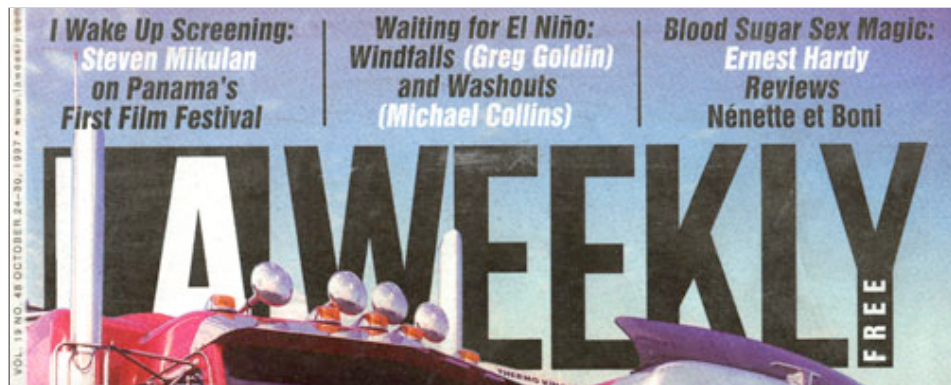


KANTOR GALLERY

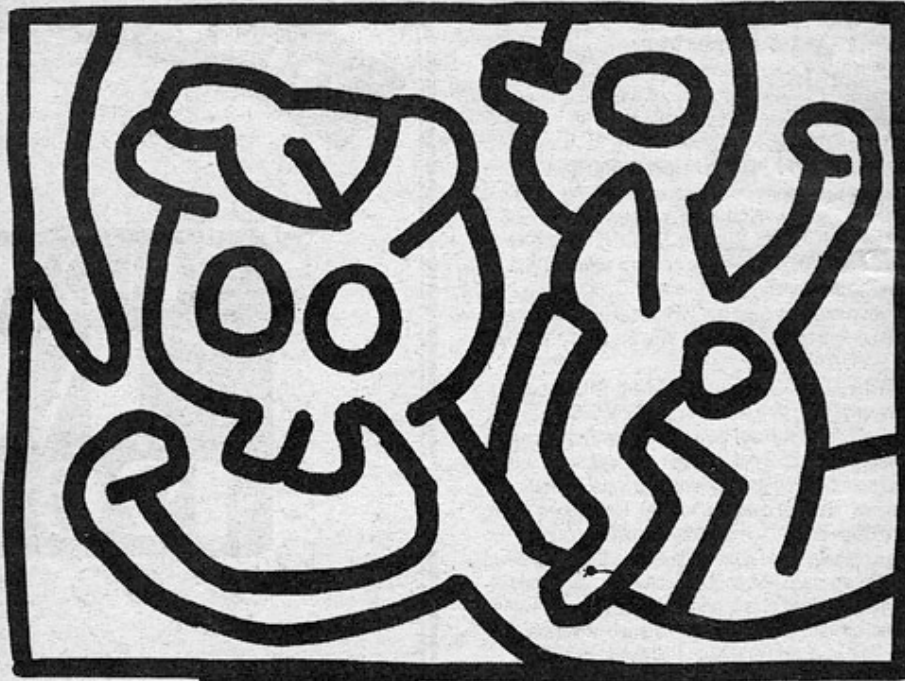
PRESS



## ART PICKS OF THE WEEK

**KEITH HARING, CHRISTOF KOHLHOFER**

Like his mentor Andy Warhol, Keith Haring had become legendary even before his death, and he found himself struggling against, as much as exploiting, his own mythic stature. Was Haring as great as all that? Or, conversely, did success spoil Keith Haring the artist? At this temporal and geographic remove, a small retrospective of works in various formats (a notably choice selection, in fact) bolsters, and even expands, our sense of Haring's accomplishment. Given the distinctiveness of Haring's style and favored motifs, it is tempting to dismiss — or, if you would, praise — him as one of the great cartoonists of our time. But Haring was more than just a method drawer and icon-conjurer; he was a post-punk, neo-Pop stylist with a keen (and surprisingly inimitable) calligraphic ability. The latest works in the show consist of more abstract and complex forms, still recognizably Haring but weirder and more unstable. Along with a clutch of Haring tchotchkes — ceramic editions, lapel buttons, wine labels, stationery, United Nations postage stamps (!) — displayed in a reliquarylike back vitrine, the late paintings and collages constitute the most engaging, unexpected things here, making this small, sweet survey as much a revelation as a revisit.



Haring's *Untitled*, 1989

The recent work of another inveterate image-monger, Christof Kohlhofer, shies away from the virtuosity of the hand, diving further into the Pop heart by privileging, however skeptically, the camera eye and the consumer culture that eye serves. A product of the late-'60s ferment in Düsseldorf, Kohlhofer evinces the archly critical mistrust of pictorial "expression" that drives friends of his such as Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke. At one point (while Kohlhofer was still in school, in fact) this caustic, Brechtian take on Pop art was called "Capitalist Realism" — playing off the German proximity to the cultures of both capitalism and communism. And, Warholian as its resonance might be, such Capitalist Realism is free of American Pop's blithe ironies and quotidian surrealist touches: Kohlhofer's appropriated photo-images and vacuous (but oddly lively) abstractions, brought to canvas with intensely saturated, spray-canned hues, are truly nasty, their brightness and crudity like optical Sweetarts, their pictorial content deflected and debased into an abjection as profound socially as aesthetically.

Keith Haring at Kantor, 8642 Melrose Ave., W. Hlywd.; thru Oct. 29. (310) 659-5388. Christof Kohlhofer at MADLA, 605 W. Olympic Blvd.; thru Oct. 31. (213) 627-7849.

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