

Editorial

Artist's work shows change in American values

Some of the strongest social statements appear in art. For example, the pop artists of the 1950s and '60s abandoned the Abstract Expressionists' search for the inner self and took everyday, common objects for their inspiration. In this way, they gave up exploring the individual soul to examine society's collective soul.

And thus, Andy Warhol's Campbell Soup cans, Roy Lichtenstein's comic strip panels, Jasper John's American flags and Claes Oldenburg's giant electric fixtures began to appear in the nation's art galleries.

By elevating everyday America to high art, pop artists forced Americans to take a hard look at their culture. And what Americans found was not always pleasing. Pop art, so full of American symbols, did not always uphold what those symbols stood for.

Robert Indiana was one of those artists that challenged the "American Dream." He used geometric patterns taken from pinball machines and road signs and superimposed on them phrases from literature, history and Americana. Snatches of Herman Melville, Walt Whitman and Negro spirituals found their way onto his works.

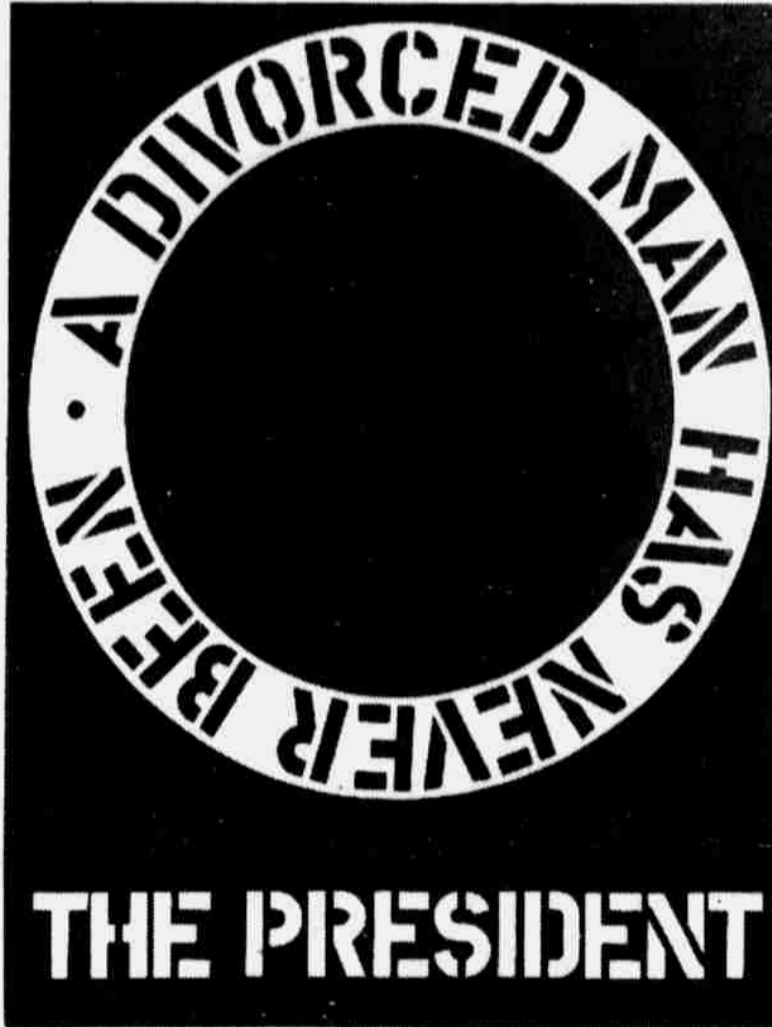
Indiana was the man who designed the famous "LOVE" symbol that was reproduced on countless posters, bags and books. It consisted of a capital "L" next to a capital "O" set at an angle. These two letters sat atop a capital "V" and "E" set side by side.

In other works he used lines such as "Just as in the anatomy of man every nation must have its hind part" and "Eat, Die."

As critic Michael Compton wrote, "His work is directly connected with the 'Great American Myths' as he sees them — food, death, love, etc. — all embodied from 1961 in a kind of painting not derived from the sophisticated advertisements but from the most blatant and peremptory signs."

One of Indiana's works is hanging in the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and is part of the gallery's permanent collection. On the 1961 oil painting are the words, "A divorced man has never been the president." Because this maxim no longer holds true, the painting, once a comment on the sentiment itself, now says something about how attitudes have changed in the United States during the last 20 years.

Many Reagan supporters, as well as detractors, often forget that our 40th president is a divorced man. Before his marriage to Nancy, Reagan was married to actress Jane Wyman. Of course, there is nothing wrong with that. But at one time it would have been terribly difficult for a divorced man to have been elected to the presidency. Questions would have been raised about his moral character and his stability as a family man. Even if he was fully



qualified to act as president, his private life would have been sharply scrutinized.

Who knows, such considerations may have been a factor in Adlai Stevenson's unsuccessful bids against Eisenhower in the 1950s. After all, Stevenson was not only an intellectual, but he also was divorced.

In a similar fight, John Kennedy had to show voters his

Catholicism would not affect his work as president. Fortunately, he was successful in breaking that social barrier despite the Protestant tradition in this country.

But it seems that many such social barriers have weakened until they aren't really obstacles for candidates anymore. Perhaps because many Americans are conducting their own lives on a more liberal and open basis, they are willing to allow their leaders more freedom as well. Leaders today have more leeway to live their lives as they wish, openly.

But Indiana's work also points out how false the divorced-man maxim was even when it was still in vogue. No, none of our presidents had been divorced before Reagan took office, but that didn't make them more exemplary or less human than the people they were governing.

Franklin Roosevelt had a long affair with his secretary, who was the only person with him when he died. During the last few years, writers have made scads of money uncovering affairs Kennedy had during his time in office. Should a divorced candidate be condemned when others have been less honest and open about their private lives? Of course, the public didn't know the full facts about FDR and Kennedy, but it seems we were setting up a double standard in any case.

It is difficult to argue that divorces and private affairs harm a public official's performance in office. As long as officials continue to devote themselves to their work, what effect can their private lives possibly have?

So why have we ever had standards that deal with public officials' private lives? Although elected to public office, presidents and other officials are human beings, and as such they share with the rest of us certain frailties and faults. As long as those shortcomings don't impair their ability to do their job, why should we be concerned with them?

As Indiana once said, "It is pretty hard to swallow the whole thing about the American Dream. It started the day the Pilgrims landed, the dream, the idea that Americans have more to eat than anyone else. But I remember going to bed without enough to eat."

Indiana's point is well taken. And although we may have come a long way as a society in scrutinizing and criticizing officials' private lives, maybe we need to look at some other "double standards" and "false claims" American culture produces. There are still a lot around.

Soviet sabotage snows over American economy

This week the shocking news from a campus organization: Sinister forces in another hemisphere may be behind the "freak" winter Americans endured this season. In an interview with a spokesperson from the College Meteorologists for Freedom, whose name is classified for reasons of national security, I came to understand the *real* reason my gas bill went up more than 25 percent this winter.

"We have proof, which we are unfortunately unable to reveal at this time in the interest of protecting our intelligence sources, that the Soviets have deployed huge fans in



Matthew Millea

Siberia for the express purpose of disrupting Free World weather patterns."

Huge fans?

"Yes, they're hand-cranked by Soviet special forces, all of whom are well over 10 feet tall, as you might have heard. The purpose is to bring cold air from the Russian steppes swooping down on the Great Plains. We also know

now they've begun cloud-seeding operations in a satellite mode, again designed to wreck havoc upon the freedom-loving people of the Western Hemisphere."

Could you be a little more specific?

"Well it's rather obvious what they're up to actually. The psychic and economic strain of continual inclement weather can be incredible. We see this as a deliberate attempt to undermine the president's economic recovery program."

You mean the trickle-down theory?

"I don't find that the least bit humorous. Besides the obvious difficulty our economy's savers and investors would have in getting to their brokers under such frigid condition, the Soviet plan was clearly also a blatant attempt to disrupt the Columbia space shuttle mission. Edwards Air Force Base was a sea of mud. And, of course, we can't ignore the fact the Russians envy our way of life. If they can't tow Southern California away, they can at least make it rain all the time."

Why haven't we heard about any of this before?

"The existence of public ignorance about such blatantly obvious foreign intervention just demonstrates the white, male, liberal, pro-Soviet, East Coast, effeminate, pinko

bias of journalism in this country."

Yeah, right. Will they be continuing this in the future?

"Most assuredly. We fear the Soviets might well be planning to manipulate weather this summer right here in the Great American Bread Basket. The proper combination of sun and rain could bring about the dreaded "bumper crop" Midwestern politicians have been trying to warn us about."

Why would they want to do that?

"Well, I don't think this or anything, but, see, well, what they think is that it shows the superiority of their system. With a bumper crop here in the United States, the price of grain goes down and banks are forced to foreclose on farmers. But in Russia, the state maintains the price and the black market takes care of the excess. The farmers stay in business you see. Of course, they'd never have a bumper crop anyway . . ."

The real question here seems to be "Is a weather war winnable?"

"Well, yes I believe it is. First, you'd have to build this huge dome over the entire Free World . . ."

Sorry, but we're all out of space. Be here next week for: Was the E.R.A. a communist plot to subvert the American patriarchy?????

Rich uncle helping families through tough times

It is no pleasant task to take public issue with the doleful accounts in the media these days concerning the finances of various individuals on welfare. Most of these people are genuinely hard up, even if they are not always quite so hard up as they claim.

But the ones we hear about on television and in the newspapers have lent themselves voluntarily to a vast and highly partisan attack on Ronald Reagan's cuts in our out-



William Rusher

of-control welfare system. They cannot fairly invoke some sort of immunity to a careful analysis of their claims.

Take the lugubrious story of Sharon Hunt, which was recently spread across five columns at the top of Page 1 of the second section of *The New York Times* (the "Metropolitan Report"), with a long carry-over on Page 5. Under the headline "Family Tries With Welfare to 'Make Do,'" reporter Sheila Rule introduced us to this welfare mother, a "short woman with electric energy," a self-proclaimed

"welfare-rights activist who agreed to discuss her finances in detail."

The story described how Hunt, her 13-month-old baby Tanya and her 10-year-old daughter Kayla scrape by on welfare grants of \$340 a month plus \$115 in food stamps. They live in Manhattan, where real estate is notoriously expensive, so the biggest item in their budget is naturally rent: \$220 a month in a "public-housing apartment" (another subsidy to Hunt from the skinflint taxpayers, and a big one, but one not otherwise alluded to in the article).

The second biggest single item is a private telephone (\$42), which Miss Hunt deems essential because "I've lived without a telephone in the past and there have been times when I didn't have a dime to call somebody when my babies and I needed help."

That leaves \$78 in cash and \$115 in food stamps, and the bulk of the article describes Hunt's painful efforts to deploy these pitiful sums economically: deciding whether to buy "what was on sale (or) what her family really needed," walking long distances to less expensive stores, clipping ad coupons for bargains, signing up for the federal free-cheese program (another subsidy), etc. She is clearly

a resourceful lady, though: She even finds time for political activity. "Welfare mothers have to organize," she said. "I've been able to fight for my rights through the help of the Redistribute America Movement." The group is a statewide poor people's organization.

Nonetheless, there are certain gaping holes in the Hunt saga, and it is to reporter Rule's credit that she acknowledges two of them: "There was no way to verify independently that (Hunt) had no other sources of income. It also could not be determined whether she might have been able to find a job that would pay enough to get off welfare" — there being plenty of (subsidized) child day-care centers in New York City that would gladly watch over Tanya while her mother worked. (Kayla is in one of the city's free public schools.)

Beyond these questions, certain other gaps bother me. It is usually necessary for a man to be somewhere in the picture if babies are getting born, yet there is not a single reference to any husband or husbands, or even to a boyfriend. Surely there must be some man, somewhere, whom some court would order to make child-support payments?

Continued on Page 5