

Art vs. Vandalism:

Tracing the evolution and social impact of 20th century street art through the works of Keith Haring and Banksy

AR1A066 Delft Lectures on Architectural History and Theory

Name: Andreea Dragan

Student number: 6248691 **TU Delft**

Guiding teacher: Everhard Korthals Altes

Text word count

Main body: 5173 words

References: 1009 words

Introduction

This research paper explores the development and social impact of street art and graffiti during the late 20th century, focusing on the works of Keith Haring (New York City (NYC)) and Banksy (United Kingdom (UK)). It analyzes how their art reflects the cultural and socio-political contexts of their time, tracing the evolution of graffiti from its controversial roots to its recognition as a legitimate art form. The paper also investigates the debate between art and vandalism, looking at how Haring's community-oriented, vibrant murals and Banksy's provocative, politically charged stencils have shaped public perceptions of street art while addressing critical issues like injustice, drug abuse, violence, and war (Stephens, 2023). Lastly, through the artists' relatively contrasting styles and philosophies, the paper highlights the transformative power of art in public spaces.

Research question

Having played a significant role in shaping the evolution and perception of street art during the late 20th century, what have Keith Haring and Banksy's contrasting approaches revealed about the debate between art and vandalism?

Research sub-questions

- (on their artistic approaches) *To what extent did each artist engage with the public directly, and how did this impact the reception of their work?*
- (on art vs. vandalism) *What role did legality and illegality play in the creation and reception of their art?*
- (on external influences) *How did the environments in which they created (NYC for Haring, and the UK and global urban spaces for Banksy) shape their artistic approaches?*

Significance of the study

Although existing literature has explored the artistic parallels between Keith Haring and Banksy, no comprehensive study has explicitly linked their contributions to the development of street art with the broader debate surrounding art and vandalism. Therefore, a research paper examining their contrasting approaches to street art would effectively demonstrate this.

It is known that both artists were pivotal in demonstrating that graffiti should be recognized as a legitimate form of art, challenging societal perceptions that often dismissed it as mere vandalism. Moreover, Keith Haring's subway billboards and Banksy's stenciled works transformed urban spaces into platforms for social commentary, addressing issues like AIDS awareness, gay rights, and political corruption (Luxury Art Canvas, 2024). Their work exemplified how street art could provoke thought and inspire change, rather than simply being viewed as property damage. Despite their differing approaches – for example, Haring's integration into mainstream culture versus Banksy's anonymity – they both reinforced the idea that street art is a powerful tool for activism and public engagement (Andipa Gallery, 2025).

In addition, Banksy's homage to Haring in works like *Choose Your Weapon* (Fig. 1) underscores their shared philosophy of using street art to challenge authority and societal norms (MyArtBroker, 2024).



Fig. 1, *Choose Your Weapon (lemon)*, Banksy, 2010

However, while exhibitions and scholarly discussions have highlighted their artistic legacies, they have yet to fully address how these artists helped redefine graffiti as an art form worthy of critical recognition. Their success in bridging the gap between outsider art and mainstream acceptance demonstrates the potential of street art to transcend its legal status as vandalism and be celebrated for its cultural significance (80 Degrees Today, 2025).

Art vs. vandalism debate

The debate over whether graffiti is art or vandalism remains complex and hostile to this day. While some view it as a powerful form of self-expression that alters urban spaces, others consider it destruction of property. Therefore, the line between art and vandalism often depends on factors such as intent, location, and public perception (Yale Daily News, 2022).

Keith Haring

Keith Haring was an American artist born on the 4th of May 1958, who combined graffiti with pop art to create iconic imagery such as the “Radiant baby” and a multitude of dancing, jumping and intertwining figures. Through his debut artworks - the NYC subway chalk drawings done on expired advertisement boards - he began addressing social issues such as AIDS, racism, and drug addiction, democratizing art and making it accessible to a broad audience before his death in 1990 (Yood, 2025).

Banksy

Banksy, born in Bristol around 1974, is a renowned yet anonymous British street artist, political activist, and film director. His artistic career began in the 1990s as part of Bristol's underground scene. Furthermore, he adopted stenciling around 2000, a method which allows for quicker execution and replication of his designs. Known for his anti-establishment perspective, Banksy's art critiques war, capitalism, and government corruption. Moreover, his anonymity adds intrigue to his work, focusing attention on the message rather than the artist. Lastly, notable projects of his include the satirical *Dismaland* installation and the self-shredding *Girl with Balloon* painting at the *Sotheby* auction from 2008 (Kim, 2024).

Methodology

To answer the main research question as well as the proposed sub-questions, a multidisciplinary approach that combines historical, cultural, and artistic analysis will be adopted:

1. Literature:

- Existing literature on street art, graffiti culture, and urban art theory will be studied thoroughly
- The focus will be on connecting studies of graffiti as an art form with its possible implications in the society, using Keith Haring and Banksy as key case studies to support and/or enhance the arguments presented

2. Sources:

a. **Primary sources:**

- Analyzing specific works by Haring (e.g., *Subway Drawings*, *Crack is Wack*) and Banksy (e.g., *The Flower Thrower*, *One Nation Under CCTV*)
- Interviews, videos, or public statements by the artists (if available)

b. **Secondary sources:**

- Books and articles/ essays on the history of graffiti and street art
- Exhibition websites (e.g., *Maddox Gallery London*) and/or documentaries discussing Haring's and Banksy's impact on the society

c. **Historical sources:**

- Photographs and maps documenting the locations of significant graffiti works from both artists
- Records of urban art movements in the late 20th century

3. Method of analysis:

To properly address the methodological framework behind the analysis of this paper, three specific methods will be utilized and enlisted below:

- **Visual analysis:** by studying the formal elements (style, medium, symbolism) of the above-mentioned key works by Keith Haring and Banksy
- **Contextual analysis:** by exploring the cultural, political, and social contexts in which their works were created and received
- **Comparative analysis:** by comparing the approaches of Keith Haring and Banksy to highlight differences in their philosophies, methods, and societal impacts

By combining these methods, the aim is to provide a deep understanding of how Keith Haring and Banksy's works reflect the evolution of street art, its perceptions, and its lasting tension between creativity and controversy.

Historical, social, and cultural context

The origins

Graffiti has ancient roots, with the earliest examples dating back thousands of years. For instance, cave paintings from 40,000 to 10,000 years ago represent some of the oldest forms of artistic expression on walls (Lazerianclaire, 2023) (Fig. 2). In addition, ancient civilizations like Rome, Greece and Egypt used graffiti for various purposes, including political statements, religious expressions, and personalized messages (Hickman, 2024).

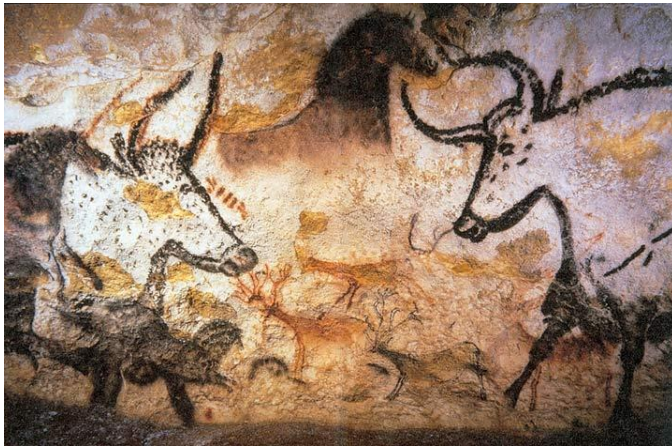


Fig. 2, Paintings inside the Lascaux Caves in southwestern France, discovered in 1940

Moreover, the word "graffiti" itself comes from the Italian term "graffiato" which means "scratched". In ancient Rome, graffiti was an ordinary form of communication, with examples dating back 2,500 years (Lazerianclaire, 2023).

Modern graffiti as we know it today emerged in the late 1960s in Philadelphia and NYC. It became strongly associated with hip-hop culture in the 1970s and 1980s, evolving from simple "tags" to

elaborate murals or so-called "pieces" (Fig. 3). Eventually, this urban art form quickly spread globally, turning from acts of vandalism into a recognized artistic medium (Art, 2023).



Fig. 3, The BMT Jamaica line, late 1970s

Socio-economic and political context in the United States (US)

In the US, graffiti emerged during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a period marked by significant socio-economic challenges. The era saw rising inflation, stagnant wages and increasing unemployment, worsened by fiscal imbalances caused by the Vietnam War and President Lyndon Johnson's *Great Society* programs (Bryan, n.d.). In addition, urban areas, particularly Philadelphia and NYC, experienced extreme poverty rates, racial inequality, and gang violence, with marginalized communities significantly affected. Therefore, in Philadelphia, graffiti became a form of self-expression for Afro-American teenagers facing urban decline (Dirkson, 2024). Thus, it served as both a creative channel and a way to reclaim public spaces among the deteriorating living conditions. Meanwhile, the broader economic stagnation and social distress fueled underground movements that embraced graffiti as a rebellious art form. Hence, by the 1970s, graffiti evolved into a vibrant cultural phenomenon tied to hip-hop in NYC, reflecting the struggles and resilience of urban youth (Askhiphop, 2024) (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4, Astonishing work at 5Pointz Aerosol Art Center Inc., titled "The Institute For Higher Burnin'."

Socio-economic and political context in Europe

The emergence of graffiti in Europe during the late 1960s and early 1970s coincided with a period of economic transition and social transformation. The 1960s saw significant economic growth in Western Europe, with increased prosperity and improved living standards for many (European Union, n.d.). However, this era of prosperity was followed by economic challenges in the 1970s, including oil shocks and the breakdown of the Western currency system, leading to reduced growth rates and rising unemployment. Therefore, urban areas experienced persistent poverty and inequality, particularly in marginalized communities (Reinecke, 2015). The period also witnessed important social movements, such as the "1968 student protests" in Paris, challenging traditional societal norms (European Union, n.d.). In addition, in many European cities, large-scale housing projects were constructed to solve housing shortages, often resulting in high-rise estates in city outskirts. These socio-economic conditions, combined with the influence of American graffiti culture, created an environment where urban youth sought self-expression and reclamation of public spaces through graffiti art (Reinecke, 2015).

Public thoughts on early graffiti

When graffiti first appeared in the US, it was looked at with divided emotions. Authorities and a substantial portion of the population saw it as vandalism and a sign of urban deterioration, but marginalized urban youth welcomed it as a way to express themselves and protest against social and economic injustice. Therefore, graffiti flourished over public areas and subway vehicles in NYC, where artists like Taki 183 (Fig. 5) became well-known for their "tags". Moreover, the "broken windows" notion, however, led authorities to associate graffiti with more general social unrest and to try to eliminate it, portraying it as a danger to public order rather than an artistic medium (L, 2018).



Fig. 5, TAKI 183 (he did not create the graffiti art movement, but his tags throughout the city inspired a *New York Times* investigation into the “mysterious 17-year-old Greek teenager's antics”, putting other taggers in the spotlight)

Similarly, in Europe, graffiti was firstly seen as an imported subculture related to youth rebellion, thus it was frequently viewed as vandalism in countries like France and Germany, especially in urban regions that were struggling economically (Fig. 6, Fig. 7). But, by the 1980s, some European artists had started to see and practice graffiti as a valid art form and incorporated it into regional social and political movements (Banot, 2025).



Fig. 6, *Eat the rich*, Telford Road, Notting Hill Gate, London, c.1974



Fig. 7, *I fought the law*, Ladbroske Grove, West London

Keith Haring: American street art and community engagement

Philosophy

Keith Haring's philosophy is best described in his own journal entitled *Keith Haring Journals* published in 2010. His beliefs are deeply rooted in accessibility, social activism, and the thought that art is for everyone, and it should be easily reachable and understood, as one of his early diary entries demonstrates: "The public has a right to art. [...] The public needs art, and it is the responsibility of a <<self-proclaimed artist>> to realize the public needs art, and not to make bourgeois art for the few and ignore the masses" (Haring, 2010). Thus, he chose murals, subway drawings and public art to exhibit his work over the gallery system to reach a larger variety of communities (Api, n.d.). Moreover, he saw art as a universal language, using simple yet effective symbols - such as the "Radiant baby" (Fig. 8) and the "Barking dog" (Fig. 9) - to communicate about issues the society was experiencing in the 70s and 80s. In fact, his journals clearly portray his deep commitment to social causes, to spreading awareness over the AIDS cases that struck the US in the 80s, the LGBTQA+ rights and the anti-apartheid movements in South Africa (King, 2024). Lastly, through his work, Keith Haring believed he could make a real change in society, writing in his journal that "[...] it should be something that liberates the soul, provokes the imagination, and encourages people to go further. It celebrates humanity instead of manipulating it." (Haring, 2010).



Fig. 8, *Radiant baby*, 1989



Fig. 9, *Barking Dogs* from *Pop Shop Quad IV*, SoHo, 1989

Key artworks

The entirety of Keith Haring's artworks illustrates his devotion to public art and social activism, but there are a few specific ones that exemplify his aim the best. Firstly, the *Crack is Wack* painting (Fig. 10) done in 1986, a large-scale mural located in Harlem, was a direct response to the crack cocaine epidemic devastating NYC in the 1980s. With his characteristic bold lines and bright colors, Haring aimed to communicate an urgent anti-drug message and draw attention to the victims of the illegal substance in question. In addition, the mural was initially painted illegally. However, later on, it was officially recognized by the city of NY, demonstrating how street art can turn from vandalism into public service (Cox, 2023).



Fig. 10, *Crack is Wack* mural, Harlem, NYC, 1986

In a comparable manner, Haring's *Subway Drawings* (Fig. 11, Fig. 12) became a significant part of his career, created using chalk on the expired, blank advertising panels in NYC's subway stations. These simple yet expressive figures – like dancing and/or moving radiating bodies, UFOs, dogs, hearts, and technological symbols such as TVs and computers – captured the energy of the city while making art accessible to the public in motion (The Keith Haring Foundation, 2024). This way, the underground became an extension of his canvas, reinforcing his belief that art should exist outside of the traditional galleries.



Fig. 11, *Subway drawing*, 1983



Fig. 12, *Art in Transit* drawing, 1984

Keith Haring's artwork significantly helped by bringing to light crucial problems in contemporary society and by promoting free access to his artwork, thus shaping the American culture in the 1980s. Marked by colorful imagery, Haring's artwork quickly achieved global recognition and symbolized street artwork. In addition, through his gained celebrity, Haring helped to promote safe sex and to provide fundraisings for AIDS institutions, thus drawing society's attention towards the urgent pandemic spreading in NYC and the LGBTQA+ affairs, for Haring was an openly recognized member of the LGBTQA+ society (The Keith Haring Foundation, 2024).

Ownership vs accessibility

Keith Haring's art challenged the traditional ideas of art ownership and public accessibility by rejecting the exclusivity of galleries and museums, instead bringing his work directly to the public. He believed art should not be restricted to wealthy collectors or institutions but should be available

to everyone, everywhere: “The system is not the answer. The word <<art>> is confusing. Art does not belong in a gallery. It belongs on the streets, in front of everyone.” (Haring, 2010). His *Subway Drawings* (1980–1985) are a prime example, allowing the everyday commuters of NYC to admire and engage with his work. Unlike traditional artworks that are bought, sold, and displayed in private collections, these drawings were temporary and were meant to be enjoyed freely.

In a comparable manner, Haring's massive murals, such as *Crack is Wack* (1986) and *Tuttomondo* (1989) (Fig. 13), were painted in noteworthy sites, thus re-affirming his strong belief in artwork for the general welfare of communities and not for the elitist only. Moreover, in his quest to destroy barriers through different means, Haring opened the *Pop Shop* in 1986, where inexpensive artworks such as T-shirts, buttons, and prints of his designs were available for purchase. The business attracted controversy, where some saw it as representing commercialism; however, for Haring, it symbolized a way to democratize artwork, something available and inexpensive to everyone (Gruen, 2005). Through his urban painting and commercial journey, Haring redefined how his artwork might be experienced, thus challenging the general assumption that art is high-class, expensive, and only available in institutional settings (Del Barco, 2023).

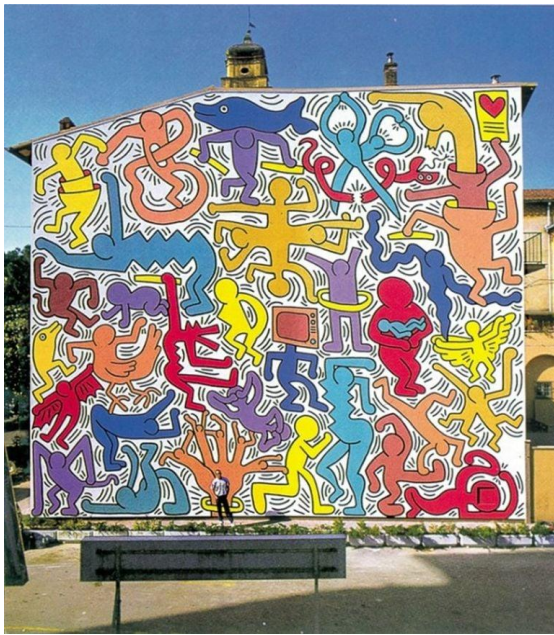


Fig. 13, *Tuttomondo* mural, Pisa, Italy, 1989

Banksy: European street art and political provocation

Anonymity, wit, and social criticism

Banksy's work is universally recognized for his intentional blend of mystery and cleverness, and for using them to criticize a wide range of political and social affairs (Diehl, 2021). By concealing his true identity, he manages to approach sensitive topics, including war, consumerism, and surveillance by states in his paintings without any inhibition (Mancoff, 2024). Furthermore, his creative approach

is just as captivating, evident in the word games and irony embedded in his works (Fig. 14). In combining wit and mystery, Banksy knowingly surpasses standard norms, leading viewers to challenge authority and rethink society's values. In doing so, his approach turns urban landscapes and walls into places for social and debate, making his paintings accessible to diverse types of viewers (Diehl, 2021).



Fig. 14, *The street is in play* mural, NYC, 2013

Key artworks



Fig. 15, *Flower Thrower* mural, Ash Salon Street, Bethlehem, West Bank, 2003

The image above (Fig. 15) features one of Banksy's most renowned works, the mural entitled *Flower Thrower*, created in 2003 on Ash Salon Street in Bethlehem, West Bank. This iconic piece is recognized best for its power to spark thought and dialogue on themes such as violence and love, which are central to Banksy's work. It depicts a masked male figure in mid-action, captured as if to throw a bouquet of flowers instead of what could have been a grenade (Schulze, 2024). The mural's stark contrasts and dynamic pose — characteristics of Banksy's stenciled style — underscore its social message, challenging conventional notions of resistance and violence by replacing aggression with an unexpected gesture of kindness.



Fig. 16, *One Nation Under CCTV* mural, Newman Street, London, UK, 2007

Another famous mural of Banksy's is *One Nation Under CCTV* (Fig. 16) located on Newman Street in London and created in 2007. The central message is now reflected through the text which gives the artwork its name, referring to the omnipresence of surveillance in modern society. Banksy reworks the familiar phrase to comment on the loss of privacy, as well as the contradiction between the idea of national unity and the reality of being constantly monitored. The mural is also placed next to real-life cameras, emphasizing that public spaces are becoming more subject to state oversight and control (Wooster, n.d.). With its straightforward design and clever irony, the piece is intended to make one think about the balance between safety and personal freedom in a society where surveillance is everywhere.

Artistic approach

Throughout his painting career, Banksy has extensively redefined the world of street art through his unique application of the stenciling technique. Banksy's paintings tend to incorporate sharp satire and irony and oftentimes focus on various political and societal topics (Leverton, 2011). In addition, Banksy's paintings incorporate surprise visual details and wordplay to stimulate thinking and challenge convention. In addition, his artistic style goes beyond mere aesthetics, to the extent of him carefully choosing where to place his context-dependent paintings, effectively blurring the boundaries between his works and their urban surroundings (Fig. 17) (Diehl, 2021). Moreover, the monochromatism predominantly found in Banksy's artwork enhances the strength of his messages and creates an aura of timelessness. Banksy's skill in technique and subject matter, through his various paintings, has developed strong modes of visual storytelling, resonating, and affecting diverse communities, as well as inspiring debate on societal issues.



Fig. 17, Artwork by Banks depicting a rhino mounting a car, on a wall in Charlton, London, Aug. 12, 2024

Comparative analysis

Both Keith Haring and Banksy managed to revolutionize public art, breaking traditional boundaries, and democratizing creative expression with their iconic symbols, while addressing societal issues that remain relevant even today. Therefore, the following chapter will present a comparative analysis between the two artists, examining their philosophies, techniques, and messages portrayed through their work.

Philosophies, methods, and messages

Banksy and Keith Haring have transformed the general view on public art by strategically choosing to exhibit their work in urban settings rather than in conventional galleries and institutions. The underground system in NYC was turned into a colorful canvas by Haring's unique sketching style which allowed everyday passengers to interact with his artworks (King, 2024). In a comparable manner, Banksy's characteristic stenciling method, which is recognizable by its rapidity and easy reproducibility, has allowed his artwork to be displayed on a range of surfaces in towns like Bristol and Birmingham, including shopfronts, houses, and government buildings (Stephens, 2023). Therefore, it can be stated that their work promotes access to creative expression for everyone, challenging present art arrays and conventional artistic norms.

Moreover, both artists tackle important societal concerns with wit and humor incorporated into their works. While Banksy's satirical images criticize contemporary themes like consumerism, surveillance, and political instability (Banksy.info, n.d.), Haring's murals convey messages of solidarity, love and resistance (Haring, 2010). In addition, by placing their works in public areas, Banksy and Haring turn ordinary urban settings into vibrant platforms for cultural criticism and social discussion, ensuring that their messages get noticed by a wide range of people.

Lastly, their creative methods have reinterpreted street art's function, transforming it from a means of individual expression to a potent tool for social change and engagement with the public. This paradigm change has had a long-lasting effect on the conversation around modern art, demonstrating

how art can challenge accepted conventions and stimulate group discussion about the status of society (Stephens, 2023).

Approaches regarding art vs. vandalism debate

The debate surrounding street art as legitimate artistic expression versus an act of vandalism is still active nowadays. Thus, well-known figures like Keith Haring and Banksy, who used contrasting approaches to transform urban spaces into canvases for social engagement, have had a significant impact on the arguments brought into this ongoing debate. On one hand, Haring gained a recognizable public identity, his face becoming nearly as iconic as his boldly outlined figures, helping with his transition from the unauthorized subway drawings to mainstream artistic acceptance (Fig. 18).



Fig. 18, Keith Haring

Banksy, on the other hand, has maintained strict anonymity to this day, deliberately shifting the audience's focus on his provocative artworks rather than his identity, creating an aura of mystery which amplifies his cultural significance (Diehl, 2021).

In addition, both artists developed two distinctive visual languages that transformed complex societal issues into accessible and easily decipherable imagery. Haring's dynamic figures address health and injustice matters (Fig. 19) whilst Banksy's precise, stenciled works depict witty scenes (Fig. 20), while tackling subjects like consumerism, violence, and political hypocrisy.



Fig. 19, *Ignorance = fear, silence = death, fight aids, act up*, 1989



Fig. 20, *Season's greetings*, Port Talbot, Wales, UK, Dec. 19, 2018

Also, differences in the lifespan of their murals further distinguish them: Haring's later artworks have been preserved or removed for sale, while Banksy embraces ephemerality, famously stating: "For the sake of keeping all street art where it belongs I'd encourage people not to buy anything by anybody unless it was created for sale in the first place." (Bardou, 2024).

Lastly, their views on commercializing their art differ as well. While Haring sold gallery works for substantial amounts while creating public art (Carrington, 2024), Banksy actively criticizes art market mechanisms, exemplified by his 2018 Sotheby's stunt where *Girl with Balloon* (Fig. 21) self-destructed after selling for £1.04 million (Mancoff, 2024). In addition, Keith Haring experienced a remarkable popularity in his career as his work began being valued at thousands of dollars in galleries,

even while he continued to produce unauthorized public pieces. This dual state of being not only gave him the status of a revolutionary street artist but also demonstrated that art can thrive outside traditional institutions as well. Haring's work, widely accepted and often preserved or recreated with permission, represents a transformation in public perception, where once-illegal expressions are now celebrated as authentic art forms. In contrast, Banksy remains anonymous on purpose and critically engages with the art market. Hence, his dramatic act of shredding the retitled piece *Love is in the Bin* (ex- *Girl with Balloon*) at the Sotheby's auction served as a powerful critique of high-value art sales, highlighting the exploit of creativity (Reyburn, 2018).



Fig. 21, *Girl with Balloon*, self-shredded after it was sold at Sotheby's auction in 2018

Art reflects reality

It is of immense importance to mention that both artists have profoundly impacted the art world by using public spaces to reflect and comment on societal issues, aiming to increase public awareness. Their work, driven by a sense of urgency and purpose in response to the injustices of their respective eras, transcends mere aesthetics and becomes powerful social commentary relevant to this day. Haring addressed local issues such as AIDS, gay rights, and drug addiction. Therefore, his work became deeply integrated into popular culture, with his imagery appearing on various commercial products, reflecting the American embrace of pop art (King, 2024). Meanwhile, Banksy still focuses on a more global stage, with his work appearing in cities worldwide and touching upon universal themes like violence, social injustice, and state surveillance that people can resonate with regardless of their culture (Diehl, 2021). In addition, unlike Haring, Banksy actively critiques commercialization and the art market, reflecting a more European skepticism towards the exploitation of art (Stephens, 2023).

Moreover, the ongoing legacies of these artists continue to shape artistic practices and inform public policy: Keith Haring's work has gained broad institutional recognition, with his foundation

continuing to support children's programs, HIV/AIDS awareness, and LGBTQ+ communities (The Keith Haring Foundation, n.d.), while Banksy's influence has sparked a global wave of socially conscious street art, inspiring a new generation of artists to use their creativity as a tool for social change. Their approaches to social commentary are rooted in empathy, honesty, and a deep commitment to justice and have inspired artists worldwide to use their platforms for activism. As a result, their legacies endure not only in their iconic artwork but also in the ongoing dialogue they sparked about the role of art in society and its potential to make a change (Stephens, 2023).

Societal impact and legacy

Influence on (street) art

Haring's legacy continues living through both institutional recognition and grassroots influence. After his death, major institutions acknowledged his contribution to art history, the *Whitney Museum* housing a retrospective of his work in 1997. In addition, his *Pop Shop*, which he established in 1986 to make his art accessible to the public, continued operating until 2005, with profits benefiting the *Keith Haring Foundation* and extending his democratizing influence on art (Yood, 2025) (Fig. 22).



Fig. 22, Third and fourth grade artists from Fayston Elementary School create life-sized figures in the style of Keith Haring, May 20, 2015, Mad River Valley in Central Vermont

Moreover, contemporary street artists continue to resonate with Haring's distinctive approach. For instance, artists like Jonas Fisch create "colorful abstract paintings...often a combination of figures, words and shapes inspired by graffiti and street art," (Fig. 23, Fig. 24) directly influenced by Haring's visual language (Fincher, 2021).



Fig. 23, *Chimerical Man*, Jonas Fisch



Fig. 24, *A Fairytale Told*, Jonas Fisch

Similarly, in 2006, journalist Max Foster coined the phrase “the Banksy Effect” to describe how interest in other street artists was rising due to Banksy's unprecedented success (Art Works Advisory, 2020). This phenomenon has elevated street art's status globally, with Banksy's omnipresence, anonymity, and creativity gaining recognition from both the public and the art establishments. In addition, this “Banksy Effect” extends far beyond the UK, inspiring artists worldwide to use street art as a form of protest and social commentary. Furthermore, his influence has caused the use of street art as a protest medium globally, including regions like the Arab world (Whadcock, 2021). Through his art, Banksy has demonstrated that public spaces can serve as powerful platforms for political expression and social criticism, regardless of the location and culture it is part of.

Influence on society

The influence that the two had on the respective societies they are part of is also significantly high. Diagnosed with AIDS in 1988, Haring used his platform to combat stigma until his death in 1990. His legacy continues through the *Keith Haring Foundation*, supporting children's programs and HIV/AIDS initiatives (The Keith Haring Foundation, n.d.). Haring's ability to blend pop culture with activism established a blueprint for socially conscious art that resonates today, influencing contemporary artists who view creative expression as inseparable from social responsibility.

Likewise, Banksy's most significant social influence lies in his ability to provoke thought about pressing social issues. His work serves as "a powerful catalyst for social and political commentary" (Boroumand, 2024), addressing "a wide range of social and political themes, from consumerism and capitalism to war, surveillance, and human rights" (EMP, 2024). By placing his provocative images in public spaces, Banksy "brings attention to topics such as war, poverty, and government corruption, forcing viewers to confront these issues in their everyday environments" (Boroumand, 2022).

Conclusion

Importance of this paper

In line with the initially formulated study significance, as the research has been fully concluded, it can be stated that this paper is bringing forth valuable insights that have been scarcely tackled in previous literature.

This research paper aimed to navigate the vibrant and controversial scene of 20th century street art through a comparative lens, focusing on the distinct yet equally significant contributions of Keith Haring and Banksy. By juxtaposing their artistic directions, philosophies, and socio-political views, the paper explored the multifaceted dimensions of street art, tracing its evolution from an illegal act to a recognized form of art, and demonstrating its continuous ability to provoke dialogue and inspire change in society, regardless of the urban context.

In addition, the study in question enriches the existing knowledge on street art by offering a thorough comparative analysis of Haring and Banksy, highlighting the way their contrasting approaches have shaped public perceptions and redefined the boundaries of artistic expression. Through rigorous examination of their key works, such as Haring's *Crack is Wack* mural and Banksy's stencils like the *Flower Thrower* and *One Nation Under CCTV*, the research revealed the artists' profound commitment to raising awareness regarding pressing social issues, including drug abuse, the 80s AIDS epidemic, social injustice, violence and political commentary.

Finally, the paper addressed the complex interplay between artistic expression and commercialization, as exemplified by Keith Haring's integration into mainstream culture and Banksy's intentional enigmatic anonymity. By exploring these different approaches, light was shed

on the ingrained tensions within the street art world and the challenges artists face when trying to maintain their artistic integrity while navigating the demands of the market.

In conclusion, the research paper is a valuable contribution to the understanding of street art's role in shaping social debate as well as urban landscapes. It highlights the enduring impact of artists like Keith Haring and Banksy, whose work continues to inspire and provoke thought long after its creation.

Reference list

Images:

Fig. 1: Argun, E. (2023, 5 June). *10 Facts about Banksy's Choose Your Weapon*. MyArtBroker. <https://www.myartbroker.com/artist-banksy/10-facts/10-facts-about-banksys-choose-your-weapon>

Fig. 2: Stewart, J. (2019, 22 April). *10 Key Moments in Street Art History That Made Graffiti a Beloved International Art Form*. My Modern Met. <https://mymodernmet.com/graffiti-art-history/>

Fig. 3: Boys, B. (2022, 25 February). *The wild times of the subway graffiti era 1970-1989*. The Bowery Boys: New York City History. <https://www.boweryboyshistory.com/2010/09/wild-era-of-subway-graffiti-1970-1989.html>

Fig. 4: Boys, B. (2022, 25 February). *The wild times of the subway graffiti era 1970-1989*. The Bowery Boys: New York City History. <https://www.boweryboyshistory.com/2010/09/wild-era-of-subway-graffiti-1970-1989.html>

Fig. 5: L, A. (2018, 16 August). *A History of Graffiti - The 60's and 70's*. Sprayplanet. <https://www.sprayplanet.com/blogs/news/a-history-of-graffiti-the-60s-and-70s>

Fig. 6: Sorene, P. (2018, 29 January). *Cats like plain Crisps: Brilliant photos of great graffiti in 1970s London - Flashbak*. Flashbak. <https://flashbak.com/cats-like-plain-crisps-brilliant-photos-great-graffiti-1970s-london-393876/>

Fig. 7: Sorene, P. (2018, 29 January). *Cats like plain Crisps: Brilliant photos of great graffiti in 1970s London - Flashbak*. Flashbak. <https://flashbak.com/cats-like-plain-crisps-brilliant-photos-great-graffiti-1970s-london-393876/>

Fig. 8: Mattioli, M. (2022, 24 August). *È storia! All'asta il primo "Radiant Baby" realizzato da Keith Haring*. ArtsLife. <https://artslife.com/2022/08/23/e-storia-allasta-il-primo-radiant-baby-realizzato-da-keith-haring/>

Fig. 9: Artnet. (n.d.). *Barking Dogs from Pop Shop Quad IV by Keith Haring*. Artnet. <https://www.artnet.com/artists/keith-haring/barking-dogs-from-pop-shop-quad-iv-F0i4ixZCYWivLsIrrX276g2>

Fig. 10: Rethinking The Future. (2022). *Keith Haring - 10 Iconic Artworks*. Rethinking The Future. https://www.re-thinkingthefuture.com/architectural-community/keith-haring-iconic-artworks-keith-haring-popular-paintings/#google_vignette

Fig. 11: van Kersschaever, B. (2020, 14 December). *The relevance of Keith Harings' dancing figures*. 21bis. <https://21bis.be/2020/12/the-relevance-of-keith-harings-dancing-figures/>

Fig. 12: The Keith Haring Foundation. (n.d.). *Keith Haring*. The Keith Haring Foundation. <https://www.haring.com/>

Fig. 13: Sgobba, V. (2019, 18 December). *La storia del murale Tuttomondo di Keith Haring a Pisa*. Artribune. <https://www.artribune.com/professionisti-e-professionisti/who-is-who/2019/12/piergiorgio-castellani-keith-haring-murale-tuttomondo-pisa/>

Fig. 14: Wyatt, D. (2013, 2 October). *New Banksy art in New York painted over after one day / The Independent*. The Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/new-banksy-art-in-new-york-painted-over-after-one-day-8854054.html>

Fig. 15: Dunworth, L. (2023, 23 April). *Banksy rumored to have bought Glastonbury pub*. NME. <https://www.nme.com/news/music/banksy-rumoured-to-have-bought-glastonbury-pub-3433721>

Fig. 16: Wooster Collective. (n.d.). *Banksy returns with "One Nation Under CCTV."* Wooster Collective. <http://woostercollective.com/post/banksy-returns-with-one-nation-under-cctv>

Fig. 17: Marx, W. (2024, 16 August). *Banksy's back with surprise daily street art of animals across London*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2024/08/16/nx-s1-5077660/banksy-london-animals-uk-street-art>

Fig. 18: Bartoux, L. (2024, 8 November). *Keith Haring*. Galleries Bartoux. <https://www.galleries-bartoux.com/en/artists/keith-haring/>

Fig. 19: Nora. (n.d.). *Bodies in Motion Inspired by Keith Haring*. <https://faystonart.blogspot.com/2015/05/bodies-in-motion-inspired-by-keith.html>

Fig. 20: De Laurentis, C. (2022, 20 May). *Masterpiece Story: Season's Greetings by Banksy*. DailyArt Magazine. <https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/banksy-seasons-greetings/>

Fig. 21: Kamp, J. (2022, 23 August). *How Banksy's "Girl with Balloon" Became an Icon of 21st-Century Art*. Artsy. <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-banksys-girl-balloon-icon-21st-century-art>

Fig. 22: Nora. (n.d.). *Bodies in Motion Inspired by Keith Haring*. <https://faystonart.blogspot.com/2015/05/bodies-in-motion-inspired-by-keith.html>

Fig. 23: MoMa UK. (2021, 21 January). *Buy Jonas Fisch Paintings - L.A. Based Artist*. MoMa UK. <https://www.moma.co.uk/buy/jonas-fisch-paintings/>

Fig. 24: MoMa UK. (2021, 21 January). *Buy Jonas Fisch Paintings - L.A. Based Artist*. MoMa UK. <https://www.moma.co.uk/buy/jonas-fisch-paintings/>

Text:

Api, S. (n.d.). *Keith Haring's Art: Bold lines and social messages*. ATX Fine Arts. <https://www.atxfinearts.com/blogs/blog/keith-harings-art-bold-lines-and-social-messages>

Art, L. R. F. (2023, 3 August). *From Subversive Vandalism to Revered Art: The History of Graffiti and Its Influence on Modern Art*. Laura Rathe Fine Art. <https://laurarathe.com/post/8330-from-subversive-vandalism-to-revered-art-the-history-of-graffiti-and-its-influence-on-modern-art>

Askhiphop. (2024, 13 January). *Philadelphia's Graffiti Revolution: From Gangs to Icons*. The Hip Hop Museum. <https://history.hiphop/philadelphias-graffiti-revolution-from-gangs-to-icons/>

Banot, I. (2025, 14 January). *The Duality of Graffiti: Art, Vandalism, or Both?* International Policy Digest. <https://intpolicydigest.org/the-platform/the-duality-of-graffiti-art-vandalism-or-both/>

Bardou, V. (2024, 1 September). *Banksy and Anonymity*. Vincent Bardou. <https://www.vincentbardou.com/en/post/banksy-and-anonymity>

Boroumand, R. (2022, 22 May). *Banksy's Art: Provocative Political and Social Commentary*. GraffitiStreet. <https://www.graffitistreet.com/banksys-art-provocative-political-and-social-commentary/>

Boroumand, R. (2024, 1 July). *Banksy's Impact on Modern Culture: A Closer Look at the Enigmatic Street Artist*. GraffitiStreet. <https://www.graffitistreet.com/banksys-impact-on-modern-culture-a-closer-look-at-the-enigmatic-street-artist/>

Bryan, B. M. (n.d.). *The great inflation*. Federal Reserve History. <https://www.federalreservehistory.org/essays/great-inflation>

Carrington, S. (2024, 30 August). *Keith Haring Value: Top Prices Paid at Auction*. MyArtBroker. <https://www.myartbroker.com/artist-keith-haring/record-prices/keith-haring-record-prices>

Cox, S. (2023, 8 November). *The story behind the Keith Haring's "Crack is Wack" mural*. All That's Interesting. <https://allthatsinteresting.com/crack-is-wack-mural>

Del Barco, M. (2023, May 27). *An exhibition of Keith Haring's art and activism makes clear: "Art is for everybody."* NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2023/05/27/1178084648/keith-haring-radiant-baby-the-broad>

Diehl, C. (2021). *Banksy: Completed*. MIT Press.

Dirkson, M. (2024, 5 August). *The Graffiti Art Movement in Philadelphia*. Picturing Black History. <https://picturingblackhistory.org/the-graffiti-art-movement-in-philadelphia/>

- EMP. (2024, 31 July). *Banksy: Street Art as a Tool for Social Commentary*. EMP Art. <https://www.emp-art.com/emp-blog/banksy-street-art-as-a-tool-for-social-commentary>
- European Union. (n.d.). *History of the European Union - 1960-69*. European Union. https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1960-69_en
- Fincher, B. (2021, 24 February). *4 Saatchi Art Artists that Echo Keith Haring*. Canvas: A Blog by Saatchi Art. <https://canvas.saatchiart.com/art/art-history-101/4-saatchi-art-artists-that-echo-keith-haring>
- Gruen, J. (2005). *Keith Haring: Art is for everybody*. USC Visions & Voices. https://libraries.usc.edu/sites/default/files/ExpLAKeithHaring_ThemeGuide_0.pdf
- Haring, K. (2010). *Keith Haring Journals: (Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition)*. Penguin
- Hickman, L. (2024, 31 May). *The Rich History of Graffiti Art : Notable Names and Their Contributions / Hickman Design*. Hickman Design. <https://hickmandesign.co.uk/blog/history/graffiti-art/>
- Kim, M. (2024, 7 October). *Banksy : The Enigmatic Artist of Social Commentary*. The Csia Quill. <https://www.thecsiaquill.com/post/banksy-the-enigmatic-artist-of-social-commentary>
- King, E. (2024, 20 February). *Keith Haring: The Blueprint of Social Activism*. MyArtBroker. <https://www.myartbroker.com/artist-keith-haring/articles/Keith-haring-the-blueprint-of-social-activism>
- Lazerianclaire. (2023, 19 June). *Exploring the Rise of Graffiti: The Evolution of Street Art in Mainstream Culture*. Lazerian. <https://lazerian.com/blog/street-art-exploring-the-rise-of-graffiti-in-mainstream-culture/>
- Luxury Art Canvas (2024, 18 July). *The Role of Street Art in Social and Political Movements*. Luxury Art Canvas. <https://luxuryartcanvas.com/blogs/art/the-role-of-street-art-in-social-and-political-movements>
- Leverton, M. (2011). *Banksy. Myths and Legends : A Collection of the Unbelievable and the Incredible*. Carpet Bombing Culture
- Mancoff, D. N. (2024, 29 November). *Banksy / Biography, Art, auction, shredded Painting, & Facts*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Banksy>
- Reinecke, C. (2015). *Localising the Social: The Rediscovery of Urban Poverty in Western European 'Affluent Societies.'* *Contemporary European History*, 24(4), 555–576. doi:10.1017/S0960777315000338
- Reyburn, S. (2018, 6 October). *Banksy painting Self-Destructs after fetching \$1.4 million at Sotheby's*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/06/arts/design/uk-banksy-painting-sothebys.html>

Schulze, M. (2024, 20 September). *Banksy's Rage, The Flower Thrower – Everything you need to know*. Public delivery. <https://publicdelivery.org/banksy-flower-thrower/>

Stephens, N. (2023, 23 August). *Tracing the Line: Banksy and Keith Haring*. Sothebys.com. <https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/tracing-the-line-banksy-and-keith-haring>

The Keith Haring Foundation. (n.d.). *Conversation with Keith Haring / Keith Haring*. Haring. https://www.haring.com/!/selected_writing/conversation-with-keith-haring

The Keith Haring Foundation. (n.d.). *Keith Haring*. The Keith Haring Foundation. <https://www.haring.com/>

Yale Daily News. (2022, 26 August). *Is Graffiti Art or Vandalism? Yes*. SJP. <https://yaledailynews.com/sjp/2022/08/26/is-graffiti-art-or-vandalism-yes/>

Yood, W. J. (2025, 12 February). *Keith Haring / Biography, Art, Artwork, & Facts*. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Keith-Haring>

Whadcock, D. (2021, 15 December). *Banksy : The Street Art Debate*. Varsity Online. <https://www.varsity.co.uk/arts/22628>