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Celebrating 175: Indiana, Robert, 1991

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Love is central to my life," says Robert Indiana. "I am dedicated to the proposition, like all Christians." Indiana's paean to love—the stacked-letter design with the cat's-eye O—was created for a Museum of Modern Art Christmas card in 1964. For the next ten years it appeared virtually everywhere, especially after the U.C. Postal Service issued it on 330 million stamps. More than any other work of art, Love became the icon of the peace and love generation. As both a declaration and an exhortation, it was ubiquitous. "It's become my logo," says Indiana. "But most people have no idea who did it. My name has just disappeared."

Indeed, the famous four-letter word did not spell success for Indiana. He milked it artistically and churned out endless variation on the theme in thousands of paintings, prints, and sculptures. But his failure to copyright the design meant that he reaped few financial rewards from its wildfire proliferation: the millions of unauthorized stickers, coasters, matchbox covers, tiles, lamps, earrings, buttons, key chains, hippie patches, and wastepaper baskets. Rather than receive royalties, Indiana was royally ripped off. "The only thing it didn't come out on was toilet paper," says Indiana sourly. "And I'm rather surprised about that."

Love was bad news for Indiana in the art world too. Although the good-looking young pop artist had been a hot item in New York since 1961, the visibility of his Love sign and his own permutations on it year after year overwhelmed his earlier work. Quickly tiring of the logo, the artist's peers judged its creator harshly as a crushing, repetitive bore. By the time he left New York in 1978 for the seclusion of a distant island off the coast of Maine, Indiana was considered a has-been.

Yet Love did succeed in turning its creator into a metaphor for his times. Having created the most enduring one-word expression of the sixties, Indiana saw it become carelessly commercialized in the decade that followed. And today—in the sexual revolution's darkest hour—Indiana is suddenly finding himself a victim of the conservative backlash. Love, in other words, may have been central to Robert Indiana's life, but it was also his undoing. Now love has found him again. And again it may undo him.

ON A QUIET DAY IN AUGUST LAST YEAR, DETECTIVE Ernest W. McIntosh of Rockland, Maine, armed himself with a search warrant, boarded the Knox County Coast Guard boat, and traveled fifteen miles across Penobscot Bay to the little island of Vinalhaven. McIntosh's destination was the Victorian mansion of one Robert E. Clark, age sixty-one, known to the outside world as Robert Indiana.

Inside the artist's three-story refuge, a former Odd Fellows lodge decked out with curios and memorabilia from the life and times of Indiana and of Maine alike, McIntosh and his men conducted a search and turned up their evidence. And by nightfall, they had their prey by their side, handcuffed and aboard the Coast Guard boat on its way back to the mainland. With Indiana was a portfolio of recent prints and love-inspired drawings, nine of them explicit studies of male genitals.

On arrival in Rockland, the artist was fingerprinted, photographed, and having refused to make a statement, released on \$300 bail. But the charges against him are plain and quite public: two criminal complaints of engaging a prostitute and one of patronizing the prostitution of a minor.



[[image - painting]]

American Dream #5 (1980, serigraph), a variation of Indiana's 1963 homage to Charles Demuth.

In his request for a search warrant, Detective McIntosh stated that two men, ages nineteen and twenty-one, had told him that Robert Indiana had repeatedly paid them amounts ranging from \$20 to \$200 to pose nude and engage in sex during the modeling sessions. One of the men told the detective that Indiana wanted to draw his genitals and that this had to oral sex. Moreover, such hanky-panky had allegedly been going on for years--ever since one of the men was an adolescent. One young man confessed that he "knew it was wrong but was doing it for the money." These accusations were leveled by him during the period in which he was being investigated for forging Indiana's checks.

[[image - group photograph]]

Left to right: Artists Jack Youngerman, Agnes Martin, Indiana, and Ellsworth Kelly and actress Delphine Seyrig, in 1958. Foreground: Youngerman and Seyrig's son, Duncan.

If convicted of the misdemeanor of engaging a prostitute, Indiana could face six months in jail and a fine of \$500. If he is found guilty of patronizing the prostitution of a minor, also a misdemeanor, he could be sentenced to 364 days in jail and fined \$1,000.

[[image - painting]]

AIDS (1987), by General Idea, one of the recent appropriations of Indiana's seminal work.

As an open homosexual in the tiny fishing village on Vinalhaven Island (population 1,200), Indiana stuck out like a sore thumb--ever

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