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The Isolation Artist: Scandal, Deception, and the Last Days of Robert Indiana

Bob Keyes
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In *The Isolation Artist*, Bob Keyes explores the tumultuous life and death of an influential artist.

Robert Indiana is best remembered for his rendering of the word “LOVE” in bold type, the first two letters atop the last two, the “O” tilted to the right. Keyes reveals that the last decade of Indiana’s life was plagued by isolation, self-imposed and otherwise; legal squabbles; and the ire of his neighbors on his small island home. Keyes, who interviewed Indiana multiple times before his “disappearance” and death, picks apart this tangled skein of conflicting allegations and prickly personalities.

Every character in this thorny modern drama has their own agenda. Among the parties who tried to control Indiana and his work were a personal assistant who withdrew and hid large amounts of Indiana’s cash, and a shady corporation that acquired the rights to *LOVE* when Indiana was at his most vulnerable, underpaid him throughout their relationship, and filed suit against his estate the day before (or possibly the same day that) he died.

Indiana himself cuts a memorable, infuriating figure. Though desperate for adulation, he could be snappish and rude to his closest allies. He found it easier to play the victim than to compromise or put effort into reviving his career. Questions still linger about his physical and mental state toward the end of his life, including how much input he had on later artworks.

Keyes reconstructs Indiana’s final years with a journalist’s meticulous eye, sorting through contradictory stories and pointing out gaps left by sealed court documents and declined interview requests. In the end, the only clear fact is this: Robert Indiana’s death will remain as mysterious as his life.

The Isolation Artist is a sympathetic account of a complex artist and the many personal flaws that allowed others to take advantage of him.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2021)

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