



Keith Haring, 1985. Photo Bernard Gotfryd, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

KEITH HARING:

Art, Activism, and the Power of Love

For artist Keith Haring, the heart is a universal symbol—a language of love for oneself, for others, and for humanity. His *Untitled* (1985), presented above the altar, stands as a defining example of his signature aesthetic.

Emerging in New York City's downtown scene of the late 1970s and '80s, Haring transformed the energy of street culture into a tool for justice. His bold lines, bright colors, and animated figures may look playful and simple at first glance, but they carried urgent messages about life, love, fear, and social change.

During the AIDS epidemic, Haring had an active voice, refusing silence. Works such as *Ignorance = Fear, Silence = Death* reminded the world that inaction could be deadly. He spoke against apartheid, stood for racial justice, and never separated art from activism. He believed that art belonged to everyone—not just in museums, but in the subways, on sidewalks, and on city

walls. In this way, he created a universal visual language that crossed boundaries of class, race, and culture.

At the center of Haring's art, both literally and symbolically, was love. He saw love not as a passive feeling, but as active work. He showed up, spoke the truth, created beauty, and resisted injustice.

Although Haring died in 1990 at just 31 years old, his legacy continues in museums, in public spaces, on clothing, and in the lives of people who find courage by his example. His art reminds us that creativity can be both joy and protest, play and prayer, all at once.

In our Unitarian Universalist tradition, we affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and we commit ourselves to justice, generosity, and equity. Haring's vision exemplifies these values, urging us to center our lives in love and to build a community where everyone is included.



Untitled, 1985 c. Keith Haring Foundation. Used by permission.