

February 2023



LGBT+HM 2022 Politics In Art: 'The Arc Is Long'



- 2022 sees the 50th anniversary of the very first Pride March in the UK in 1972. A popular slogan of the early Gay Rights Movement (the idea of the 'LGBT' community was some way off) of the time was "the personal is political", and art is probably the most individual of pastimes. So it seemed logical, as we have a National Curriculum link to our theme every year, to choose Art for 2022.

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- We then looked for five artists (one each to represent the L,G,B,T and ‘+’ of the community) who had used their talents for “political” ends, or expressed their orientation through their work and decided on our Five Faces for 2022. **Keith Haring**’s dancing figures are a perfect example as they were used to draw attention to the growing AIDS crisis of the early 1980s. **Doris Brabham Hatt** and **Fiore de Henriquez** both fought against fascism in the 1930s. **Jean-Michel Basquiat** began as a graffiti artist and **Mark Aguhar**’s life “and mere existence was an act of confronting white hegemony”.





Doris Brabham Hatt

24th September 1890 – 27th August 1969

Doris Brabham Hatt was a modernist artist and activist. She was born in 1890 into an affluent Bath family. After being drawn to art as a teenager, she studied at the Bath School of Art, Goldsmith's College and the Royal College of Art. She spent time in Vienna where she studied woodcutting and Paris where she met modernists such as Legér. She was influenced by artists such as Cézanne and Picasso and cubism, purism and abstraction.

Her paintings were first exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in London in 1918. Over five decades her work featured in 40 exhibitions. Hatt developed a painting style that was meticulous in its planning and execution. Her great mantra being 'to simplify and at the same time intensify' with her guiding aim to present only the essential elements in her compositions whilst rigorously discarding all that was superfluous to the intended design. In her own words this disciplined process meant 'order' had 'been brought out of chaos - that life after all is not so difficult as it seems. This will give you a sense of power and well-being as you study the picture.'

As well as being a modernist painter, Hatt was a socialist and feminist activist. Her interest in politics started during the War after seeing levels of poverty in London she had not seen where she grew up, and seeing the impact of the war. She was involved in the New Woman and Women's Suffrages movements and joined the Communism Party in response to the rise of Fascism in the 1930s.

Hatt stood as Communist Party candidate for Clevedon Urban District Council in 1946 and 1947. At the time, there were no women council members. In both instances, she was unsuccessful.

Hatt designed her Art Deco Bauhaus-style house 'Littlemead' in Clevedon. She lived there with her partner Margery Mack Smith, a weaver and school teacher. Littlemead became a meeting place for like-minded people to talk about art and politics as well as a place where Hatt hosted free art classes and gave lectures.

To the 'society' of the polite town of Clevedon, she was seen as scandalous. Not just living there with her partner, but because she could be found attempting to sell the Daily Worker Newspapers to local people. She managed to change the political makeup of the small town in the longer term, becoming a living example of equality, showing others how to start embracing civil rights and social change through her art and activism.

In her 60s she had her first solo exhibition and was recognised as a British artist, including a retrospective exhibition at the Royal Watercolour Academy.

After Doris died on 27th August 1969, a relative burned her correspondence and personal records in an attempt to conceal her life as a feminist and a lesbian. Fortunately Margery was able to move two crates of sketchbooks, portfolios, working drawings, and what letters and writings she could to her new home in Watchet but a significant amount was lost.



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- Finally, as this year's anniversary is one on a continuing and often winding journey towards full equality, which has suffered many setbacks while still moving forwards, we took 'the arc is long' as our tagline, from Dr Martin Luther King jnr's quote "The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice".





Jean-Michel Basquiat

22nd December 1960 – 12th August 1988

Jean-Michel Basquiat was born in Park Slope Brooklyn. His father was Haitian and his mother was Puerto Rican. His cultural heritage provided inspiration and he would often incorporate Spanish words into his artworks.

When he was eight years old, he was hit by a car. His mother bought a copy of Gray's Anatomy to read whilst he was recovering and this provided inspiration for art later in life, copying diagrams of chemical compounds. He also named his band Gray which referenced the book.

Jean-Michel's mother suffered from mental illness. Due to her instability and family unrest, he ran away from home at 15. He slept on park benches in Washington Square Park, and was arrested then returned to the care of his father within a week.

Basquiat did not have a formal art education. His father would take him to local art museums from a young age. Neither did he go to art school – he learnt from going through art galleries and was inspired by music his father played

He started as a graffiti artist using the tag "SAMO" (shorthand for "same old s*** ") in 1978. He created this with high school friend Al Diaz. They started spray painting graffiti on buildings in Lower Manhattan. In 1980, they fell out and Basquiat wrote "SAMO IS DEAD" around lower Manhattan. The SAMO tag was resurrected by Diaz after Donald Trump's 2016 presidential election victory. Basquiat sold his first painting, Cadillac Moon (1981), to Debbie Harry, lead singer of punk band Blondie, for \$200.

His girlfriend, Suzanne Mallouk, who financially supported him as a waitress during this period later described his sexuality as: " ... not monochromatic. It did not rely on visual stimulation, such as a pretty girl. It was a very rich multichromatic sexuality. He was attracted to people for all different reasons. They could be boys, girls, thin, fat, pretty, ugly. It was, I think, driven by intelligence. He was attracted to intelligence more than anything and to pain." In 1982 he also dated then-unknown singer Madonna.

His signature artistic motif, the crown, had three peaks symbolising his three royal lineages which were the poet, the musician and the great boxing champion. In his art he decorated historically prominent black figures with crowns and halos.

Aged 22 he was the youngest to exhibit at the Whitney Biennial. He was deeply affected by the death of Michael Stewart, an aspiring black artist in the downtown club scene, killed by police in September 1983. He painted Defacement (The Death of Michael Stewart) (1983) in response to the incident.

He died on 12th August 1988 at age 27 years old, of a heroin overdose at his home.

Basquiat's used social commentary in his paintings as a tool for self-examination and for identifying with his experiences in the Black community of his time, as well as attacking power structures and systems of racism. His visual style was acutely political and direct in his criticism of colonialism and his support for class struggle.





Keith Haring

4th May 1958 – February 16th 1990

Keith Haring was an American pop artist who advocated for safe sex and AIDS awareness through his images. He was born in Reading Pennsylvania and raised in Kutztown, Pennsylvania. Haring drew from a young age, learning basic cartooning skills from his father, and was influenced by cartoons such as those by Walt Disney, Dr Seuss and Looney Tunes.

Haring studied at a commercial arts school, the Ivy School of Professional Art in Pittsburgh. He dropped out after two semesters when he realised that he had little interest in becoming a commercial graphic artist. He moved to New York City in 1978 where he found an alternative art community and enrolled in the School of Visual Arts. While he was a student he experimented with different art forms and continued to draw.

He became friends with fellow artists Kenny Scharf and Jean-Michel Basquiat, as well as the musicians, performance artists and graffiti writers that comprised the burgeoning art community. He was also inspired by artists Pierre Alechinsky and William Burroughs.

He started using advertising panels covered in black paper in subway museums as a way of sharing his art with a larger audience. Using white chalk, he created public drawings which New York commuters became familiar with. Haring produced hundreds of these public drawings in rapid rhythmic lines, sometimes creating as many as forty "subway drawings" in one day. This seamless flow of images became familiar to New York commuters, who often would stop to engage the artist when they encountered him at work.

In 1981, he had his first solo exhibition in New York at the Westbeth Painters Space. In the following year he made his Soho gallery debut at the Tony Shafrazi gallery. Over his career, his work was featured in over 100 solo and group exhibitions and was a sought-after artist.

Throughout his career, Haring devoted much of his time to public works, which often carried social messages. He produced more than 50 public artworks between 1982 and 1989, in dozens of cities around the world, many of which were created for charities, hospitals, children's day care centres and orphanages. The now famous Crack is Wack mural of 1986 has become a landmark along New York's FDR Drive. Other projects include; a mural created for the 100th anniversary of the Statue of Liberty in 1986, on which Haring worked with 900 children.

Haring opened the Pop Up shop in 1986 which sold multiple items with his images such as t-shirts and toys. More people were able to access his work at a low cost and was an extension of his work.

Haring was diagnosed with AIDS in 1988. A year later, he established the Keith Haring Foundation to provide funding to AIDS organisations. He also raised awareness about AIDS through his art.

He died on 16th February 1990 of AIDS related complications. Haring's signature style is still seen in fashion. His estate has collaborated with Adidas, Lacoste and UNIQLO, Supreme, Reebok, and Coach.



A black and white photograph of two hands clasped together in a firm grip, symbolizing partnership and support. The hands are positioned in the center of the frame, with the fingers interlaced. The background is dark and out of focus, emphasizing the hands. The text is overlaid on the image in a clean, white, sans-serif font.

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