The Art Of Dying

September 1, 2001 By Walter Armstrong

In 1989, with only months to live, Keith Haring painted this beauty, gave it the beguiling title “Unfinished Painting” and presented it to a friend as a wedding gift. The canvas’ left half weeps as it contemplates a radiant eternity, and you could look at that blue forever; the right half is blank, and you make of this empty mirror what you will. Haring has bequeathed us a typically subversive exercise in facing -- even embracing -- death.

Our three features this month offer a more hands-on approach. In “Words to Die By,” eight creative types tell how they stopped worrying and learned to love their mortality. “Death in Hand” reports on the return of the “Is self-deliverance self-empowerment?” debate with the demise of the protease miracle (of course, Nurse Know-It-All weighs in, too, with tips for terminals). And “The Way We Die Now” investigates five recent PWA deaths to discover how today’s new killers -- complications of HAART and human failure -- can be prevented.

How to live with death. How to die with dignity. And, best, how not to die at all. That about finishes it. But first treat yourself to another eyeful of that sublime Haring blue. [image not available]

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