

Welcome to Infinite Women. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today we're talking about artist Margaret Keane's fight to be recognised for her work

In the 1960s, Walter Keane's "Big Eye" paintings gained immense popularity across the US. Derided as kitsch by critics, they were a massive commercial success. Andy Warhol remarked "I think what Keane has done is just terrific. It has to be good. If it were bad, so many people wouldn't like it."

But while they were done by "Keane," they weren't Walter's. Like other women who escaped their husband's influence, Margaret Keane later claimed credit for her work. In a common refrain, Walter was significantly older - 12 years - and physically and emotionally abusive, with Margaret later saying "I was afraid for my life."

Initially, he was taking credit for her work without her knowledge or consent. As she explained, "After I married Walter I just signed my paintings 'Keane'. He was able to take credit for my work, which I was not aware he was doing at first." When she did find out, she kept quiet and even publicly supported his claim for fear of reprisals behind closed doors, later saying that he had threatened to kill her.

It was only years after their 1965 divorce that Margaret went public, asserting in a radio broadcast that she was the true artist. A reporter from the San Francisco Examiner arranged a "paint-off" between the former spouses - Margaret attended, Walter did not. It was not the only time he'd dodge such a challenge - in 1986, Margaret sued Walter and USA Today for an article in which he claimed to be the true artist of the Big Eyes paintings. The presiding judge ordered both Keanes to create a Big Eyes painting in the courtroom. Walter refused, spinning a tale about a "sore shoulder," while Margaret finished hers in under an hour. The jury awarded her \$4 million in damages; a federal appeals court later overturned the monetary award but upheld the defamation verdict. Margaret said after the initial trial, "I really feel that justice has triumphed. It's been worth it, even if I don't see any of that four million dollars."

Indeed, unlike the sad children and dark surroundings of her earlier works, her post-Walter paintings tended to be much happier and lighter - a reflection of her own revitalised outlook on life. For a big-screen adaption of Keane's life, check out Tim Burton's 2014 biopic *Big Eyes*, starring Amy Adams and Christoph Waltz.

Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast and remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.