

## LOVE for all: Robert Indiana's 'To Russia with Love' at the State Russian Museum

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'To Russia with Love' is the first show in the titular country for American artist Robert Indiana. Pictured: 'To Russia with Love' installation view

'To Russia with Love' is an irresistible title for the first show in the titular country by American artist Robert Indiana, whose ubiquitous *LOVE* image arguably overshadows its creator in its worldwide notoriety.

*LOVE*, Indiana's signature composition, was originally conceived for a MoMA Christmas card in 1965, then made into a postage stamp and since reproduced innumerable times in paint, print and as a sculpture. Given this, it's refreshing that there's just one *LOVE* sculpture within Indiana's recently opened retrospective at the State Russian Museum in St Petersburg, allowing a broader view of the artist's six decade career.

Indiana first rose to fame amid the burgeoning American pop art movement of the early 1960s, his bold graphic images inspired by both the commercial and highway signs of 60s America and more highbrow literary influences. Yet Indiana cannot be typecast as purely a pop artist, nor his work seen as paused and suspended in that decade (as is often the case with his peers).

Indiana's love of typography is palpable in the hard edged, meaty images of the exhibition; indeed, he proudly referred to himself as a 'painter of signs'.

His admiration for signage is shown in his assemblages. In the 1950s, after he moved to the old shipping district of Coenties Slip in lower Manhattan, he started scavenging old wooden stencilled and hand painted signs, and other objects, for his

anthropomorphic constructions. Like much of his work they are often ironic or playful, undercut by more sober literary and historic references.

The Russian Museum show blends assemblages and sculptures with paintings and graphic works, and has been organised in collaboration with the Zurich-based Galerie Gmurzynska, who represent Indiana.

'Several years ago Robert Indiana expressed two exhibition wishes that he wanted to accomplish when he turned 80,' says Mathias Rastorfer, CEO of Gmurzynska. 'First was a major show in New York which was fulfilled with the substantial Whitney Museum of Modern Art retrospective [2013–14] and the second was an exhibition in Russia.'

Though his art was originally born of the American commercial iconography of the Cold War period, Indiana has a long held fascination with Russia and Rastorfer believes an exhibition in the country makes sense as, 'historically the artistic influences between the US and Russia in the 20th century went both ways.

'First, Russian suprematism and constructivism influenced American minimalist artists such as Ellsworth Kelly, Donald Judd, Carl Andre [and] Brice Marden, to name only a few. Then during the second half of the 20th century, American pop art influenced Russia and movements such as Soviet nonconformist art.'

*LOVE* is, he says, as legendary in Russia as it is in the west, but 'there is so much more to discover about Indiana'.

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I N F O R M A T I O N

'To Russia with Love' is on view until 7 June. For more information, visit the State Russian Museum's Marble Palace [website](#)

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S H A R E

