m sure I rode the subway with people and when we would see one we would probably stop to look at it and comment on it, but again, if I was to be with somebody it would be someone who was an artist or knew the gallery or knew Keith Haring or something like that. But, it was, yeah, I do kind of remember seeing people standing around them a couple of times kind of looking at them. I was kind of, I was always more willing or I was kind of more willing to just leave the artwork there and letting people experience the work without me interfering or projecting anything on it. They could experience it without me saying ‘ok that’s a Keith Haring and I work in the gallery…’ you know I just wanted to let them enjoy it for what it was. That was kind of my approach.

RF – So, did you try to interpret the pieces or try to find a meaning?

GH – Try to interpret, no…hmmm, well, I’m not exactly sure what that means. But I would look at them and go like there is a flying saucer zapping a dog you know running down a pyramid. You do sort of, I mean again, I did work at the gallery and I knew Keith and I knew his iconography. I hung his art, I looked at it everyday we put out catalogs on his work, I knew his iconography, I knew his drawings and his visual language. I guess you always look at something and try to figure out what you are looking at, if you take the time. I certainly did.

RF – The number of works that he did in the subway, what did you think about that?

GH – You mean the amount?

RF – Yes, the amount

GH – Well, I don’t think that he did thousands, but I think that he did a couple hundred, but I don’t think that anyone knows exactly how many he did. I think that it was incredible of Keith. Once again, I think it was generous of him to draw down there. But, that was his remarkable talent, he could do these huge drawings really quickly, his line was so sure. He could finish one of those drawings in 15 or 20 seconds. He was so fast, and that was kind of the nature of those things, b/c it was against the law. Keith was arrested a bunch of times, it is documented where Keith is handcuffed and taken out of the subways by a couple of officers. Well, he was doing graffiti, but everyone would say that he’s not spray-painting, he’s just using chalk you can just wipe it off. But the fact of the matter is he was making a mark, whether of not it was paint it didn’t matter. So, in the early days
they were really quite hard on Keith. After a while when they realized Keith’s notoriety and how famous he was they kind of left him alone, even maybe the powers that be put their foot down a little to leave him alone. Keith, knew the danger so he could draw very quickly and he would just go down there and draw, you know I said 15 or 20 seconds he could finish a drawing, then jump into a train. He knew the train was coming step out and see a black billboard, in those days billboards were there and when their time ran out they would be covered with black paper. So, Keith was sort of brilliant to see them as blackboards. SO he would do the drawings in them, and they had frames and everything, you know a blank canvas just waiting to be drawn on. He could draw really quickly and just jump on the train and disappear. That was the nature of it, he could do it then just leave. The possibility of being arrested was very real and he did get arrested a couple of times. You know, actually knowing the amount of art that he was doing in those years and knowing the danger involved and that he could be arrested, people were stealing them, knowing that all of these things were happening. But he kept doing them.

But you know, I personally think that these were a part of Keith’s best artwork, ever. It was made not to be sold, it wasn’t about making money. It was just a pure act of art making. Just going down there to do these pieces, then jump on a train and ride away. And they were just very powerful, just fantastic. I think that it also helped Keith develop his skills, even though at that point he was a full, his talent was full blown. He had the vocabulary and everything already. You know, it allowed him to create in this arena that wasn’t about a commercial venture. He was, I’m not trying to say, he was making art for galleries, and I’m not trying to say those are any less important or valuable, but I just personally like the subway drawings. They were like gifts to the city of New York, and that any of them survive is a miracle. They were so ephemeral, you know they were made of chalk so you would rub up against them and they would be gone. Or they would put up another advertisement you know within the same day, or people would go down and steal them. I just think there is something fantastic about that, they weren’t meant to survive. They were only meant to be out for a short amount of time, I think there is something very remarkable about that. Rather than saying this is such a precious sort of thing or my artwork is so precious and so valuable. That wasn’t the nature of it, it was just quick. But, Keith was so sure and such a great artist that this quick 20 second drawing was like a masterful artwork. Pretty remarkable stuff it you look at the images, they are very beautiful.

RF – I agree, I love looking at them myself.

GH – I actually have one myself, someone came into the gallery and left it here one day. It is a radiant child that has a big rip in it. It looks like they just cut it out, I would have never done something like that. But someone just came in and left it, they just said something like ‘look what I just got.’ It ruined, it. ‘You cut it out of a bigger piece.’
RF – So when people cut them out did you think that the meaning was taken away from the piece?

GH – Well, No, I don’t think that the meaning has changed at all a drawing is a drawing. Whether you see it down in the subway or not. It is taking it out of the context, but it is still a powerful drawing. You know, I never condoned people going and taking the artwork out of the subway. The fact of the matter is, it is remarkable that any of these images still survive. You know, the people who took them at least they preserved a portion of New York artistic heritage. If no one would have taken them then there would be no record of them, then just some photographs. Some people went down there with crow-bars popping them off of the walls. There are some that are completely intact with the frames and everything I mean, it is a remarkable thing. But again, that shows the lawlessness of New York in those years. I don’t think anyone would try to do that today, without having some video surveillance and police following someone out. You know, but it was just kind of like the Wild West mentality.

I think that it is wonderful that some survive. I think that it is really sad that the city didn’t try to preserve them as Keith was making them. They could have put some plexi-glass over them, but it was a bit of a shame. But, that was the nature of it. I think it was last year, Keith had a showing at the Brooklyn Museum. I remember for the exhibition they had a chalk drawing. They put it down into the subways to announce the exhibition. It was wild, it was sort of like seeing his chalk work down there all over again, but it was obviously for the exhibition. It was very interesting to see them all over again. I’m sure they were intentional, b/c the show was about his early work. We actually helped hang some of the works for that show.

RF – Did you actually ever see him drawing in the subway?

GH – No, I don’t think I did. I can’t say that I did. I wish I would have. I can’t

RF – Do you have any other reactions to the works or last insights? About the subway drawings…

GH – I think that is probably about it. I love them, and I think that they are some of Keith’s best works and most important works. I think it is interesting b/c Keith had always said that he never wanted his subway drawings to be in a gallery. B/c he didn’t want people to be encouraged to steal them, and he didn’t want people to think of them in terms of a commodity. Consequently, the Haring estate never, and I think to this day, they have never acknowledged those drawings. It’s not that they don’t acknowledge them, but they don’t authenticate them. The longer it is that Keith has been dead, all of the work has become much more precious and valuable. They were just supposed to be drawn then disappear. Sort of like
drawing in the snow or something. You know, Picasso doing a drawing on the sand and the ocean comes and washes it away. It was only supposed to last a short time then go away. And they have lasted such a long time. People are recognizing the importance of the pieces, and are paying top dollar to buy the pieces. Even though Keith didn’t really like his pieces being a commodity. That is the nature of the commercial art world. You can’t stop people from wanting them or buying them. Nature of the beast. A funny thing about it, you know, people just say ‘oh, there just chalk drawings or line drawings that anyone can do.’ You know, but that is just not true. Keith had a remarkable hand and eye. His line was so sure. Kind of like Warhol’s lines, his lines were very much his lines. You can tell a Warhol line and Keith line. It is a shame that he died so young.

RF – I’m always surprised that he did everything he did in only 12 years.

GH – Yeah – there is an amazing retrospective of his opening next month in Paris. We are loaning works. To bad for me, b/c I was going to go help with the set up but I just had surgery on my shoulder so I’m not really up to it. It is going to be one of the largest showing of his work. It’s called the Political Line, more of his work that has a political nature to it, gay politics, apartheid, etc. He was very intense but also very giving. Very sweet man, I miss him actually. It was kind of a rough time b/c you know, Andy Warhol died in ’87, then Basquiat in ’88, then Keith went a few years later. It was boom, boom, boom. All three of them went so quickly. We had some fun times, and I have some fond memories of those times. I’ve been at this gallery for almost 30 years now so a lot has happened.
www.nycsubway.org/wiki/The_New_York_Transit_Authority_in_the_1980s.

www.haring.com/!/art-work/242#.UW2pw8ooY60.

“In the Subway: Hot Artist Returns to his Roots.” Newsday, original print January 27, 1986.


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