

MAKING LOVE

ARTIST ROBERT INDIANA SPENT 10 YEARS ON projects that led to the creation of the “LOVE” sculpture, during which he explored individual words as “a fit and viable subject for art.”

The American artist, who died in May at the age of 89 in his home on the island of Vinalhaven in Maine, said the use of isolated words was inspired in part by old wooden beams he found near his studio on the East River in Lower Manhattan. Quoted in the journal *Art Now: New York* in 1969, he said the beams looked to him like stelae, which in ancient societies would bear inscriptions. These, however, had “the breadth to bear just one word, such as ‘Moon’ or ‘Orb,’ or ‘Soul’ and ‘Mate.’”

He was also working with elemental shapes – circles and squares, the latter divided into quarters. The “LOVE” design drew on all these preoccupations: The quarters of the square are each occupied by a single letter, “as compactly and economically as possible, but with my interest in the circle still called to mind by the tilted ‘o.’” The

design was created in 1964 as a Christmas card for the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

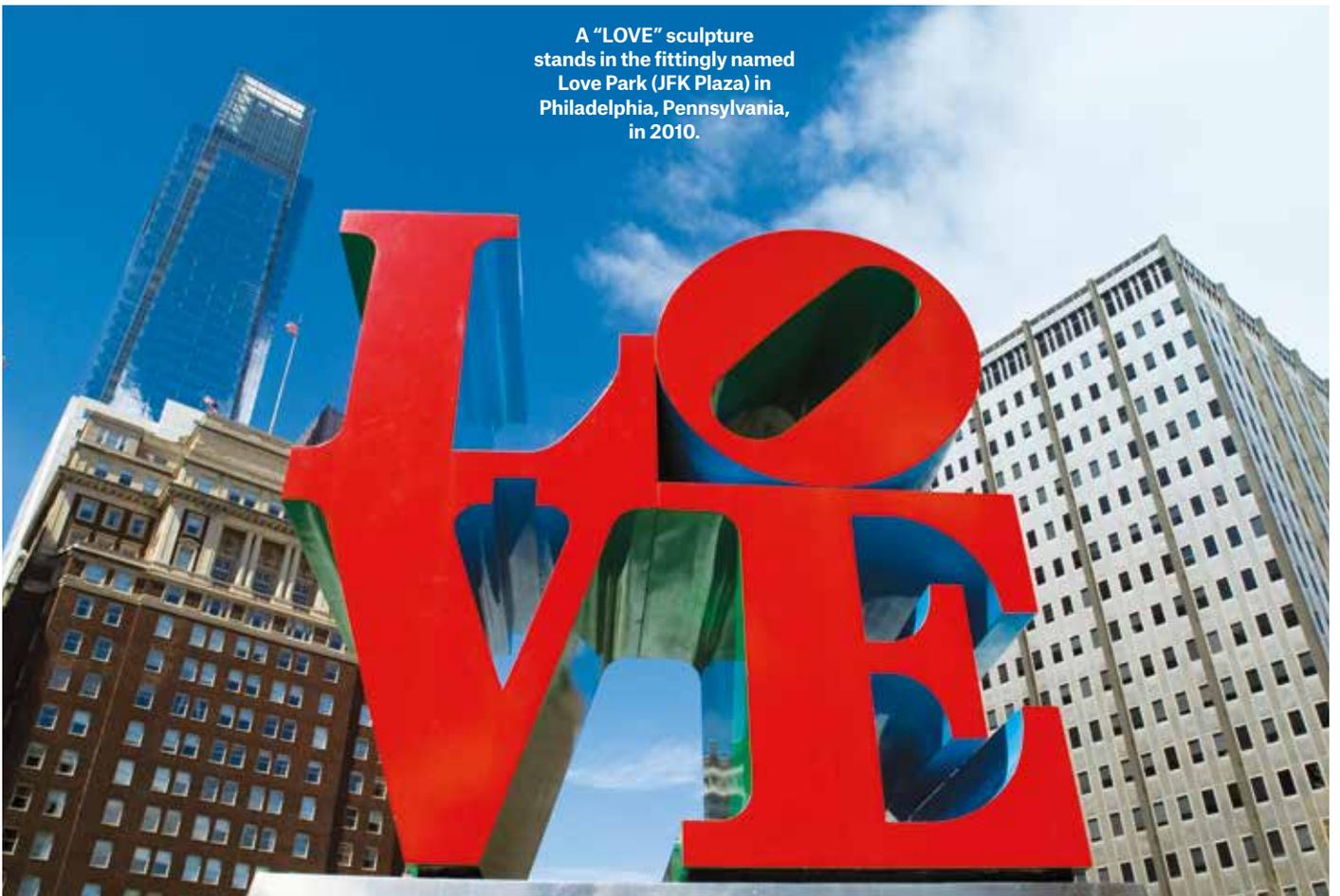
The design’s popularity rose through the ’60s and ’70s, as the global youth culture and anti-Vietnam War movement latched on to the word “love” for its complex message of idealism, nonviolent protest, compassion and sexual freedom. The year 1967 was the “Summer of Love” – a hippie high-water mark. On the radio, the newly released Beatles’ hit “All You Need is Love” provided a soundtrack.

Born Robert Clark, the artist adopted the name “Indiana” from his home state and, in 1970, he created the first metal “LOVE” sculpture for the Indianapolis Museum of Art. It stands 12 feet square and 72 inches thick. Others have since been installed in New York, Philadelphia and other North American cities as well as Europe and Asia. Sculptures of translations, including into Hebrew and Chinese, have been made.

In 1973, the design’s significance was blessed by no less a cultural authority than the US Postal Service, which put it on a stamp.

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A “LOVE” sculpture stands in the fittingly named Love Park (JFK Plaza) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 2010.



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