



April 28, 2016

ROBERT INDIANA



AMERICAN
BORN 1928

Robert Indiana (born Robert Clark, 1928, New Castle, Indiana, USA) is a leading figure of American Pop art, whose bold graphic designs, often incorporating words such as 'Love' and 'Hope', have achieved international renown. In 1963 he declared that Pop art had replaced Abstract Expressionism in 'the eternal What-Is-New-in-American-Painting shows' and he gave it 'ten years perhaps'.

Following military service, Indiana entered the Art Institute of Chicago in 1949. After studying in Maine and Edinburgh, he settled in New York where he produced sculptures from rough pieces of wood embellished with found objects such as metal wheels, as well as stencilled letters and coloured lines reminiscent of street signs. *Zig* (1960) also manages to evoke the shape of classical Greek herms, even though the depiction of the male anatomy is reductive, to say the least. In this way, Indiana's work combined references to everyday life, high culture and the scatological.

During the 1960s Indiana was a key member of the Pop art movement, participating in the seminal *New Realists* show of 1962 at the Sidney Janis Gallery. Although resembling dials, signs and the other ubiquitous symbols of Pop, Indiana's crisply painted compositions also reflected the hard-edged abstraction developed by his friend Ellsworth Kelly. As Indiana put it, 'Pop is either hard-core or hard-edge. I am hard-edge Pop.'

The precise technique and stencilling of images such as *Eat/Die* (1962) masked their personal significance (referring to his parents' deaths), while others allude directly to the painting *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold* (1928), by Charles Demuth, which inspired Indiana to incorporate the same number into such works as *The Demuth American Dream NO.5* (1963). The obscure numerology is a classic example of an esoteric meaning lurking behind a clear, graphic image. To some extent, the same could be said of the painting *Love* (1966), which has been reproduced in numerous formats, including large metal sculptures and a postage stamp. For all its apparent simplicity, the word, both a noun and a verb, an actual experience and an exhortation, is ambivalent. It is both a celebration of love and a reflection of the politics of the period.

Indiana remains an articulate and perceptive figure, responding to the attack on the World Trade Center in New York with *Afghanistan* (2001), and the American-led invasion of Iraq with the *Peace* series (2003-4). Few artists have represented more powerfully the optimism, naivety and perils embodied in the American Dream.

WHERE TO SEE INDIANA'S WORK

- Indianapolis Museum of Art
- Miami University Art Museum, Oxford, Ohio
- Museum of Modern Art, New York
- Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

DID YOU KNOW?

Indiana lived in more than 20 different houses with his parents, an experience reflected in *Mother and Father* (1963). Eventually, Indiana's father left with another woman and his mother got into her car and scoured the countryside with a '38 revolver the evening that he left. Indiana's painting presents the couple 'totally unaware of the sad trip ahead'.