

What's Behind the Robert Indiana Revival?

EXCERPTS FROM AN ARTICLE ON ROBERT INDIANA
BY FAMED ART WRITER MARION MANEKER

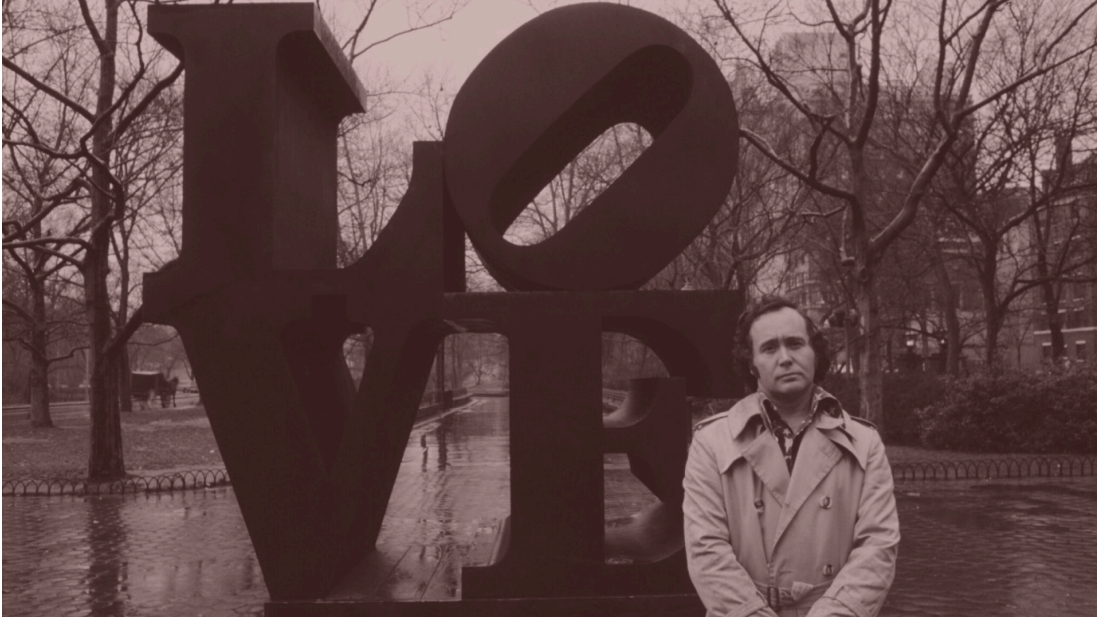


Photo: Jack Mitchell/Getty Images

“As pop art experiences a slow-motion return to the popular imagination, Robert Indiana has been borne along with it...

Indiana's actual work and life is being showcased again in a recent book about Coenties Slip (now South Street Seaport), once a bohemian refuge for the likes of Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, and Jasper Johns. The Slip, by Prudence Peiffer, focuses on a group of artists who lived there a bit later—Lenore Tawney, Agnes Martin, Ellsworth Kelly, Jack Youngerman, James Rosenquist, and Indiana—all of them on top of each other, in former sailmaker's lofts under the shadow of the Brooklyn Bridge.

On the surface, little connects these artists otherwise. Tawney was a ground-breaking weaver aspiring to make art out of craft. Martin was a pioneering minimalist who would eventually remove herself to New Mexico, as one does. Kelly lived a long and successful life as a hard-edged abstract painter. Youngerman was, at the time, among the most successful of the group; now he is all but forgotten. Rosenquist went on to become one of the defining figures of the pop art movement, though he, too, is now more mentioned in art history textbooks than discussed by collectors.

Their common thread is Indiana, himself, who plays a surprise role in the book, incorporating elements of each of the others' work—and remaking himself in the crucible of the slip. Born an orphan in 1928, Indiana was adopted by parents, surnamed Clark, who were devastated by the economic depression and eventually divorced. He knew he wanted to be an artist from childhood, joined the military to get himself an education, and eventually enrolled in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, then traveled in Europe before moving to New York in the mid-1950s. A chance encounter with Ellsworth Kelly evolved into a brief romance, which led him to the Coenties Slip, where he forged his own identity, rechristening himself from Clark to Indiana, his state of origin, in a final declaration of independence...

We're in the midst of a slow-motion return of attention to pop art: The Roy Lichtenstein retrospective at the Whitney is coming next year; the Warhol market is showing signs of life after years of stagnation. Signs and symbols remain important aspects of our social and cultural lives....”