

## Robert Indiana: A Sculpture Retrospective

June 16–September 23, 2018

1905 Building, South Galleries and Sculpture Court

This exhibition explores the more than five-decade career of one of America's most beloved artists, Robert Indiana (American, 1928–2018). A selective survey of Indiana's sculpture, it also includes numerous paintings, prints, and drawings, highlighting how Indiana's thinking in visual form crossed different media.

This quintessentially American artist returned to frequently autobiographical motifs, symbols, and imagery often after many decades of quiet reflection and rumination, building a corpus of work that ever more meaningfully reflected what it meant to be an American artist—and what it meant to be Robert Indiana—as the years passed.

While *LOVE* will likely always remain the artist's greatest contribution in the public imagination, his work beyond and apart from this memorable image places Indiana among the great American artists of the second half of the twentieth century. This exhibition introduces lesser-known late works—the Vinalhaven Woods, bronze editions of sculptures from different eras in his career, and the marble *LOVEs*—to make the case for the breadth and import of Indiana's achievement.

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This small construction is among Indiana's earliest sculptural works and introduces many elements of his later practice, including the prominent use of white gesso and the incorporation of rusted metal found objects. The circle and diamond shapes also find echoes in Indiana's later work.

*Soul*, 1960

Gesso, oil, and iron on wood with iron-and-wooden wheels

Private Collection



Indiana was raised in the Christian Science faith, and although he was not exceptionally religious, many ideas introduced there—for example, the circle as a symbol of eternity or the integral relationship between love and God—found their way into works, including *Soul*, through the decades.

During 1958, Indiana divided much of his time between an administrative job at New York's Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine and work in his studio on *Stavrosis* (Greek for crucifixion): a nineteen-foot-long mural painted on forty-four separate sheets of paper he had pieced together. It was only after completing *Stavrosis* that the artist rechristened himself Robert Indiana, taking the name of his home state as his own.

*Womb*, 1960

Oil on wood and iron wheels

Private Collection



Indiana frequently reworked his herm sculptures prior to completing them. *Womb* initially had four small wheels on its front face, which were ultimately replaced with four small nails.

*Hole*, 1960 (cast 1991)  
Painted bronze, edition 5/8 and 2 APs  
Private Collection



*Eat*, 1962 (cast 1991)  
Painted bronze, edition 7/8 and 2 APs  
Private Collection



The word “eat,” which along with “err,” “hug,” and “die” appears repeatedly in Indiana’s work, spoke to multiple different memories and emotions for the artist: “eat” was his mother’s dying word, but Indiana also enthused that “the happiest moments of my childhood . . . were these big family reunions where eating was the most important thing.” Hand-painted signs for what he later described as “all those hundreds of thousands of grubby bars and roadside cafes, alternate spiritual homes of the American” were a backdrop to Indiana’s nomadic childhood, and his mother waitressed in a variety of small diners.

The “25” on the front face of the work refers to 25 Coenties Slip, Indiana’s home and studio between 1957 and 1965. During this transformative time, he developed several significant friendships with his neighbors, including the artist Ellsworth Kelly, and went from a virtual unknown to one of the leading figures of the burgeoning Pop art movement.

*Slip*, 1961

Oil and gesso on wood with iron wheel  
Private Collection Midwest



A number of ginkgo trees grew in Jeanette Park across the street from Indiana's Coenties Slip home and studio. He later recalled that "in the fall the solidly paved asphalt park is tempered with their yellow leaves." Indiana, who had cast off his old identity as Robert Clark in the fall of 1958, found parallels in this natural process. He also took the double ginkgo leaf—with its two halves united by a delicate stem—as an emblem of his relationship with the artist Ellsworth Kelly, his partner and Coenties Slip colleague, and the motif appears in a number of related paintings, including *Ginkgo* and *The Sweet Mystery*, on view nearby.

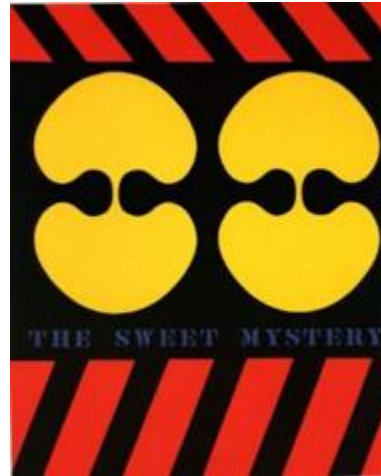
*Ginkgo*, 1959

Gesso on wood panel  
Private Collection



Among the earliest works in this exhibition, *Ginkgo* presents the abstract form of two ginkgo leaves joined at their stems that Indiana conceived in 1957 or '58 and that occupied his imagination for several years; it appears in a number of other works in this gallery. Beginning in the mid-2000s, Indiana returned to this form in a series of works bearing the Chinese character for love, *ai* (爱). In so doing, Indiana united this abstract motif from his earliest mature work with the "greatest preoccupation" of his career: love.

*The Sweet Mystery*, 1959–62  
Oil on canvas  
Private Collection



*The Sweet Mystery* is among Indiana's first paintings featuring stenciled words; he had previously used stencils on his herm sculptures, such as those in this room. The yellow forms at the painting's center are abstractions of ginkgo leaves, like those Indiana saw in the park across the street from his studio. This stylized double ginkgo leaf, with two leaves paired at the stem, is a frequent presence in Indiana's early work, and he associated it with his relationship with his Coenties Slip neighbor, the artist Ellsworth Kelly. As a gay artist in the late fifties and early sixties, Indiana frequently deployed subject matter that could be interpreted at face value or, simultaneously, as a coded reference to his own personal experience and identity; the black-and-red caution stripes on this and other works may allude to Indiana's circumspect approach to meaning in his art. Significantly, the painting's title references an early-twentieth-century song that identifies "the sweet mystery" as love.

*Marine Works*, 1960–62  
Oil on wood with iron-and-wooden wheels  
JP Morgan Chase Art Collection



*Marine Works* began its life as a loading ramp in one of Lower Manhattan's waterfront warehouses, which, by the time Indiana and other artists moved into the neighborhood in the mid-1950s, were increasingly being bought and razed by developers. Indiana eventually titled the

construction after something even closer to home: a shipping supply company called Marine Works that had once occupied the building where he lived and worked. During this period, Indiana was preoccupied with how his personal and physical geographies wove together, and the body of related works in this room speaks to his exploration of self and place.

*The Slips*, 1959–60  
Oil on Homasote  
Private Collection



While the southern tip of Manhattan today is home to the financial district, shipping was the focus of the neighborhood during the early period of European settlement. The area was once punctuated with slips where ships docked, and the names of some of these historical slips are stenciled around the eight circles that make up *The Slips*. By the start of the twentieth century all of the slips—including Coenties Slip where Indiana lived and worked—had been filled in, becoming streets and parks. This painting highlights Indiana’s practice of exploring his personal geography in many of his works.

*Mate*, 1960–62  
Oil on wood with iron-and-wooden wheels  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
Gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc., 66.28



“Mate” was a commonly used term at the Seaman’s Institute across the street from Indiana’s studio where he regularly ate and bathed (his loft lacked hot water), and he later recalled that he

routinely had to enlist the help of his own “mates” in hoisting scavenged beams—like the one used for *Mate*—up five flights of stairs to his studio. However, the artist also considered red and yellow, which dominate this work, to be “the most raucous and unruly color combination,” and it’s likely that he also intended an allusion to “mate” as a verb, signifying connection or copulation.

*The Calumet*, 1971

Color screen print on white Schoellers Parole paper, XX/XXV from an edition of 200 plus 25 artist's proofs and 5 printer's proofs  
Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery  
Gift of Multiples, Inc., NY, 1971



The text in this print, based on a 1961 painting, comes from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha*. A “calumet” is a kind of Native American peace pipe, like the one shared by representatives of the tribes called together by Gitche Manito, a mythical peace-bringer in Longfellow’s narrative. In his composition, Indiana visually brings the names of various tribes together within the unifying confines of a large circle emblazoned with the poet’s verse. “Calumet” is also the name of a township in the artist’s home state of Indiana, and he was drawn to the connection between his personal biography and this grand national narrative.

*Chief*, 1962

Oil and iron on wood with iron-and-wooden wheels  
Private Collection

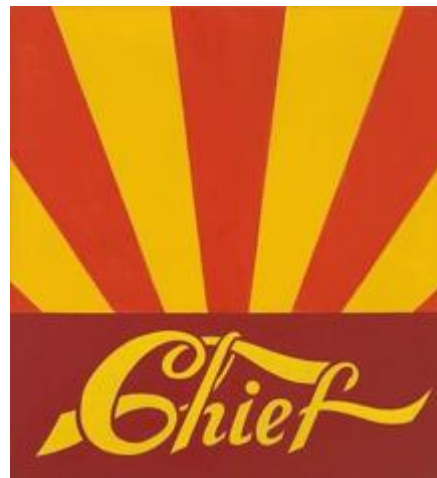


*Chief* was conceived as a pendant herm sculpture to the 1961 “literary painting” *The Calumet* (a print version of which is on view nearby). *Chief*’s antique wheels, phallic peg, and red-and-yellow caution stripes recur in other works of the period. Indiana noted that the narrowness of the wooden beams he recycled for his sculptures, including *Chief*, limited the length of the words he was able to stencil on their surfaces—“Chief” is the longest.

*Chief*, 1962 (cast 1991)  
Painted bronze, edition 2/8 and 2 APs  
Private Collection



*Chief*, 1969  
Oil on canvas  
Private Collection



This diminutive painting complements the adjacent sculpture of the same title and also references the artist’s 1965 meeting of the United States’ Commander-in-Chief, President Lyndon B. Johnson. Indiana largely avoided the explicit references to consumer culture common in the work of his Pop art peers, and the citation of the Coca-Cola logo in this painting, perhaps a comment on the commodification of Native American culture in the 1960s, is a rarity.

*USA/EAT*, 1965  
Acrylic on canvas  
Private Collection



*Meteor*, 2000  
Gesso, oil, and iron on wood  
Private Collection



The small sculpture *Meteor* was likely conceived as a belated pendant to the nearby painting *Year of Meteors*. In the early 1960s, Indiana planned that each of his major paintings would have a complementary sculpture, an idea he soon abandoned. The Walt Whitman poem “Year of Meteors“ to which the painting pays homage features both meteors and comets in its closing line, and Indiana made another sculpture entitled *Comet* the same year he made *Meteor*.

*Year of Meteors*, 1961

Oil on canvas

Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery

Gift of Seymour H. Knox, Jr., 1962



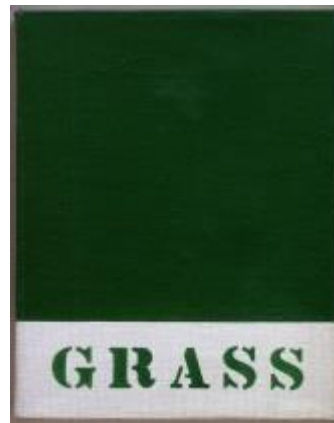
*Year of Meteors* is one of several “literary paintings” of the early 1960s. The painting’s central geometric motif, a compass rose with eight points and two concentric circles, provides the architecture for passages from Walt Whitman’s poem “Year of Meteors,” published in *Leaves of Grass*. In his poem, Whitman reflects on events of 1859 and 1860, including the passage of the ship the Great Eastern (an engineering marvel) through New York Harbor, the presidential election of Abraham Lincoln, and a rare meteor procession. The blue-green color language of Indiana’s painting brings to mind his other blue-and-green works, such as *Leaves*, on view nearby, which was the last painting produced in his Coenties Slip studio.

*Year of Meteors* was acquired by the Albright-Knox from the artist’s first commercial gallery exhibition in 1962. The painting that served as the poster for this exhibition is on view in the adjacent gallery.

*Grass*, 1962

Oil on canvas

Greenwich Fine Arts, Inc.



*Leaves*, 1965  
Oil on canvas  
Collection of the McNay Art Museum  
Gift of the Tobin Foundation



*Leaves* depicts a dracaena plant that was in the artist's studio, and it references the plant drawings of Indiana's friend and Coenties Slip neighbor Ellsworth Kelly. Not long after completing this painting, Indiana "leaves" his home and studio at 25 Coenties Slip, which was slated for demolition. *Leaves* might also be viewed as an oblique reference to the poet Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and as an addendum to the artist's literary series.

The composition of *Leaves*—an image framed by a circle with its title stenciled below—mimics that Indiana deployed for a series of paintings of the cardinal numbers in 1965, and *Leaves* shares the signature blue-green color pairing he assigned to the number two.

*The Melville Triptych*, 1962  
Oil on canvas  
Private Collection

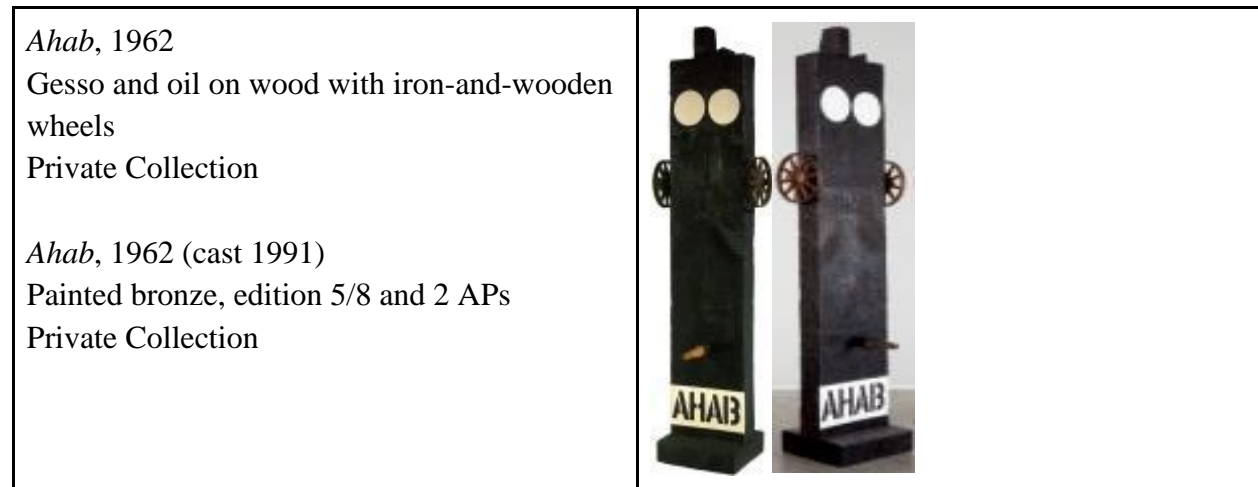


Indiana dedicated this composition to author Herman Melville, and the text is drawn from Melville's most famous novel, *Moby Dick*: "There now is your insular city of the Manhattos. . . . Circumambulate the city on a dreamy Sabbath afternoon. Go from Corlears Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall northward. What do you see?—Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries. Some leaning against the spiles; some seated upon the pier-heads; some looking over the bulwarks."

In this passage and elsewhere, Melville evoked the very streets and neighborhoods in which Indiana would immerse himself a century later. Writers like Melville and Walt Whitman

resonated with Indiana on multiple levels: for their groundbreaking expressions of the American experience but also for their paeans to seafaring, which were widely read within the queer community as coded investigations of same-sex desire.

*The Melville Triptych* is part of a larger body of work Indiana based on his engagement with Melville, including *Ahab*, *Call Me Ishmael*, and *Call Me Indiana*, on view nearby.



Indiana named this sculpture after the antihero protagonist of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, whose fanatical devotion to killing the white whale of the book's title drives much of its ultimately tragic narrative. *Ahab* and the adjacent *The Melville Triptych* were Indiana's first intentional painting and sculpture pair. *Ahab* is one of eight herms—the artist's word for his early wooden assemblages—Indiana selected to be cast in bronze in the late 1980s. Here, the herm and the bronze translation are put in close proximity in order to present the remarkably close relationship between the two.



The line “Call me Ishmael” launches the narrator’s wild tale in Herman Melville’s 1851 novel *Moby Dick*. The line also seems to call into question the narrator’s identity—why does he ask the reader to call him Ishmael rather than stating his name is Ishmael? Indiana’s sculpture of the same name is paired with a similar sculpture entitled *Call Me Indiana*, which references the artist rechristening himself as Robert Indiana in 1958.

The columns that form the bases in these two sculptures, like many of the materials in Indiana’s early work, were scavenged from warehouses being knocked down in his neighborhood. These were originally part of masts of tall ships, later repurposed into building posts, and finally integrated into sculptures that reference one of the best known novels about life on the sea.

*Stable*, 1962  
Oil on canvas  
Private Collection



Indiana created this painting as the design for the poster advertising his first solo exhibition at New York’s Stable Gallery. At the time, the Stable Gallery was largely responsible for bringing the artists defining the nascent Pop art movement to the attention of the art world and general public. Indiana’s 1962 exhibition was immediately followed by a presentation by Andy Warhol—his first in New York—and preceded by a solo show by Marisol, both of whom would become Indiana’s friends. Seymour H. Knox, Jr., the Albright-Knox’s great patron, provided funds for the acquisition of *Year of Meteors*, on view in the adjacent gallery, from Indiana’s 1962 Stable Gallery exhibition.

*ART*, 1972–2001

Polychrome aluminium, edition 4/5 and 2 APs

Private Collection



Words were one of artist Robert Indiana’s abiding preoccupations during his nearly six-decade career. Indiana spent much of the later 1960s working through variations on what would become his best-known work, *LOVE*, and *ART* took a similar hold on the artist’s imagination during the 1970s. Indiana debuted what would become his signature composition of “ART”—with the *A* and adjacent *T* seeming to support a tilted *R*—in a poster for the 1970 exhibition *American Art Since 1960* at the Princeton University Art Museum. Later, he would go on to reimagine the design in prints, paintings, and sculptures in a range of sizes and color pairings.

*LOVE*, 1966–98

Polychrome aluminium, AP 2 from an edition of 5 and 2 APs

Private Collection



*LOVE* is artist Robert Indiana’s best-known work and one of the twentieth-century’s most iconic works of art. Beginning in the mid-1960s, the artist reimaged this distinctive stacked square in media ranging from paintings to postage stamps, and the motif has been subject to innumerable unlicensed appropriations. Especially early in his career, Indiana thought of himself primarily as a poet and a painter, and words are a key component in nearly all his work. However, “love,” according to the artist, “has been my greatest preoccupation.”

*Four Star Love*, 1961

Oil on canvas

Portland Museum of Art, Maine

Gift of Todd R. Brassner in memory of Doug Rosen, 1999.7



This is Indiana's earliest painting featuring the word "love" and is one of a number of small paintings completed during this period featuring simple words, numbers, and symbols. He remarked that the stacked composition of the four stars in this painting would inspire his distinctive stacking of *LOVE*'s four letters in later paintings, prints, and sculptures.

*Star*, 1962

Oil and gesso on wood with iron wheels

Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery

Gift of Seymour H. Knox, Jr., 1963



*Star* is among Indiana's earliest assemblages, or sculptures made using found materials. The area near Indiana's home and studio on Coenties Slip was well past its heyday as a vibrant port when Indiana moved there in 1957, and the demolition of many of the neighborhood's disused warehouses provided fruitful grounds for scavenging. One of his most significant finds was a set of die-cut, brass stencils, which he would go on to use to paint numbers, letters, and other personally significant symbols on his repurposed beams.

Stars feature prominently in Indiana's work across the decades—including the paintings *Stable* and *Four Star Love*, also on view in this gallery—and over time, the star became a personal symbol of the artist. For example, a single large star defines the center of the paintings and prints of Indiana's extensive *Decade Autoportrait* series, including *Decade: Autoportrait 1961*, on view elsewhere in this exhibition.

*LOVE*, 1964

Frottage and colored pencil on paper  
Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas



These two colored pencil rubbings are the earliest instances of what would become Indiana's distinctive stacking of the word "love." As he later explained, "The word *LOVE* got to be the way it is because I have a kind of a passion about symmetry and the dividing of things into equal parts . . . [and] those four letters best fit a square if the square is squared by that particular arrangement."

*Hug*, 1962

Oil on canvas  
Private Collection



*Hug* is one of several small-scale paintings Indiana made at a time when he could not afford large canvases. Over the next few years, the word "hug"—coupled with the word "err" and alongside "eat" and "die"—would come to the fore as a central element of Indiana's American Dream theme.

*Column Hug*, 1964

Gesso on wood

Private Collection

*Column Love*, 1964

Gesso on wood

Private Collection



In 1963 and 1964, Indiana created a series of columnar sculptures, stenciling around their circumferences words such as “love,” “hug,” “eat,” “err,” and “die.” These columns were first used as masts of nineteenth-century ships and later recycled as supports for warehouses in Lower Manhattan. When these warehouses were demolished, Indiana scavenged the columns from demolition sites and deployed them as sculpture.

*Four Panel LOVE*, 1972

Color screen print on four sheets of heavy white wove paper, edition 1/150

Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery

Gift of Seymour H. Knox, Jr., 1973



*LOVE* is among the most recognizable artworks of the twentieth century. Indiana first executed this square stacked-letter format in a series of pencil rubbings in 1964 (two of which are on view nearby), and his design first achieved widespread distribution as a Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Christmas card in 1965. The artist did not copyright his design, and by 1966, the year he conceived his first *LOVE* sculpture, the image was already being widely pirated. Indiana revisited *LOVE* throughout his career in a variety of media, scales, and color combinations, such as this four-panel, red, white and blue screen print of 1972. Outside the museum’s entrance is an eight-foot, polychromed aluminum *LOVE* in the classic red, blue, and green color combination that Indiana originally used for MoMA’s Christmas card.

*AMOR*, 1998–2009  
Red Travertine  
Private Collection



*LOVE*, 1966–2009  
Blue Bahia granite  
Private Collection



*LOVE*, 1966–2009  
Verde Malachite  
Private Collection



*LOVE*, 1966–2007  
Bianco marble  
Private Collection



*LOVE*, 1966–2006  
Calacatta Oro marble  
Private Collection



*LOVE*, 1966–2001  
Bianco di Carrara marble  
Private Collection



*LOVE*, 1966–2005  
Rosato Portogallo marble  
Private Collection



*LOVE*, 1966–2014  
Rosso di Mexico marble  
Private Collection



*LOVE*, 1966–2006  
Portoro marble  
Private Collection



*LOVE*, 1966–2006  
Nero Belgio marble  
Private Collection



Indiana's project to realize his *LOVE* sculpture in marble was inspired by the prominence of marble in the history of art and the longevity of stone as a medium. The full project, begun around 2000 and continuing for more than a dozen years, includes approximately fifty individual works in a variety of sizes and stone types from around the world. Indiana selected each block for its specific coloration and veining, and master craftsmen in a workshop in Pietrasanta, Italy, carved his selections. Indiana originally conceived the works in sizes of 50, 100, and 150 centimeters, but the nature of individual blocks ultimately governed the specific scale that could be achieved, a limitation Indiana happily embraced. Inscribed on each work is the date the *LOVE* sculpture was originally conceived (1966) along with the date the particular marble realization was completed. This exhibition is the first public presentation of Indiana's marble *LOVEs*.

*AHAVA*, 1977–2004  
Stainless steel, edition 2/6  
Private Collection



In 1977, Indiana told an interviewer, “I really would like to be able to communicate with everyone on the face of the world.” That same year, he would design his first non-English *LOVE* based on the Hebrew word for “love,” *AHAVA*. Indiana would go on to create a design based on the Spanish and Portuguese word for “love,” *AMOR*, an example of which in marble is on view nearby. As with his English-language *LOVE*, Indiana reimagined *AHAVA* and *AMOR* in many materials and sizes. The artist stated that *AHAVA* was a personal favorite among his sculptures.

*Decade: Autoportrait 1961*, 1972–77  
Oil on canvas  
Collection of the McNay Art Museum  
Gift of Robert L. B. Tobin



In the early 1970s, Indiana began a series of paintings that reviewed personally important occasions and places of the 1960s year by year. A number of signs and symbols that recur throughout the series are superimposed at the center of *Decade: Autoportrait 1961*. The number 1 that extends from top to bottom of the canvas, for example, symbolizes the singular identity of the artist, as does the large star, which Indiana adopted as a personal symbol. The star is inscribed within a circle, which also provides the boundaries for a dodecahedron (ten-sided shape) that signifies the ten years of the decade; the smaller number 1 at the center marks the individual year the work commemorates. “Bar” refers to Alfred Barr, the influential Museum of

Modern Art curator behind Indiana's first museum acquisition in 1961, which helped launch his career.

*Decade: Autoportrait 1969, 2001–14*  
Serigraph  
Private Collection



During the 1970s, Indiana ruminated on events of the previous decade year by year in a series of “autoportraits.” Each painting or print includes words, numbers, and symbols related to his biography. The three interlocking links, for example, are the insignia of the Odd Fellows, the organization that built the Star of Hope lodge that Indiana first visited in 1969 and to which he would permanently relocate in 1978.

*Eternal Hexagon* from the portfolio “Ten Works X Ten Painters,” 1964  
Color screen print on off-white Mohawk paper, edition 238/500 and 10 APs  
Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery  
Gift of Frederic P. Norton, 1999



Indiana associated the number six with his father. He chose this composition as his contribution to a 1964 portfolio of works by various artists entitled “Ten Works X Ten Painters.”

*Two*, 1968

Color serigraph on white Schoeller's Parole paper

Private Collection



Indiana claimed two as his favorite number, “my own personal number.” He explained, “My studio that I lived at . . . longest of all in New York was at 2 Spring Street on The Bowery, and it does require two for love, and love has been my greatest preoccupation.” This combination of personal geography and emotional associations loaded into a common symbol is characteristic of Indiana’s artistic practice. His selection of blue and green as the color combination for his favorite number adds an additional layer of symbolic meaning to this chromatic pairing elsewhere in his work.

*Two*, 1960–62 (cast 1991)

Painted bronze, edition 7/8 and 2 APs

Private Collection



*Four*, 1962

Oil and gesso on wood with wire and iron wheels

Private Collection



*Five*, 1984

Painted wood ceiling beam, wood dowel, wood block, and metal wheels

Smithsonian American Art Museum

Gift of the Artist



In 1978, Indiana permanently relocated from New York City to Vinalhaven, a small island town off the coast of Maine. He took with him a number of wood beams he had scavenged from the area around Coenties Slip during the early 1960s. In the early 1980s, Indiana returned to these materials and to making constructions after a nearly twenty-year hiatus. This work was first shown on the occasion of a Smithsonian museum survey of his early wood sculptures, and it was specifically conceived as a pair for his 1963 painting *The Figure Five* in the Smithsonian's collection. The sculpture and painting are part of a larger series of homages to Charles Demuth's *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold*, 1928, which was one of Indiana's favorite paintings.

*Exploding Numbers*, 1964–66

Oil on canvas

Private Collection



Numbers were one of Indiana's abiding preoccupations—he linked his fascination to an itinerant childhood in which he lived in twenty-one houses by the time he was seventeen—and he developed a complex system linking the numbers one through nine and zero to human life stages. He has remarked that “four is my least favorite number, it's very square; also, in the life of man it represents adolescence and adolescence is certainly one of the more obnoxious phases of one's life,” and elsewhere he has referred to yellow and red as “the most raucous and unruly color combination.”

*The Demuth American Dream No. 5*, 1963

Oil on canvas

Collection Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Gift from the Women's Committee Fund,

1964



Each of the five panels in *The Demuth American Dream No. 5* features a similar design, and taken together, this imposing painting packs considerable graphic punch. The central panel provides the title and date of the work as well as the artist's year of birth, and the four surrounding panels are devoted to the words “hug,” “eat,” “err,” and “die,” marking the first time that Indiana brought together these four words that, to him, encapsulated the human experience. The painting lies at the numerical center of Indiana's nine American Dream paintings, a project that extended from 1961 to 2000, and it is also the masterpiece of a 1963 suite of five paintings the artist made in homage to American artist Charles Demuth's *I Saw the Figure Five in Gold*, Indiana's favorite painting in The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Demuth's painting is itself an

homage to and conceptual portrait of the poet William Carlos Williams, whose poem “The Great Figure” inspired Demuth’s work.

*Four Numbers Summing Thirty*, 1963  
Oil on canvas  
Collection of the McNay Art Museum  
Gift of Robert L. B. Tobin



*The American Dream*, 1992  
Gesso, oil, and wood on wood with iron wheels  
Private Collection



For Indiana, the words “hug,” “err,” “eat,” and “die” encapsulated the breadth of the endlessly optimistic struggle to achieve the American Dream. Indiana had been intrigued since his youth by the American Dream as an obsessive “ cliché which seems to affect everybody” and referred to his father as “the American Dreamer . . . who never quite got there” during the artist’s Depression-era childhood. However, seeing a performance of Edward Albee’s unsettling one-act play *The American Dream* in 1961 directly spurred Indiana to begin what would become a nine-part series of paintings devoted to the subject (one of these, *The Demuth American Dream No. 5*, is on view in this exhibition). The American Dream theme lay at the heart of Indiana’s artistic practice, and this sculpture, which complements the painting series, may be regarded as a conceptual self-portrait.

*The American Dream*, 1992 (cast 2016)  
Painted bronze, edition 1/3 and 1 AP  
Private Collection



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*Icarus*, 1992  
Oil, wire, and iron on wood  
Private Collection



In Greek mythology, Icarus was the son of Daedalus, an inventor who crafted wings of feathers and wax to aid in his and his son's escape from captivity. However, Icarus failed to heed his father's warning not to fly too close to the sun, and the sun melted his wings, causing him to fall into the sea and drown.

Indiana referred to his early sculptures as "herms"—a reference to a type of ancient Greek sculpture—and later in life he returned to specific mythological sources as inspiration.

*KvF*, 1991 (cast 2018)  
Painted bronze, edition 2/3 and 1 AP  
Private Collection



*KvF* is among the masterpieces of the Vinalhaven Woods, the constructions Indiana completed in the decades after moving to Vinalhaven, Maine. *KvF* is both a pair to the nearby sculpture *Mars* and a pendant construction for the *Hartley Elegies* paintings of 1989–94, three of which are on view here. *KvF*'s heavy-duty iron wheels replace the more spindly wheels of earlier sculptures, and its sturdy assemblage elements, fortified base, and monumental central column embody a physical expansion of Indiana's assemblage practice.

The sculpture memorializes the German military officer Karl von Freyburg, who was killed at the age of twenty-four in the opening days of World War I. Von Freyburg was the close friend and likely lover of the American modernist painter Marsden Hartley, who himself memorialized von Freyburg's loss in an extensive series of paintings created between 1913 and 1915 (one of these is on view downstairs in the 1962 Building). This body of Hartley's work inspired Indiana's later *Elegies* and this pendant sculpture.

*KvF II (Hartley Elegy)*, 1989–94  
Oil on canvas  
Private Collection



*KvF X (Hartley Elegy)*, 1989–94  
Oil on canvas  
Private Collection



*KvF XV (Hartley Elegy)*, 1989–94  
Oil on canvas  
Private Collection



Indiana's magisterial *Hartley Elegies*, a series of eighteen paintings, was inspired by Marsden Hartley's war paintings of 1913–15 and by Hartley's relationship with the fallen soldier Karl von Freyburg. Indiana borrowed the red and white circles, black triangles, stars, and banners that are present throughout the *Elegies* from Hartley's earlier series. He also invested the series with

affinities he shared with Hartley as a quintessentially American artist and Vinalhaven resident, as well as with his own autobiographical associations. For example, in *KvF X* '14 and '43 refer to von Freyburg's and Hartley's years of death, respectively, and "Friendship, Love, and Truth" is the motto of the Odd Fellows, the organization that built the Star of Hope lodge in which Indiana lived for the last three decades of his life. Indiana began the *Hartley Elegies* on October 7, 1989, in commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of von Freyburg's death.

*Mars*, 1990 (cast 2016)  
Painted bronze, edition 1/3 and 1 AP  
Private Collection



*Mars*, like *Thoth* and *Icarus*, on view nearby, is one of the constructions Indiana created after returning to assemblage-based sculpture in the mid-1980s after a nearly twenty-year hiatus. Like his herms of the early 1960s, works like *Mars* incorporate found objects, evoking Indiana's sense of place at a particular moment in his life. While the early herms incorporate items collected in Indiana's Lower Manhattan neighborhood, the later constructions often feature farm implements culled from the area around Indiana's home in Vinalhaven, a small island town off the coast of Maine. Here, the pitchfork and brush axes on the sculpture's sides may coincidentally allude to Mars's role as a god of war and agriculture in Roman mythology. However, "Mars" is probably an abbreviated reference to Marsden Hartley, the great American early modernist painter and notable Maine resident. Indiana later created the sculpture *KvF*, which commemorates Hartley's friend and likely lover, the young German soldier Karl von Freyburg, as a pair for *Mars*.

*Thoth*, 1985

Gesso, oil, and iron on wood with iron-and-wooden wheels

Private Collection



*Thoth* takes its name from an Ancient Egyptian deity that was often depicted with the head of an ibis: a wading bird with a beak that looks somewhat like the weathered piece of wood attached to the front of this sculpture. In Egyptian mythology, Thoth maintained the balance between good and evil and was associated with the judgment of the dead. Embraced by the Greeks as an equivalent of Hermes, Thoth was also credited with the invention of writing—including the alphabet and numbers—astronomy, mathematics, and numerous other domains of knowledge.

*USA*, 1996–98 (cast 2016)

Painted bronze, edition 1/3 and 1 AP

Private Collection

*USA*, 1996–98

Oil, animal skull, and iron on wood

Private Collection



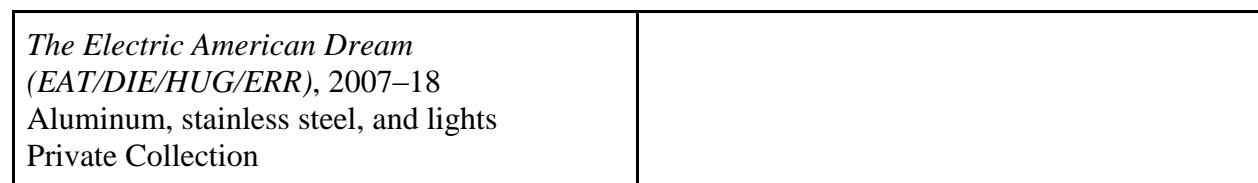
Throughout his career, Indiana identified himself as an American artist, and he emphatically embraced the roadside folk art tradition of the American Southwest in this later sculpture, *USA*—here presented in both its original form and its bronze “translation.” Indiana used “USA” as a motif in several paintings of the 1960s and '70s—including *USA/EAT*, on the wall behind these

two sculptures—pairing it with other words and motifs, such as “FUN,” “666,” and his four-word American Dream theme.

The bronze translation of *USA* was completed at Kunstgeisserei in St. Gallen, Switzerland, one of the world’s leading foundries for contemporary art. Indiana’s translations are among the most complex bronze works of the contemporary era. He sought to achieve a remarkable degree of verisimilitude in each painted bronze, translating all the sculpture’s various elements from their original materials into the long-lasting metal.



This small sculpture is among a series of later works in which Indiana revisited the themes that preoccupied him as a young artist in the early 1960s. This *Star* is a younger sibling of the Albright-Knox’s 1962 herm sculpture *Star*, on view nearby.



Indiana was among the artists commissioned by architect Philip Johnson to provide an artwork for the exterior of Johnson’s New York State Pavilion at the 1964–65 World’s Fair in Queens, New York. Indiana’s contribution was a giant electrified *Eat* sign, which many hungry visitors mistook for a literal advertisement for food. Decades later, Indiana extended his initial concept to include all four words that define his American Dream theme: “hug,” “err,” “eat,” and “die.” For the artist, these four short words convey the breadth of human existence: positive and negative experience, vitality and death. The configuration of the terms in oppositional pairs—hug with err and eat with die—in this diamond shape is Indiana’s final

statement of the theme that was first introduced in *The Demuth American Dream No. 5*, also on view in this exhibition.

*ONE* from *ONE through ZERO*, 1978–2003  
Polychrome aluminum, AP 2 from an edition  
of 3 and 2 APs  
Private Collection



Indiana first conceived the numbers as a series of paintings in 1965, at which time he assigned each number a specific color scheme. He later wrote, “The color choices were based upon chromatic associations with the ten stages of man’s life.” Indiana’s number series begin with one, birth, and end with zero, “standing in for ten, but fully representing death.” The number sculptures were conceived around 1980 in a variety of media and sizes, and individual series were executed sporadically over subsequent decades.

*TWO* from *ONE through ZERO*, 1978–2003  
Polychrome aluminum, AP 2 from an edition  
of 3 and 2 APs  
Private Collection



Indiana claimed two as his favorite number. “I’m particularly interested in two,” the artist said, “because it takes a couple to make love.” This sculpture is part of Indiana’s life cycle of ten numbers, in which two represents “Infancy. The beginning of growth, referring in this case to the botanic, as that was my favorite subject of study at the University of Edinburgh.”

Indiana assigned each number in the cycle a specific color scheme and paired two with blue and green. The prevalence of this color combination in other paintings, including *Year of Meteors* and *Leaves*, is significant in light of Indiana's powerful associations with two.

*THREE* from *ONE through ZERO*, 1978–2003

Polychrome aluminum, AP 2 from an edition of 3 and 2 APs

Private Collection



Indiana first conceived the numbers as a series of paintings in 1965, at which time he assigned each number a specific color scheme. He later wrote, “The color choices were based upon chromatic associations with the ten stages of man’s life.” Indiana’s number series begin with one, birth, and end with zero, “standing in for ten, but fully representing death.” The number sculptures were conceived around 1980 in a variety of media and sizes, and individual series were executed sporadically over subsequent decades.

*FOUR* from *ONE through ZERO*, 1978–2003

Polychrome aluminum, AP 2 from an edition of 3 and 2 APs

Private Collection



For Indiana, the number four signified adolescence. He considered this number “the most troublesome of the suite, beginning with the difficulty of fitting the awkward angular number into the circular format in the original painting: typical of that period in life.” Fittingly, he also assigned “the most raucous and unruly color combination red and yellow” to this number.

*FIVE* from *ONE through ZERO*, 1978–2003  
Polychrome aluminum, AP 2 from an edition  
of 3 and 2 APs  
Private Collection



Indiana wrote of the number five: “The prime of life. In the original painting red, white, and blue—the American colors, virile and pure—the zenith of the capacities of man.”

*SIX* from *ONE through ZERO*, 1978–2003  
Polychrome aluminum, AP 2 from an edition  
of 3 and 2 APs  
Private Collection



In Robert Indiana’s life cycle of numbers, six represents maturity, and he strongly associated the number with his father, who was born in June. He wrote, “Red and green, against blue in the paintings, comes directly from my *LOVEs*, which originally referred to my father and the company that provided my family’s sustenance: Phillips 66.” Indiana described the Phillips 66 sign as the one “that loomed largest in my life, casting its shadow across the very route that my father took daily to and from his work and standing high in a blue sky, red and green as the company colors were at the time.” For the artist, the number also alluded to 666, a common cold medicine advertised along roadsides in his early life, and to the United States’ most iconic road, Route 66.

This work is on view as part of *Robert Indiana: A Sculpture Retrospective*, which continues in the 1905 Building through September 23, 2018.

*SEVEN* from *ONE through ZERO*, 1978–2003  
Polychrome aluminum, AP 2 from an edition  
of 3 and 2 APs  
Private Collection



Indiana first conceived the numbers as a series of paintings in 1965, at which time he assigned each number a specific color scheme. He later wrote, “The color choices were based upon chromatic associations with the ten stages of man’s life.” Indiana’s number series begin with one, birth, and end with zero, “standing in for ten, but fully representing death.” The number sculptures were conceived around 1980 in a variety of media and sizes, and individual series were executed sporadically over subsequent decades.

*EIGHT* from *ONE through ZERO*, 1978–2003  
Polychrome aluminum, AP 2 from an edition  
of 3 and 2 APs  
Private Collection



Beginning in the mid-1960s, Robert Indiana conceived a set of specific, often autobiographical associations for the numbers one through zero, which he thought of as expressing a kind of life cycle. Of the number eight, Indiana wrote, “Colors of late fall, the mellowing and winding down of the chroma.”

This work is on view as part of *Robert Indiana: A Sculpture Retrospective*, which continues in the 1905 Building through September 23, 2018.

*NINE* from *ONE through ZERO*, 1978–2003  
Polychrome aluminum, AP 2 from an edition  
of 3 and 2 APs  
Private Collection



Of the number nine, Indiana wrote, “Beware Danger Death: from all the traffic signs alerting us to danger, the beware danger of yellow/black. Death is near.”

*ZERO* from *ONE through ZERO*, 1978–2003  
Polychrome aluminum, AP 2 from an edition  
of 3 and 2 APs  
Private Collection



Indiana’s series of numbers *ONE through ZERO* traces the ten stages of life through colors the artist assigned to each number. Of this final number, Indiana wrote, “Zero—Death: Standing in for ten, but fully representing death. Gray only suggests the color of ashes. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes.” The form of 0 coincides with the circle as a symbol of eternity for the artist.

Robert Indiana passed away at his home, the Star of Hope, in Vinalhaven, Maine, on May 19, 2018.

*NUMBERS ONE through ZERO,*  
1980–2002  
Cor-Ten steel  
Private Collection



Along with words, most notably “love,” numbers are one of the most frequently reoccurring motifs in the art of Robert Indiana. According to the artist, his fascination with numbers stemmed from an itinerant childhood in which he lived in twenty-one houses by the time he was seventeen, and he subsequently developed a complex system linking the numbers one through nine and zero to human life stages. Because he associated one with infancy and zero with death, the artist conceived of all of his number series as running one through zero.

The form of these particular numbers was inspired by an old printer’s calendar that Indiana discovered in his studio—a former industrial property—in 1961. He went on to refine the symbols in a number of painting and print series during the 1960s and 1970s before exploring sculptural variations beginning in 1980. This set was produced in Cor-Ten steel, a material specifically designed to weather the elements, developing a rich red-brown patina over time.