

ROBERT INDIANA

Love is only Part of the Story

Slip wood, iron, gesso and oil on wood, 101,6 x 35,56 x 10,16 cm, 1964

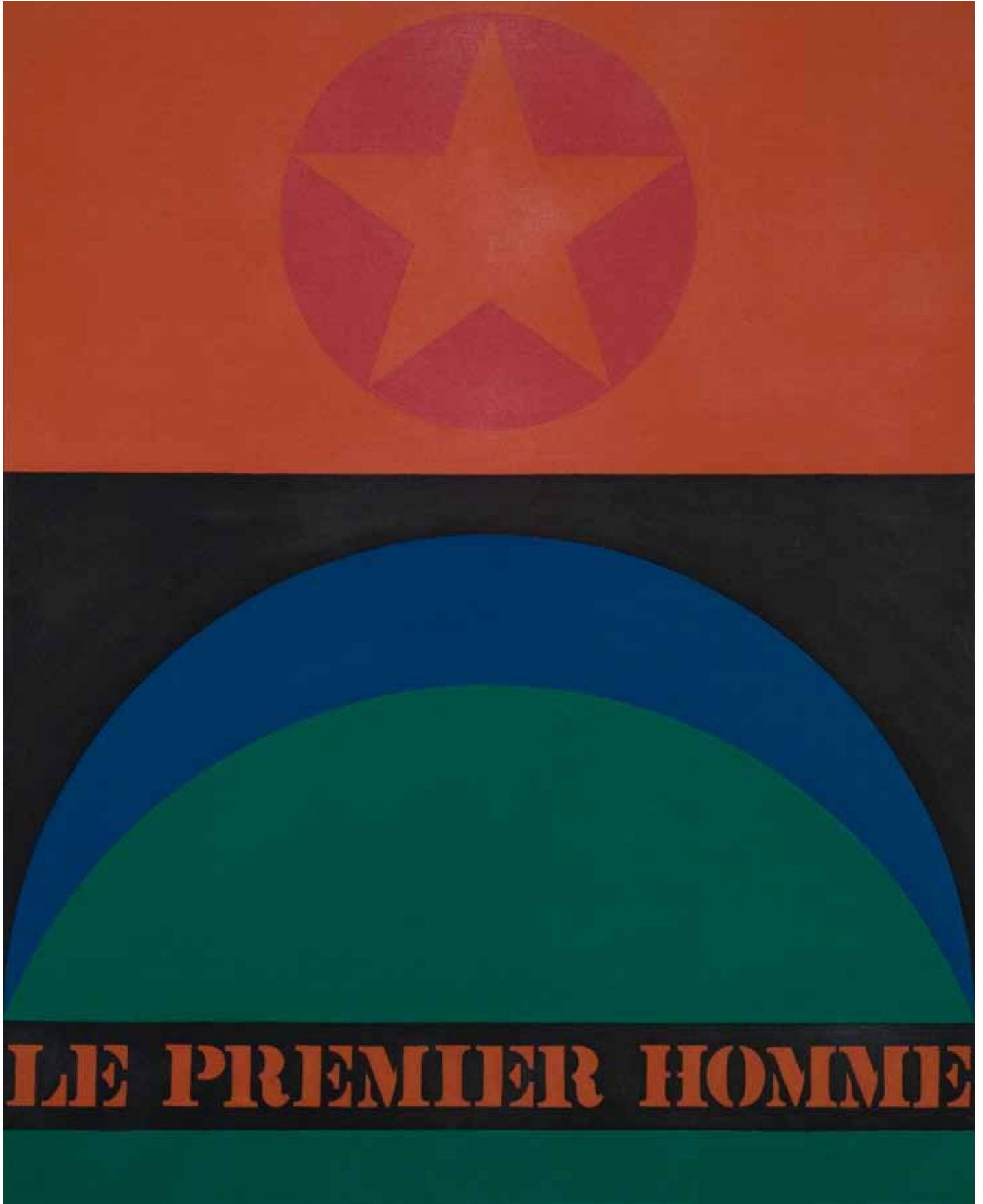


No living American artist better illustrates the optimism of the pop culture that originated in the 1950's and still resonates today. However, Indiana never felt much like a 'Pop Artist'. He prefers to be considered 'a realist who paints real signs'. His works are, in fact, more personal, psychological and emotional than ironic. Obviously, art needs to be more than cleverness. It must be telling and producing more than it surprises. This is true of great Pop artists as Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol and... Robert Indiana.

Born Robert Clark in New Castle, Indiana, on September 13, 1928, the artist soon adopted the name of his home state, as he wanted 'a more distinctive handle'. From that moment on he calls himself Robert Indiana. Apparently it was Tennessee Williams in New Orleans that gave him the idea. Most of Indiana's paintings are based on familiar images of the American scene and executed in bold, contrasting, and frequently clashing colours. His work is represented in collections galleries and major museums all over the world. As many other artists, Indiana's official life story is about youthful struggles, day jobs, and then the breakthroughs.

A Love affair

Indiana's most significant breakthrough came with the creation of his LOVE series. The artist is internationally best known for the logo he created in 1964 as a Christmas card for the Museum of Modern Art in New York. With its four letters in strong



Le Premier Homme, oil on canvas, 122 x 102 cm, 1961

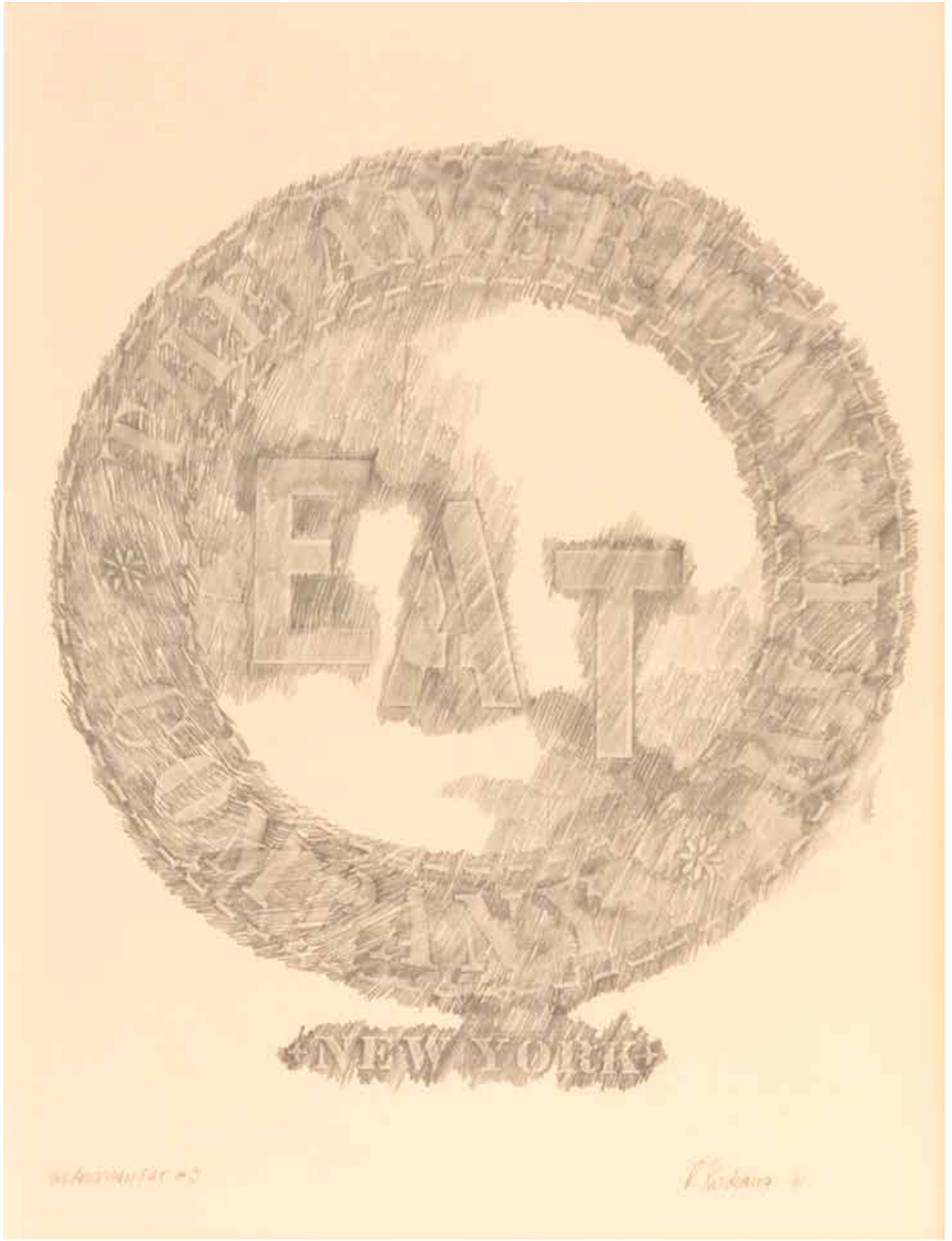
colours, stacked atop another with a tilted 'O', LOVE became a bestseller. Simple and direct, it fitted with a growing anti-war generation and became one of the most widely recognized and reproduced images in contemporary art.

LOVE was first exhibited as a sculpture in New York City in 1970. The original sculpture, made of Corten steel, is on exhibit at the Indianapolis Museum of Art since 1975. The design has been reproduced in a variety of formats, versions and colours. Even the U.S. Postal Service put Robert Indiana's design on the

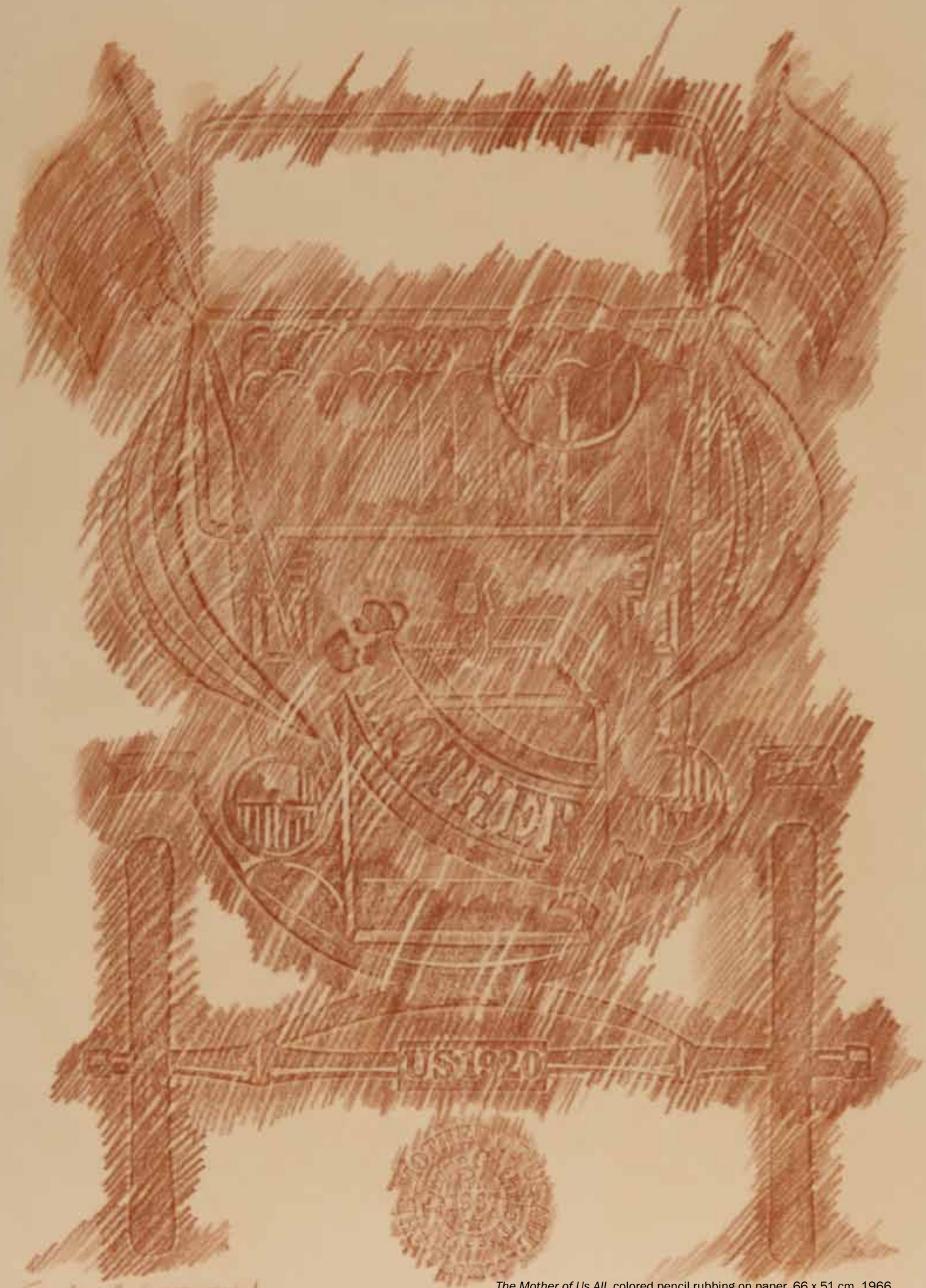
very first LOVE stamp. Over three hundred and twenty million of these stamps were printed and with every letter delivered with his stamp on it, Indiana's message was being spread a little further.

True blue

Red, green and blue, the colours he chose for his famous LOVE image long favoured in his work and derived from childhood memories. Indiana grew up with a strong awareness of local



The American Eat 3, pencil on paper, 62 x 48 cm, 1961



The Mother of Us All

The Mother of Us All, colored pencil rubbing on paper, 66 x 51 cm, 1966



Untitled, oil on canvas, 101,6 x 96,5 cm, 1959

road signage and a close identification of digits and colour schemes with his own early family life.

Specially, the Phillips 66 logo and the gas stations of Phillips Petroleum, a company for which his father used to work, had great impact on the young Indiana. As a consequence he got inspired by the bright red and green of the old Phillips signs against the strong blue of the Midwestern sky.

Already in 1958, long before his LOVE paintings, Indiana created a small triptych of separate red, green and blue panels.

Indiana's work is strongly autobiographical. Not only the chosen colours, images and forms, but also the specific words he

paints, have direct correlation to his lived-life.

Words, words, words

There is, of course, more to Indiana than LOVE. Over the past five decades, using words as 'hope', 'hug', 'die' and 'eat', the artist created a broad range of works that speak eloquently to universal human concerns.

In his work EAT Indiana reflects on the American Dream and the idea that Americans had to have more to eat than anyone else. But, living through America's Great Depression as a child, he mostly associated this Dream with going to bed without enough to eat. And so, again, in this statement, Indiana blends personal

and historical information within a cultural judgment.

Indiana was commissioned to create a sculpture for the 1964 World's Fair, held in Flushing, New York. Fair-goers not only noticed Indiana's creation, but lined up at the New York State Pavilion thinking it was a place to eat. Who could blame them for mistaking the flashing-light sculpture for a sign mounted on highway diners.

In a way the diptych EAT/DIE also refers to Indiana's parents. His mother's last words were: 'Did you have anything to eat?' and much later, his father died while eating breakfast. Both paintings also resemble signs, advertising the diners where his mother used to work. As a pair they witness of the contradictory concepts contained in the Dream: plenty and death, hunger and salvation.

Many years later, Robert Indiana is still on the barricades, standing out for actual human values and concerns. In 2004 he made twenty paintings in response to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. His PEACE paintings, full of word play and bright colours, mix familiar Pop art features with politics in a condemnation of American foreign policy.

Even more recent, in 2008, Indiana created HOPE, an image similar to his iconic LOVE, for Barack Obama's presidential campaign. He again stacked letters two to a line, the letter 'O' tilted on its side. A six-foot high stainless steel sculpture was unveiled in Denver during the Democratic National Convention. Indiana donated all proceeds from the sale of reproductions of his image to Obama's presidential campaign. The artist himself calls HOPE 'love's close relative'.

Of fierce men and women

Another historical fact in a more distant past that had an immense impact on Indiana, was the first human spaceflight in April 1961, taking into space Yuri Gagarin, a cosmonaut from the Soviet Union. Gagarin's daring journey inspired him to create LE PREMIER HOMME.

And, although Indiana uses the same bold colours and geometric shapes, there is something different about this canvas. Unlike his previous works, he integrated no short, terse English one-syllable word but a French text. Apparently subconsciously, in order not to make it too sympathetic to the prevailing communist propaganda, Indiana decided to call the painting by its French title. A phrase he picked directly from the cover of a French magazine, trusting most Americans would recognize it anyway.

A woman of great importance in the artist's life and work, certainly is Susan B. Anthony. Anthony was a prominent American civil rights leader during the latter half of the 19th century, who played a pivotal role in the women's rights movement to introduce women's suffrage into the United States. She is often referred to as 'the mother of us all'. Already in 1966, Robert Indiana honoured America's first and most famous suffragist in a coloured pencil rubbing on paper, which he called THE MOTHER

OF US ALL. The artist re-used the theme in many other ways his later work.

In 1976, Indiana collaborated on an opera that abstractly explores Susan B. Anthony's life and mission. For this opera by American composer Virgil Thomson on a libretto by poet Gertrude Stein, Indiana designed scenery and costumes.

The star of hope

Last year in Rockland, close to 'The Star of Hope Lodge' in Vin-alhaven, that has been the artist's home and studio for the past thirty years, the Farnsworth Art Museum celebrated him and his unique island residence in the exhibition 'Robert Indiana and the Star of Hope'. The retrospective featured more than seventy pieces of the artist's work

On that same occasion the Farnsworth Art Museum's Presidents Council honoured Indiana with the Maine in America award for his outstanding contribution of Maine's role in American art.

Indiana comes full circle

Today, in his eighties, Indiana seems to come full circle, folding back into the very beginning, making works that have to do with the circle. From canvas shape to internal design, Indiana's compositions easily qualify as strong fields of force. The artist often commented on his attraction to the circle: 'practically every painting I've ever done has at least one circle or more and usually dominates the canvas'. After all, that tilted 'O' has always been the central motif of his career.

Want to know more about Robert Indiana?

'Masters & Animamix' will be open to the public from August 5 to August 23, 2010.

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