

**POWERFUL BABIES:  
KEITH HARING'S IMPACT ON ARTISTS TODAY**

25 September 2015 – 3 April 2016  
Stockholm, Sweden



L-R: Jeanette Hayes, 'iOS Veneration', 2013. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist. Przemek Pyszczyk, 'Playground Structure (Cone)', 2014. Lacquered steel. 130 cm x 120 cm x 80 cm (in two parts). Courtesy Belenius/Nordenhake, Stockholm. Private Collection. Trenton Doyle Hancock, 'Step and Screw #18-1, the Handoff', 2015. Mixed media on canvas. 60 x 60 inch (152.4 x 152.4 cm). Courtesy of the Zang Collection, London.

*Powerful Babies: Keith Haring's Impact on Artists Today* brings together a diverse group of contemporary artists from across the United States and Northern Europe to celebrate the legacy of Keith Haring on the 25th anniversary of the artist's death. Curated by Bill Arning, Director of Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, and Rick Herron, New York-based independent curator, the exhibition reconsiders Haring's career and achievements through new commissions, recent work, performances and events to highlight the ubiquitous influence Haring has had on contemporary artists working today.

From symbols to social practice, Haring's influence reverberates throughout the contemporary art landscape in new and unexpected ways. Rather than engaging artists whose work merely mimics Haring's style, the exhibition includes artists whose practices exemplify the innovation and veracity for which Haring is known, including his embrace of humor, dance and nightlife, issues relating to health and wellness, his artistic approach, social and political activism and the inspiration of kids.

The importance of contextualizing the social aspects of nightlife has become increasingly integral to contemporary art practices. The artists in *Powerful Babies* play in bands, DJ at parties and direct music videos. Works in the exhibition based on this theme include a text-based commission by artist, DJ, poet, model and celebrity of the LGBT community, **Juliana Huxtable**; a 38 song playlist tribute to Haring by **Steven Evans** using songs from Larry Levan's Paradise Garage, with song vinyl lyrics installed around the museum; a mixed media sculpture by Raul de Nieves, whose title has been inspired by the 1960s classic 'It's My Party and I'll Cry if I want to'; limited edition t-shirts designed specifically for the exhibition by New York based artists **Scotter LaForge** and **J. Morrision**, made together with Xiu Xiu; and a performance by Swedish artist **Tobias Bernstrup**.

Artists in the exhibition also use art and social media to tackle issues of health and well-being, including AIDS, violence against trans-people and gender as construction, legislation and social violence against women's bodies, cancer, the misuse of drugs and alcohol, anxiety and clinical depression. 'Meth Kills', a painting by **Scotter LaForge** which plays homage to Haring's 'Crack is Wack', will be exhibited, alongside a digital collage by long-term survivor of AIDS, **John Hanning**; a painting by **Thedra Cullar-Ledford**, who like Haring's response to his own AIDS diagnosis, became most prolific after being diagnosed with breast cancer; and an unfinished work by **Lori Ellison**, whose passing from terminal cancer in July 2015 resulted in an overwhelming display of sympathy in the form of digital floral bouquets on her Facebook page.

The long-lasting influence of Haring's artistic approach to the canvas, formal qualities and his way of creating work is evident in the work of several artists in the exhibition, including **Klara Lidén**, who wheat-pastes fresh white paper over concert bills in every major city in a defiant act of erasure and addition, one of which will be on show as part of the exhibition. **Katherine Bernhardt**, who is inspired by everyday objects, will exhibit a painting of a Swatch watch made from acrylic and spray paint on canvas, while **Michael Alan**'s use of fine lines flitter around canvas and masks like an endless, nervous ribbon. As Haring painted directly on the bodies of Bill T. Jones and Grace Jones to bring painting to life, **Tad Beck** asks choreographers to dance on top of photos of themselves dancing, making their gestures simultaneous acts of creation and destruction. Like Haring, **Jeanette Hayes** seamlessly mashes history and the current moment to create a perfect synthesis of our own time in her painting 'iOS Veneration' and **Allen Grubestic** has an uneasy engagement with commodity and cultural appropriation, using humour to mine the location between the found and the readymade in his 'I DIDN'T DO IT' series. Encompassing a style as instantly memorable as Haring, Japanese artist **Misaki Kawai** uses cartoon narratives to create an iconographic system that is universal yet ambiguous – not strictly a happy place – and **Alexander Tovborg** meditates on history and mythology in his paintings, full of complex patterns and references to folk art and outsider personalities.

A celebration of Haring's achievements and legacy cannot be complete without acknowledgement of his life as an activist. His conceptual, political and social approach infiltrated the contemporary art scene of the late 20th century, paving the way for future generations of artists to use art as a social and political vehicle. In **Trenton Doyle Hancock**'s work, his alter ego Torpedo Boy, a black super-anti-hero, reveals human foibles and brings difficult societal issues to the surface. **M Lamar** mixes the genres of opera, metal, performance, sculpture and video to conjure a place beyond received categories of racial and sexual identity, using blackness and horrific histories of slavery and colonialism to explore exaggerated power dynamics.

For Haring, children were the greatest sources of motivation and happiness, frequently collaborating with kids to paint murals all over the world. Work in *Powerful Babies* are examples of how the art of Haring's generation instructed and inspired emerging artists working today, many who in turn make projects for, with and about kids. Kids had a hand in making, producing and starring in **Jaimie Warren**'s ongoing video work, *Whoop Dee Doo* – the result of a week's long residency in California that involved high school and university students. **Joakim Ojanen**'s ceramic sculptures use cartoons and childish motifs to address melancholic issues of the adult psyche, and **Przemek Pyszczyk**'s work is inspired by a sense of nostalgia for his Polish heritage. His sculptures in the exhibition, entitled 'Playground Structure', combine materials and elements of color and scale to reflect on his childhood.

*Powerful Babies* is the third in a series of annual exhibitions presented by Spritmuseum, home of the Absolut Art Collection, celebrating the lives of artists and work in the Collection. The exhibition brings together four of the five 'Absolut Haring' paintings for the first time since they were commissioned by Absolut in 1986, including two from the Keith Haring Foundation which have never before been exhibited in Sweden.

An illustrated catalogue written by the curators of the exhibition, Bill Arning and Rick Herron, with an introduction by Spritmuseum curator Mia Sundberg, will accompany the exhibition.

**Bill Arning, Director of Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and co-curator of the exhibition, said:**

"I have had a long interest as a curator and critic in mapping contemporary art family trees; for instance, which artists as part of their life projects opened up new turf for the next generation of artists to work in. The figure of Haring in the art world and popular imagination in relation to the most exciting art being made today is a vivid and uniquely rich project for me."

**Rick Herron, independent curator and co-curator of the exhibition, said:**

"It's been a dream come true to work with Bill Arning and these incredible artists on *Powerful Babies*. Keith Haring was always 100% himself and we hope that by remaining fiercely loyal to their own beliefs and instincts, this work, by some of today's most exciting artists, will be a fitting tribute to Haring and the astounding body of work he produced in just ten short years."

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**Notes to Editors:**

**Spritmuseum** is based in Stockholm, Sweden and houses the work of the Absolut Art Collection, which began in 1985 when Absolut invited Andy Warhol to create the first in a series of iconic advertisements inspired by the Absolut bottle. Formed between 1985 to 2004, the collection features approximately 900 works by over 600 artists, including internationally renowned artists Keith Haring, Andy Warhol and Damien Hirst, as well as major Swedish figures such as Ola Billgren, Dan Wolgers and Linn Fernström.

Since relocating in 2012 to its new premises on the island of Djurgården, a unique destination in the heart of Stockholm featuring the city's two remaining 18th century naval buildings, Spritmuseum has been dedicated to celebrating the Absolut Art Collection through an annual exhibition programme that includes a solo or group presentation inspired by an artist represented in the Collection, alongside a number of exhibitions that explore the history of Sweden's alcohol culture. *Powerful Babies* is the third exhibition in this annual programme, following *Traingone* by Frank Bowling in 2014 and *Rude Girls* by Beatrice Cussol in 2013. For more information on Spritmuseum and the Absolut Art Collection, please visit [www.spritmuseum.se/en](http://www.spritmuseum.se/en) or follow on Twitter [@Spritmuseum](https://twitter.com/Spritmuseum) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/spritmuseum)

**Bill Arning** is the director of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston where he has organised solo exhibitions of Marc Swanson, Melanie Smith, Matthew Day Jackson, and the late Stan VanDerBeek. Arning was previously Exhibitions Curator from 2000-2009 at MIT where he curated shows of AA Bronson, Cerith Wyn Evans and a retrospective of Kate Ericson and Mel Ziegler. From 1985 to 1996, Arning was also the Director of White Columns in New York City. In 1993, Arning organized the first exhibition about gender and sexuality in South America, Maricas, at the Center Cultural Ricardo Rojas at the University of Buenos Aires. He is currently writing an essay on the art market and AIDS for the upcoming exhibition ArtAIDS America, organized by the Tacoma Art Museum in Washington.

**Rick Herron** is a curator, artist, writer and museum worker from Plattsburg, MO. He has curated projects and exhibitions for The Leslie Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art, New Museum, The LGBT Center of New York, VisualAIDS, Chashama, Cindy Rucker Gallery and others. Herron has participated in projects with Elmgreen & Dragset, Carsten Höller, Dis, The Kitchen, palissimo, fluxconcert, Our Hit Parade and many others. In 2013-14, he was the Curatorial Fellow in the Queer/Art/Mentorship program, working with independent curator Pati Hertling and film writer/director Ira Sachs. Rick lives in New York City, where he is the Assistant Manager of Visitor Services at the New Museum.