

# WHITNEY

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# PRESS RELEASE



## Whitney Museum Reassesses Career of Robert Indiana in a Major Retrospective

**New York, September 25, 2013**—The first major American museum retrospective devoted to the work of Robert Indiana will be presented by the Whitney Museum of American Art this fall. Organized by Whitney curator Barbara Haskell, the exhibition focuses on the powerful body of work created by Indiana over the past five decades, exploring his bold use of language, his continual questioning and dissection of American identity, and the multiple layers of personal history embedded in his art. The exhibition, *Robert Indiana: Beyond LOVE*, will be on view in the Whitney's fourth-floor Emily Fisher Landau Galleries from September 26, 2013, through January 5, 2014.

Known the world over for his iconic *LOVE*, Indiana (b. 1928) early on embraced a vocabulary of highway signs and roadside entertainments, combining words with images to create art that was dazzlingly bold and visually kinetic. In the early 1960s, he was central to the emergence of Pop art, along with Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, and Andy Warhol. Like these contemporaries, he shared a desire to both critique and celebrate post-war American culture. Using a populist, quintessentially American style, he addressed in his work many of the fundamental issues facing humanity, including love, death, sin, forgiveness, and racial injustice.

Joining simple declarative words with bold, hard-edge graphics allowed Indiana to embed multiple layers of autobiographical and cultural references into his art. Although visually dazzling on the surface, his imagery has a psychologically disquieting subtext; it draws on the myths, history, art, and literature of the United States to raise questions about American identity and American values. "Indiana's exploration of identity, racial injustice, and the illusion and disillusion of love give emotional poignancy and symbolic complexity to our ever-evolving understanding of the ambiguities of American democracy and the plight of the individual in the modern world," says curator Barbara Haskell.

The success of *LOVE* eclipsed to a great extent the range and breadth of Indiana's work. *Robert Indiana: Beyond LOVE* remedies this by placing well known works such as *EAT/DIE* (1962), *Exploding Numbers* (1964-66), and *LOVE* (1965) alongside more than seventy-five other works, from early pieces the artist made in 1955 to his *Ninth American Dream* (2001), the last piece in a series that has consumed him throughout his career. Also included are:

- Indiana's painted vertical wood sculptures, (called herms by the artist after anthropomorphic stone pillars in ancient Greece);
- his abstract geometric paintings from the late 1950s and early 1960s;
- his entire politically-charged Confederacy series, pinpointing sites of violent crimes against African Americans and civil rights workers;
- Indiana's rarely seen papier-collé collages of costumes that he designed for the Bicentennial production of Virgil Thomson's and Gertrude Stein's operatic collaboration *The Mother of Us All*;
- Indiana's series of paintings using texts drawn from the American writers Walt Whitman, Herman Melville, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow;
- paintings inspired by twentieth-century American masterworks by artists such as Joseph Stella, Charles Demuth, and Marsden Hartley.

By early 1960, the artist, known by then as Robert Indiana (having changed his name from Robert Clark in 1958), had begun to apply elementary words onto his vertical wooden sculptures or herms, using found stencils that had been employed in earlier times to affix trademarks and labels to commercial freight. The use of straightforward, everyday words allowed Indiana to work on multiple levels, creating works which were, on one hand, immediately understandable and direct and, on the other, akin to conceptually multilayered verbal-visual puzzles. "Indiana's marriage of language and hard-edge abstraction was audacious," says Haskell. "It was one thing to insinuate words into an overall composition or depict them with painterly brushstrokes, but to present them without mediation, in the style of advertisements, was unprecedented."

Indiana was thrust into the spotlight of the New York art world when Alfred Barr, director of the Museum of Modern Art, purchased *American Dream 1* in 1961, before Pop art had coalesced as a movement. Two years later, Indiana's status as one of the major artists of his generation was solidified by Dorothy Miller's inclusion of his work in her exhibition of rising talents, *Americans 1963*. By the time Indiana was commissioned by Philip Johnson to make a work for the New York State Pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair, he was considered one of the leading Pop artists of the day.

*LOVE*, with its stacked letters and tilted "O," is Indiana's best-known but also his most controversial work. In taking a commonplace word and transforming it into a powerfully resonant art object onto which viewers could project their own spiritual, erotic, and personal experiences and associations, Indiana created one of the most famous images in 20<sup>th</sup> century art. *LOVE* appeared at the height of the counter-cultural revolution and instantly became a talisman of sexual freedom, with massive numbers of commercial products bearing the image produced without the artist's permission. Over time, the plethora of objects bearing the *LOVE* logo, and Indiana's almost exclusive identification with the image, muted recognition of the complexities and range of his art.

A reassessment of Indiana's career has been underway for several years. With this reevaluation has come recognition of the poignancy and complexity of Indiana's work and its status as a precedent for the contemporary text-based art of younger artists such as Jenny Holzer, Mel Bochner, Glenn Ligon, Christopher Wool, and Barbara Kruger. Presenting the full sweep of Indiana's work, this exhibition provides audiences with the opportunity to revisit the work of an artist central to the narrative of the 1960s as well as to contemporary practice.

## **About the Artist**

Born Robert Clark in New Castle, Indiana, in 1928, Robert Indiana was raised by adoptive parents who struggled financially during the Depression. Aesthetically precocious, his talent was remarked upon as early as the first grade. At Arsenal Technical High School in Indianapolis, he worked in the style of American artists such as Reginald Marsh, Charles Sheeler, and Edward Hopper. After high school, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps in order to be able to take advantage of the G.I. Bill, under which he studied at Chicago's School of the Art Institute from 1949 to 1953. He moved to New York in the fall of 1954 and, after meeting Ellsworth Kelly, settled in Coenties Slip, at the southern tip of Manhattan, where he was closely associated with artists such as Agnes Martin, Lenore Tawney, Ann Wilson, Jack Youngerman, and Kelly himself. It was during this period, in 1958, that Indiana traded his surname – Clark – for a name that acknowledged his archetypically Midwestern American roots. Following his emergence in the 1960's as one of the leading Pop artists of his day, Indiana left New York in 1978 for the island of Vinalhaven, Maine, where he lives and works to this day.

*Following its Whitney presentation, the exhibition travels to San Antonio, Texas, to the McNay Art Museum, where it will be seen from February 5 to May 25, 2014.*

**Major support for *Robert Indiana: Beyond LOVE* is provided by Morgan Art Foundation.**

**Generous support is provided by Shirley and William Lehman, The Lunder Foundation, and the Robert B. Mayer Family.**

**Additional support is provided by The Gage Fund, Inc., Virginia and Herbert Lust, the Overbrook Foundation, and Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel.**

## **Catalogue**

In conjunction with *Robert Indiana: Beyond LOVE*, the Whitney and Yale University Press are publishing a fully-illustrated catalogue by Barbara Haskell. In addition to a chronology, exhibition history, and bibliography, the book includes essays by McNay Art Museum chief curator Rene Paul Barilleaux and independent scholar Sasha Nicholas, as well as the transcript of roundtable discussions on Indiana's art by Thomas Crow, Robert Storr, John Wilmerding, Robert Pincus-Witten, Allison Unruh, Susan Elizabeth Ryan and Bill Katz. The catalogue also contains an appendix of statements, interviews, and writings by Indiana.

## **About the Whitney**

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the world's leading museum of twentieth-century and contemporary art of the United States. Focusing particularly on works by living artists, the Whitney is celebrated for presenting important exhibitions and for its renowned collection, which comprises over 19,000 works by more than 2,900 artists. With a history of exhibiting the most promising and influential artists and provoking intense debate, the Whitney Biennial, the Museum's signature exhibition, has become the most important survey of the state of contemporary art in the United States. In addition to its landmark exhibitions, the Museum is known internationally for events and educational programs of exceptional significance and as a center for research, scholarship, and conservation.

Founded by sculptor and arts patron Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in 1930, the Whitney was first housed on West 8th Street in Greenwich Village. The Museum relocated in 1954 to West 54th Street and, in 1966, inaugurated its present home, designed by Marcel Breuer, at 945 Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side. While its vibrant program of exhibitions and events continues uptown, the Whitney is moving forward with a new building project, designed by Renzo Piano, in downtown Manhattan. Located at the corner of Gansevoort and Washington Streets in the Meatpacking District, at the southern entrance to the High Line, the new building, which has generated immense momentum and support, will enable the Whitney to vastly increase the size and scope of its exhibition and programming space. Ground was broken on the new building in May 2011, and it is projected to open to the public in 2015.

## Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art

Hopper Drawing	Through October 6 2013
T.J. Wilcox: In the Air	Through February 9 2014
Robert Indiana: Beyond Love	Sept 26 2013-Jan 5 2014
Rituals of Rented Island: Object Theater, Loft Performance, and the New Psychodrama—Manhattan, 1970–1982	Oct 31 2013-February 2 2014
Steichen in the 1920s and 1930s: A Recent Acquisition	Opens December 6 2013
2014 Whitney Biennial	March 7-May 25 2014
Jeff Koons	June 27-October 19 2014

The Whitney Museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue at 75th Street, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. General admission: \$20. Full-time students and visitors ages 19–25 and 62 & over: \$16. Visitors 18 & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 6–9 p.m. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit [whitney.org](http://whitney.org).

Image credit:

Robert Indiana (b. 1928), EAT/DIE, 1962. Oil on canvas, 2 panels, 72 × 60 in. (182.9 × 152.4 cm) each. Private Collection. ©2013 Morgan Art Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York