

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša

Podpis



Signature

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Aksioma - Zavod za sodobne umetnosti, Ljubljana,
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The Poetics and Politics of the Signature

Petja Grafenauer

1 Translator's translation from Zoé Valdés, *Kavarna nostalgija* (trans. Nina Kovič), Založba Goga, Novo mesto 2009, p. 37.

‘I am not sure if it is smart to keep this name; it does not sound like the signature of a great artist, it seems somewhat lighter. Roch is too awkward, too heavy...’

I responded that the greatest masters of the camera introduced themselves with trivial names, that a name does not produce the quality of the work and that consumer society has already grown used to this.¹

The author's name is such an important element of the work of art that artists, for various reasons, often change or adapt their names. Sometimes the changed names conceal the author's gender, identity, familial background; sometimes they evade or complicate the issue of copyright;

usually, however, they strive to sound as harmonious as possible, so that the user can memorise them as soon as possible and they stay in the audiences' minds for as long as possible. The list of such names is endless (and the reasons for the changes are numerous); it ranges from George Sand, Elton John, Mark Twain to Nicholas Cage, Andy Warhol, Arman, Marilyn Monroe, David Bowie, Balthus, ♀ to Alva Noto.

The name of the artist has been gaining in prominence since the times of the Renaissance, when it wrenched itself from anonymity. When the experts on attribution, gathered on the Rembrandt Research Project around 1995, attributed the famous Rembrandt painting *The Polish Rider* only to the master's workshop and not to the master himself,² the painting of course remained the same; it still consisted of the same canvas and the same pigments, yet, its cultural and market value, and even its placement in the museum, changed drastically.

To be a Rembrandt is to claim pride of place in the greatest collections and to command the close aesthetic attention of art pilgrims. To be a great Rembrandt, like *The Night Watch*, is legitimately to enjoy the prerequisites of an altarpiece in a museum construed, like the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, as a cathedral to national identity. Whereas to be merely by the Master's Workshop, as now *The Polish Rider* is, gives the work claim only to experts on the minor artists of the seventeenth century in Holland and a place in the lesser galleries devoted to the School of Rembrandt. There is the further consequence of re-evaluation in the crassest meaning of the term: were *The Polish Rider* to come onto the market as genuinely by Rembrandt, it might just break the hundred-million-dollar mark the art world has been waiting for.³

² See Saša Glavan [Nabergoj], "Vprašanje Rembrandtovega avtorstva slike 'Mož z brado'", *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, Vol. 34, Slovensko umetnostnozgodovinsko društvo, Ljubljana 1998.

³ Arthur C. Danto, "The Art World Revisited: Comedies of Similarity", *Beyond the Brillo Box. The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1992, p. 33.

The author's name, then – which is most visibly guaranteed by the author's signature in one of the painting's corners, by the line that forms the shape of the letters in his name – gives the painting a special value, an aura of authenticity, so to speak, which is not related to other properties and the quality of the painting.

In his book *Ways of Seeing*, John F. Berger writes about “bogus religiosity”, which is attributed to works of art.⁴ To a great extent, works of art lost the aura of uniqueness with the possibility of reproduction, for since the advent of photography everyone can enjoy them in the privacy of their homes; they are no longer accessible only to those who can afford to visit the Louvre or a similar art institution. The special value of the work of art, its aura, is today kept alive only by its physical uniqueness. The painting has become a relic, whose value is sometimes measured in millions of American dollars. Among all the elements that the work of art consists of, the author's signature constitutes the most visible proof of whether or not the relic is genuine.

Of course, the mystified modernist notion of the signature in painting did not articulate explicitly its market, prestigious or cultural value. The moment of the artist signing the work of art determined the moment of the work of art being finished and ready for public presentation. The signature was an integral part of the work of art, which testified to the authenticity of the work of art and guaranteed that the artist confirmed this authenticity and that he achieved it with his own hands. And yet, some artists signed copies of their own works. Jean Corot's opus consists of nearly 700 paintings, but it is known that Corot used to sign copies as well, which were made for him by other painters, for he felt honoured by the fact that other artists copied his work.

As the art market grew and the prices skyrocketed, the number of attempts to cheat the buyers by selling them counterfeits also rose and the author's signature was often the key element in such matters. While Han van Meegeren is the most famous example of an art counterfeiter in the

4 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing: Based on the BBC Television Series*, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin books, London 1972.

20th century – to create fake Vermeers, he used canvases from Vermeer’s period, and to avoid being exposed, he prepared the pigments himself – the frauds that concerned the artist’s signature on an inauthentic work of art often involved the artists themselves. Dalí, Picasso, Chagall and Miró are artists known also for their fraudulent signatures on inauthentic graphics and ceramics. Picasso was well aware of the meaning and value of a signed work of art, as the following anecdote demonstrates:

[A] woman enters with a package carefully tied up with string under her arm. She would like to see Picasso ‘in person’. She has something to show him that will undoubtedly interest him. She can wait for him all morning if necessary. When Picasso returns two hours later, she undoes the package and takes out a little picture: ‘M. Picasso,’ she says, ‘allow me to present you with one of your old paintings.’ And he, always rather moved to see again a work long lost from sight, looks tenderly at this little canvas. ‘Yes, it’s a Picasso. It’s authentic. I painted it in Hyères where I spent the summer in 1922.’ ‘May I ask you to sign it, then? Owning a real Picasso without his signature is very distressing, after all! People who see it in our home may assume it’s a fake.’ [But Picasso responds:] ‘People are always asking me to sign my old canvases. It’s ridiculous!’ [...] ‘But since the picture is by you, M. Picasso, couldn’t you do me the favor of signing it?’ ‘No, ma’am! If I were to sign it now, I’d be committing forgery. I’d be putting my 1943 signature on a canvas painted in 1922. No, I cannot sign it, madam, I’m sorry.’⁵

5 Brassäi, *Conversations with Picasso* (translated by Jane Marie Todd), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London [1964] 1999; the excerpt is also accessible at <http://www.artnewyork-city.com/2007/01/28/picassos-fakes-from-seth-godin/>.

The artists were becoming increasingly aware of the significance of their signature on works of art – not only because the act of signing moved the work of art beyond

the moment of *non finito*, but also because with their signature they asserted their authorship of the work of art and thus gave it cultural and market value, which was socially attributed to the signature. The question of the author of the work of art became so important in the art world that it was no longer possible to entrust the artist with it; hence, in the middle of the 19th century, the expert appeared on the market – a person who, using virtually detective skills, was able to determine the author of a work of art. The science of signature became a lucrative business. There are numerous collections, such as *Artists' Monograms and Indiscernible Signatures, An International Directory, 1800–1991* by John Castagno, that help one decipher signatures on paintings and, of course, experts are available who help you determine, for a fair amount, the author of the illegible signature on the painting in your bedroom.

The artists on the market could no longer be trusted for, in the 20th century, they also started to toy with the status of “bogus religiosity” of the work of art. Duchamp, of course, must be mentioned here, but it was Andy Warhol who introduced the technique of screen-printing to the world of art; before Warhol, everybody considered this technique appropriate only for cheap, commercial products and certainly not for the Work of Art. And not only this! For Warhol,

6 Tony Scherman and David Dalton, *Pop: The Genius of Andy Warhol*, Harper, New York 2009, p. 342.

traditional, manual craft no longer had any value. The fact that Warhol was a skilled draftsman had no bearing on his art. The mode of creation of a work of art was no longer a criterion for gauging its quality. [...] Artistic creativity became a series of mental decisions, the most important of which was the choice of an appropriate motif. A few years later, Warhol stated: ‘The choice of images is what matters most; it is the fruit of imagination.’⁶

In the late sixties and particularly in the seventies, Andy Warhol relinquished all physical contact with his works of

art except for the signature. His works were now, for the most part, manufactured by his assistants, including Gerard Malanga and Billy Name. Sometimes this was done even so that Warhol conveyed his ideas over the phone; at the Factory, these works were referred to as *art by telephone*.

Because he was raising questions that the ideology of art and the art market could not afford to ask, the artist had lost the faith of dealers in art and cultural prestige. Just like in the case of gigantic corporations in the music industry, in fine arts, too, the person who determines whether or not a work of art is authentic is often no longer the artist. What is an authentic Warhol and what is not is today determined by the companies *Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.* and *Andy Warhol Art Authentication Board, Inc.*, which in 2003 set a precedent in the history of fine arts. They determined that the signed and dated portrait *Bruno B Self-Portrait* from the series *Red Self Portraits*, which Warhol himself dedicated to his gallerist Bruno Bischoffberger in writing and which represents one of the frequently reproduced Warhol's works, is not Andy Warhol's authorial work. Of course, there is the issue of profit in the background of this story. The existence of the non-profit foundation – which was established after the artist's death to be the arbiter in disputes over the authenticity of Andy Warhol's works – depends, of course, on the sale of the artist's works in its possession, which are worth approximately 500 million dollars. It is in the foundation's financial interest to control the price of Warhol's works on the market and, of course, it is in their interest to make sure that as few authorised Warhol works as possible exist outside the foundation's possession. Before the *Andy Warhol Art Authentication Board, Inc.* begins investigating the authenticity of a work of art, the owners of the piece must sign a waiver giving up the possibility of disproving the foundation's decision. The foundation is also not required to explain its decision; it is, however, mandatory that a work of art that has not passed the authenticity

test acquires a new authorial signature, only this time the signature is not written by the artist himself but rather by the bureaucratic apparatus of the foundation, which puts a large ink stamp on the canvas which reads *DENIED* written in capital letters. The work with the signature *DENIED* has thus lost its cultural and market value forever.

The signature of the corporation thus assumes the role of the artist's authentic signature; yet, such transfers of authority are, for now at least, still rare and the author's signature is usually still proof of authenticity. This is why there are numerous manuals on how to sign works of art. The first piece of advice that they offer is to make one's signature legible and to write out one's name in full. They also advise the artists to be consistent, that is, to make sure that they always write their name in the same way. To prevent the possibility of subsequent forgery, they advise the authors to sign the painting while the pigments are still wet, for subsequently added signatures look like forgeries. And in conclusion:

Your signature should not be so bold or overbearing that it actually interferes with or detracts from the composition [...]. It should blend rather than contrast or conflict with its surroundings and look like it 'lives' within the art.⁷

⁷ Sign Your Art so People Can Read It... and Other Tips, <http://www.artbusiness.com/signart.html>, last accessed on 29 July 2010.

⁸ Janez Janša is the pseudonym of the artist who changed his name from Janez Janša into Žiga Kariž in November 2008. Since then, Žiga Kariž has been using the pseudonym when collaborating with the artists Janez Janša and Janez Janša.

The twenty-seven paintings painted by Viktor Bernik do not follow this rule. Each of them measures 50 x 70 cm in size and each of them shows the author's signature painted in thick acrylic paint. Yet, the author of the work of art is not the artist Viktor Bernik. The authors of the art project, in which these twenty-seven paintings are assembled into nine triptychs, are Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša,⁸ who also signed the triptychs. The nine almost identical triptychs differ from one another only inasmuch as this is necessary due to the manual reproduction of the image of each Janša's signature. The minimal

differences between the signatures have occurred because of the painter's flaws and they actually resemble the minimal differences that occur when someone repeatedly writes down their name on a piece of paper. The signature is still sufficiently the same to be confirmed as identical by the graphologist; yet, there are minimal differences between one's signature today and one's signature tomorrow.

The triptychs differ in yet another respect, concerning a property that occupies the boundary between the painting's extrinsic and intrinsic qualities. It concerns the author's signature. Only now I am not talking about the signatures of Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša that were transferred onto the canvas by Bernik, but rather about the very signatures of the authors of the project. These signatures differ from one another, however, not only in minimal formal features, but also in key properties for, as it turns out, these three authors have more than three names by which they are recognised. All nine triptychs are necessary to produce the possibility for signing all names of the authors. The three paintings in the first exhibited triptych at the show *Signature*, which is a joint project by Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša, are signed by the artist Janez Janša. The second triptych is signed by the second artist in the group, so that the signature, which looks different in form, reads Janez Janša. The third triptych is signed by the artist who uses the pseudonym Janez Janša. The fourth triptych is the authorial work of all three artists and the paintings are signed with signatures Janez Janša, which sound the same, yet, they are different in form and content.

The three artists called Janez Janša are problematic. One of the Janša artists changed his name to Žiga Kariž in Ljubljana in November 2008. The second Janša, who was born in Italy, is forced to use the name Davide Grassi to observe the legislation in Italy. Similarly, the third Janez Janša is called Emil Hrvatin in Croatia. This is why the cycle of triptychs with variations on their signatures does

not end with the fourth triptych. The fifth triptych at the exhibition is signed by Emil Hrvatin, the sixth by Davide Grassi and the seventh by Žiga Kariž. The artists signed the composition of the eighth triptych with their given names Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi and Žiga Kariž, which they had used in their artistic opuses until they changed their names into Janez Janša in 2007. So, will the foundation of works by Janez Janša in a few decades declare this triptych a market and cultural fraud, because the artists signed it by departing from their standard decision to use the names and the pseudonym Janez Janša within the *Janez Janša* project? The last triptych is the “official Slovenian” triptych, so to speak; it is such that its authenticity could be confirmed by the Registry Office of the Republic of Slovenia. It is signed by Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Žiga Kariž.

In the twenty-seven paintings we see four different combinations of words, that is, four variations on names and surnames: Davide Grassi, Emil Hrvatin, Janez Janša and Žiga Kariž. With their combinations, diverse semantic structures are woven on two levels. First, there is the signature in the role of image on canvas. It is important that this signature is only an image of signature, which is what the project emphasises in a visual way as well as in a way that concerns content. The fact that we are dealing with an image is discernible from the size and, above all, from the painterly pastiness of the acrylic layer of the black paint, of which the signature in the painting consists. The fact that Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša entrusted a fourth person, a painter, with painting this signature – a painting within the painting – is an additional warning that we are dealing with an image of the signature and not the signature itself. All signatures/images were created by the artist Viktor Bernik, who appears in the project with his name and surname, that is, not as a “shadow” creator of the signatures, not as a painterly ghost writer of sorts, but rather as an author. And yet, Bernik here appears as the author

in the service of other authors – two Janez Janšas and Žiga Kariž, a former Janez Janša, who is now Janez Janša only when he uses his pseudonym. These authors have secured their authorship of this project with their signatures on all nine triptychs. The tension that is thus created raises the question of authorship, which in fine arts, despite Warhol, is still understood in emphatically individual terms and it is considered an expression of work by the artist genius's own hands. Who, then, is the author – the artist who created the work or the artists who signed it? And who are the signatories and how many of them are there? Is Emil Hrvatin a different author from the same person with the name Janez Janša? What is the market and cultural value of this triptych in comparison to that one? Are they the same or are they different from one another?

The tension created between the signatures-images and the signatures-signatures raises the question of authorship and copyright. The question is, of course, broader within the context of the broader *Janez Janša* project. The latter is so complex that some writers trivialise it into the “monstrous three-headed project Janša” and attempt to read it on a simple, linear level.⁹ Yet, the project clearly shows that it does not come into being through a socially critical statement, nor is it a continuation of excessive identification,¹⁰ which was common among a certain part of the alternative and subcultural scene in Ljubljana in the 1980s. The *Janez Janša* project functions as a network of meanings. Like in a painterly execution, the whole project is an investigation, which is not straight and it does not strive for an instrumental goal (e.g., social critique); rather, within time and with the instabilities and the changes of the project, it creates visual, performative and conceptual tensions, which are not subject to a uniform ideological statement.

The relationship between the political and art is only one of the possible ways of reading the *Janez Janša* project. Of course, the political orientation of the artists is not collective; rather, there are individual political affinities of the

9 Marina Gržinić, “From Biopolitics to Necropolitics and the Institution of Contemporary Art”, *Biopolitics, Necropolitics and de-coloniality*, No. 14, Pavillion, Bucharest 2010, pp. 35–48; and Marina Gržinić, “On the dark side of the Alps”, *Maska*, Ljubljana, Nos 113–114, Spring 2008, pp. 66–72.

10 See, for instance, Blaž Lukan, “The Janez Janša project”, *NAME Ready-made*, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, Revolver, Berlin 2008, pp. 11–28; and Rok Vevar, “Več kot nas bo, hitreje bomo na cilju!”, *Večer*, 1 September 2007, p. 12.

artists Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Žiga Kariž. It does not manifest as an image of the political within an art project; rather, it is realised in the entirety of their opuses and public activities. The project of the twenty-seven paintings, or rather the nine triptychs, is not an image of the political in painting; it is an investigation of a possible network of the meanings of politics in fine arts.

What is it that situates a painting within the field of the political? One of the most important elements of fine arts – which places the painting within the framework of “guiding one’s activities in a certain direction, that is, towards the realisation of a certain goal”¹¹ – must be the signature of the author. As mentioned, there are two levels of signatures in the painterly *Janez Janša* project. The image of the signature is not political; like any other image, it is merely an image of the political. The image within the painting is thus also merely an image of the real and not the real itself. However, the author’s signature – the signature of the painting – is what enters into the painting directly from the real and it is not merely an image. The signature is a socially agreed upon sign, which evaluates the painting within the painting itself; it marks it, it attributes it and it ensures that the painting, even before it leaves the studio to enter the social, acquires the possibility of its cultural and social evaluation. This is why the author’s signature is more political than what is represented in the painting, for the latter is merely a motif, such as an image of a worker on strike, which in itself is no more political than an image of a lonely monk on the beach. While previously the *Janez Janša* project tackled questions of Slovenian and international cultural space, art world, the iteration, loss and assumption of meaning, art history, individual identity, bureaucracy, the personal, etc., this time it confronts the key medium of fine arts and the tensions that the latter offers today.

¹¹ Igor Lukšič, “Politika”, *Enciklopedija Slovenije* XV, Mladinska knjiga, Ljubljana 1995.

Translated by Polona Petek.

A Crisis of Inscription/ Signature: The Power of the Personal Name

Miško Šuvaković

... questio mihi factus sum ...
Aurelius Augustinus

**Critique, subversion and the performing
of “subjectivity” in times of crisis**

Artistic practice which focuses on the subversion of social power and its hegemonic identifications is always performed as a singular event within a certain social relation, as a critical, actionist, engaged, activist practice in the complex realms of individualised subjectivities and intersubjective identifications. Artistic practices pursue a destruction or derealisation of events within the social

Janez Janša
*Podpis (Holivudski
 pločnik slavnih),*
 Los Angeles, 2007
 Akcija
 Fotografija: Janez Janša
 Z dovoljenjem:
 Aksioma

Janez Janša
*Signature (Hollywood
 Walk of Fame),*
 Los Angeles, 2007
 Action
 Photo: Janez Janša
 Courtesy: Aksioma



field – elite practices of high art or alternative practices of popular culture alike. Actionist practices rely on performing personal and straightforward, notably ethical, political, existential or behavioural provocative acts, gestures or forms of behaviour in particular micro- or macro-social relations. Engaged practice

implies a vital decision on the part of the artist to assume intentionally (with his work or his existence) a contingent but critical role in social contradictions, conflicts and confrontations with the repressive power, i.e., the performative and symbolic realm of the political. Activist practice in/of art terms a conceptualised viable project, aiming at quite concrete practices and life forms, i.e., an artistic intervention into the culture and society bearing effective political (social and cultural) consequences. Actionist, engaged or activist practices, as a subversion of social power and its potentialities of identification come from below (from the people, from the margins, etc.) as singular events. Such practices engage with the hierarchical structures of power in the society, and their provocation, destruction or derealisation. Provocation implies a relatively “safe” violation or questioning (challenging, problematising) the symbolic norms and discourses of political or cultural power. Destruction implies a singular event – excess – problematising, destructing or decentering a symbolic or concrete order of intersubjective relations in a society. Destruction is a process established and evolved from the *tradition* of historical avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes. The political aspects of artistic destruction refer to the historical examples of Dada in German art around the year 1920. Derealisation implies more complex forms of artistic or cultural

actions focused on depriving of sense/reason, legitimacy, importance or effect in certain social practices, primarily didactic and repressive; namely, practices of daily existence within the manifestations of social power as the basis for informing life. Artistic subversions of power emerge as an exit – it may be claimed: transcendence – of the *artistic* into the realm of the political conceived as informing of “human condition”. These and such artistic practices thus pursue immanence in a political sense, and this implies work with the social.

Artistic practices intuitively or programmatically focused on subversions of “power” are conceived in critical media representations or live-action performances in specific micro- or macro-contexts. Representations and performances are directed against the advocacies, effects and phenomenalities of the real, actualised or the symbolically/fictionally mediated “power”. Artistic practice may be termed as critical and subversive in the conceptual, discursive, and political sense in two cases:

- a) when it expresses or demonstrates a critical or subversive attitude in relation to social power, corresponding identifying hegemonies and its advocates in a context of relative autonomies of art, and
- b) when, in a sufficiently transparent manner, it discloses itself as a *signifying practice* engaged in a “problematic relation” in a web of social signifying practices, exposing them through work, production and action.

The former case refers to a “political critical and/or subversive attitude” stated by means of a work or action of the artist in a spontaneous manner or according to a plan. A political critical and/or subversive attitude of the artist is pronounced as an individual articulated or inarticulate attitude of the artist, an attitude of an artistic or interest group (micro-world, micro-ecology) or an attitude of a political micro- or macro-platform, including inarticu-

The latter case implies an implicit or explicit attitude becoming a reflexive, symptomatic or activist *practice* of confrontation with the material conditions and circumstances of art, culture, and society. An attitude becoming reflexive, symptomatic or engaged practice (demonstrative and open to understanding) aims to disclose the potentiality of art to confront the “political” and to make it visible/audible in the order of the political opaqueness of the social life.

On the project *Janez Janša: From subversion to human condition*

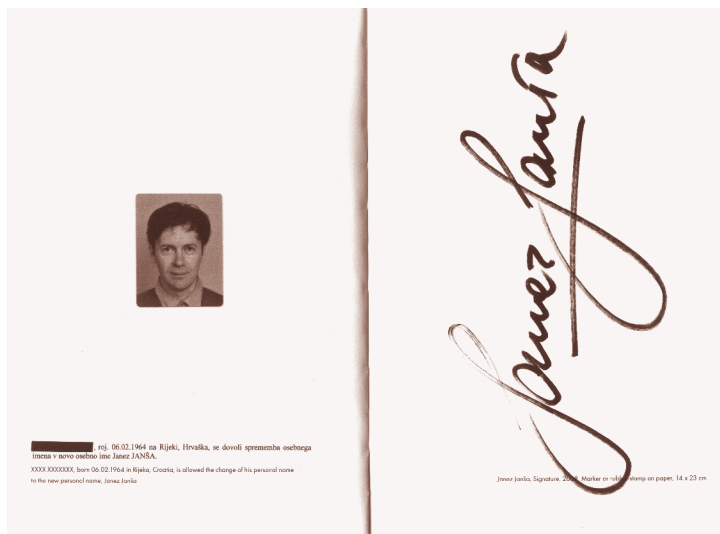
When the three artists, theatre director Emil Hrvatin, new media artist Davide Grassi and painter Žiga Kariž administratively changed their names and surnames, taking the name and surname of the standing¹ prime minister of the Republic of Slovenia Janez Janša, they performed a characteristic act of cynical performance of cultural criticism and subversion within the Slovenian public sphere. Their action featured “artistic practice in the age of culture”, meaning that they intervened in the *tissue* of the Slovenian social daily existence.

¹ July 2007.

Art in the age of culture is an indeterminate index identification of artistic practices following the end of the Cold War and the later shift from *separate symptomatic retro- and post-artistic practices* in the art of the 1980s and early 1990s towards establishing the critical and intervening art of the new age of globalisation and transition. Art in the age of culture emerged with the spectacles of power of the global neoliberal transnational companies and the global multicultural empires (USA and EU). After the globalisa-

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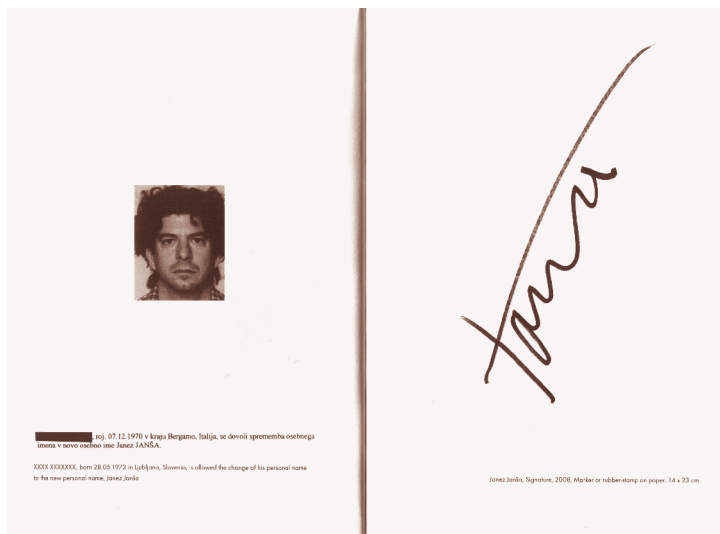


tion/transition shift from local to global, something in art and culture crucially changed, and that change should be clearly identified.

The global of the transitional culture features *short circuits* or *corridors* between art and culture. There are developments transforming art into culture and incorporating culture into art. Translucent, soft and permeable borders emerge between art and cultural theory, as it were. As a cultural practice, art comes about in pervious relations between the contemporary mega-culture and *macro-ideological practices and systems of culture* in Western Europe, North America, the states/cultures of post-socialism, and the Third World, informing the cultural relations between the first, the second and the third world. Various *index items* referring to a concrete or potential reality may be distinguished in the newly-established situation of art in the *age of the infinite*. Contemporary art falls outside the recognisable contextualisations of trends, styles, manners, movements, tendencies – this is the art of the chaotic and accelerated infinity of the artistic phenomena in an open cultural realm of the new media and global/local performatives. In other words: (1) while, for instance, the

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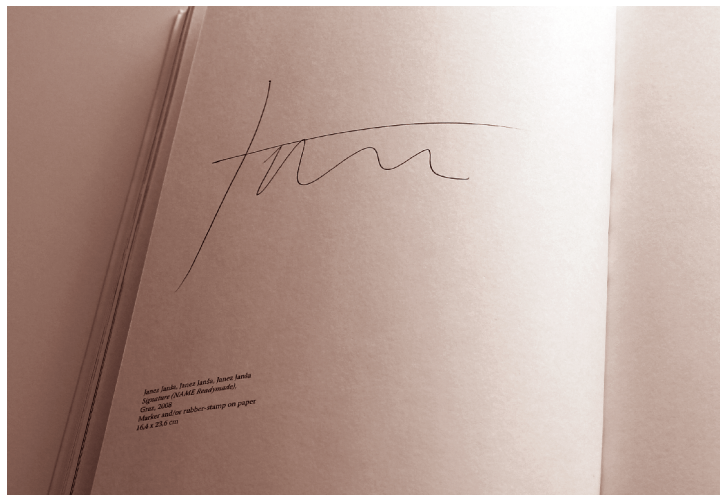
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traditional painterly bourgeois realisms of the 19th century, or critical social realisms of the 20th century aimed at faithful or optimal visual representations of the natural and social world outside art, (2) while the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde anti- or post-painterly realisms (concretism, new realism, neo dada, pop art, arte povera) aimed at a literal post-Duchampian displacement of objects of the world outside art into the exceptional and critical art world, (3) the global and transitional simulationist media realism emerges as a mediated disclosing of real or fictional information, and erased and displaced traces of the relations between image and word in the constitution of the social ideology of globalism – namely, the *post-conflict second* (post-Communist) or the *third* (postcolonial) world. An artwork is, and that is an ontological determinant, a mediated order of information disclosing the functions of the context in the production of social signification of the problems within the post-Socialist (transitional), civil European, liberal American or post-colonial societies. Art becomes a *probe* for testing and displaying a culture in its social potentialities of operation, contexts and production of public signification.

Janez Janša,
Janez Janša,
Janez Janša
*Podpis (NAME
Readymade. steirischer
herbst)*, Gradec, 2008
Akcija
Flomaster na knjižni
strani 80, *NAME
Readymade*, Janez
Janša, Janez Janša,
Janez Janša (uredniki),
Moderna galerija,
Revolver, Ljubljana 2008
23.5 x 16.5 cm
Št. izvodov 1000

Janez Janša,
Janez Janša,
Janez Janša
*Signature (NAME
Readymade. steirischer
herbst)*, Graz, 2008
Action
Marker on book page 80,
NAME Readymade,
Janez Janša, Janez
Janša, Janez Janša
(editors), Museum of
Modern Art, Revolver,
Ljubljana 2008
23.5 x 16.5 cm
Edition of 1000



The project of the three artists Janez Janša emerged in this context of probing the Slovenian culture and its public political realms of power, identification and articulation of daily life.

However, the neo-liberal global expansion and permanent market transitions have already reached the critical points. The global financial crisis at the end of the first decade of the 21st century disclosed the weakness, fractures and limits of permanent economic and market expansion. It appears that essential contradictions of the “human condition” of existence (poverty, social insecurity, global epidemics and natural disasters) lurk behind the “cliché of the ordinary”. The three artists who go under the name of Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša² shifted their concerns from the “local Slovenian *doxa*” related to a critical evaluation of the roles of the ex-prime minister Janez Janša, to re-examining the general conditions of human existence. In other words, they abandoned their interest in cultural clichés of the daily routines of the Slovenian society and began to explore, test and re-organise the structures of human denomination. They began their research of sheer humanity on individual and social levels through modali-

2 The two artists currently use their real “administrative” names Janez Janša and Janez Janša, while the third Janez Janša reclaimed the name and surname he got at birth: Žiga Kariž. Žiga Kariž now uses the name Janez Janša as a pseudonym when he works on *Janez Janša* projects.

ties of denomination. Denomination and signification, i.e., communicational and identification mediation with names became a central theme of their artistic exploration of the human condition (*conditio humana*). Indeed, they quite self-consciously suggest that the “human condition” rendered as a pronounced or written name is not the same thing as *human nature*.³ The determination of the human being by human creations and the outside world marks the character of this project conceived by the artists in different circumstances: as a signature “Janez Janša” on the pavement of Hollywood’s Walk of Fame; the same signature executed in stone on the slope of an Alpine ridge, or with Light-Emitting Diodes (LED) at the exhibition *Ars Electronica*; written with a pen on a passport form or any other document, or inscribed on a surface of an *art painting* as a gestural, almost calligraphic sign similar to the signatures of artists like Pablo Picasso, Cy Twombly, Robert Ryman, or Neša Paripović ... Namely, everything that enters into the human world, or is brought into it in human *effort* becomes a part of human determination. A name is an exclusively human linguistic/semiotic “arte fact”, but in a retrospective sense, a complex condition of humanity and a dynamic condition of conceiving humanity. All this provokes anxiety, which marks the human presence in the world.

3 Hannah Arendt, *Vita Activa*, Biblioteka “August Cesarec”, Zagreb 1991, p. 13

The actions of the three artists do not merely represent a contemporary cultural symptom, but a way of bringing anxiety into the human daily and traumatic existence.

Personal names in all or some *possible* worlds

We can commence with an intuitively given supposition that the concept of a name apparently does not include a “description” of the named. The relation between a

name and a description is not simple; to the contrary, the description is important for understanding the “sense of the name”.⁴ The pronounced or written personal name does not provide a description of the being or the object applied to. It may be said for a mineral: “This is stone!”, or for a woman/man: “This is Mary/Peter”. Thus one does not provide a description or characterisation of that stone (for instance, the stone is a black mineral) or the human being in question (Mary is a sexy widow, Peter is a diligent worker). Nevertheless, the “name” itself is not merely a name (an empty signifier), but a complex ambiguity and potentiality of reference and communication. Only in referential relations Mary and Peter become “the very Mary” or “the very Peter”; indeed, the one particular Mary of all Maries (she is his mother), or the one particular Peter of all Peters (he is the first apostle, a factory foreman), etc. Anyway, how is the name’s reference given? Is it simply demonstrative? According to Ludwig Wittgenstein, in many cases of using the word “meaning” (although not exclusively), it can be explained in the following terms: the meaning of a word is its use in language. However, the meaning of a name is at times explained by indicating the bearer.⁵

4 Saul A. Kripke, “Imenovanje i nužnost”, *Dometi* no. 4, Rijeka 1984, pp. 44–64.

5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Filozofska istraživanja*, Nolit, Belgrade, 1980, p. 56.

This is where we encounter a complex location of “causal” or “quite coincidental” chains and webs of communication, which condition the relations between names and referents. A personal name may be written on personal documents (ID card, passport, credit card), on business and private letters, as a signature of an artistic or scientific work, etc. Personal names may appear on street graffiti, in a wide range of situations: for instance, on political graffiti containing names of politicians and political leaders (the inscription of the name “TITO” in white paint and capital letters on the walls of village or town buildings marked the omnipresence of Josip Broz Tito in the socialist

Yugoslavia). However, graffiti on school walls, like “Janez loves Jasmina” or “Janez loves Janez” display merely private statements entering the public sphere. Personal names featured on posters, ads or billboards offer useful information on products, services, entertainment, cultural or artistic events, because a name does not only represent a subject, but is also a trademark for particular social practices. For instance, seeing on a billboard the initials D&G, every fashion lover recognises the visual identity of the fashion company Dolce&Gabbana, while lovers of contemporary philosophy laugh, seeing the initials of the philosophers Deleuze and Guattari. What is at stake are different “language games” or language potentialities of a name.

It is, therefore, important to emphasise that the “chain/web” determining the relation between a name and a referent appears as important for understanding the artistic pursuits with personal names of the artists Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša. The former Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša was born on 17 September 1958 as Ivan Janša, never officially changing his name. However, in his public appearances he used the popular Slovenian name “Janez” as his nickname. In other words, Ivan Janša used the name Janez Janša as a *hard signifier* in his public political life. Publicly known as Janez Janša, he was prosecuted as Ivan Janša. In the military prison of the Yugoslav People’s Army in Ljubljana he stayed in 1988 under his real name Ivan Janša, although a public campaign demanded the release of Janez Janša.⁶ On 3 December 2004, he was appointed Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia as Janez Janša, etc. In Slovenia, some people were baptised/named Ivan Janša but call themselves Janez. Their personal name appears as a “hard signifier”, but like in the case of the former Prime Minister Janez Janša, it is in fact a “soft signifier”. On the other hand, there have been at least three “individuals” who were not named/baptised at birth as Janez Janša, but Emil Hrvatin in Croatia, Davide Grassi

⁶ After his arrest in late May 1988, he was tried, together with two other *Mladina* journalists and a staff sergeant of the Yugoslav Army, in a military court on charges of exposing military secrets. Known as the JBTZ trial, all four were sentenced to prison. Janša was sentenced to 18 months and was released after serving about six months. The case triggered mass protests against the regime.

in Italy and Žiga Kariž in Slovenia. Those three “individuals”, at a certain point of time (2007) and place (Slovenia) deliberately and officially renamed themselves into Janez Janša, bearing in mind that they took the former Prime Minister’s name which was “public”, but not a “hard signifier”. For them, this new name became a “hard signifier”, although it was indeed a “soft signifier”, determined and governed by an intentional chain of communication.

The circular transformations of a name, as hard into soft, and as soft into a hard signifier, comprise one of the key critical reformulations of the name Janez Janša in the project of the three artists. After their act, in every conceivable world there is not only one Janez Janša with a variant personal name, but several of them who refer not only to themselves (“Me and my name”): they also refer to his personal name and nickname. All the names are activated. Especially when one of the Janez Janšas took back his old name Žiga Kariž, demonstrating that both personal names feature as “soft signifiers”. This is also confirmed by the fact that the authorities in Slovenia recognise one of the Janez Janšas as Janez Janša, while Croatian authorities recognise him as Emil Hrvatin. Likewise, the other Janez Janša is recognised by the authorities in Italy as Davide Grassi. It turns out that a name, by means of a chain/web of communication, necessarily or accidentally, yet voluntarily conditions the relation with the referent. This has created a hybrid situation of multiple references with particular consequences for *life itself*.

Inscription and/or signature: coding and decoding the truth of “being”

Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Žiga Kariž have also begun to explore inscriptions of personal names, i.e., signatures.

Janez Janša
Podpis (Kunsthhaus
 Graz), Gradec, 2008
 BIX Media Facade
 Računalniška
 animacija
 20 x 45 m
 Fotografija:
 Peter Rauch
 Z dovoljenjem:
 Aksioma

Janez Janša
Signature (Kunsthhaus
 Graz), Graz, 2008
 BIX Media Facade
 Computer animation
 20 x 45 m
 Photo: Peter Rauch
 Courtesy: Aksioma



The history of the notion and phenomenon of signature is a long European story of authentication of the individual in bodily inscriptions of phonetic or graphic “endorsements” or “traces”. Those are personal inscriptions of names and surnames, initials, nicknames, but also sealed traces of a coat-of-arms, emblem, encoded sign, initials or a particular individualised or specified symbol. In bureaucratic paperwork, at times, a signature is replaced with a hand marking, “x” or “+”. For a long time, the signature had been perceived as a sign and/or trace for an “authentication” of the individual.

Writing as a particular skill refers to handwriting of standardised signs. The history of the alphabet is a long one, spanning civilisations from the Sumerian to the Phoenician, and from the Phoenician to the Greek and Roman. The European scripts emerged, drawing from the classical heritage, throughout the early Middle Ages. Gothic script (Blackletter) was adopted as the basis of writing since the 12th century, all through the Renaissance times. One of the first writing manuals was published by Sigismondo Fanti and Ludovico degli Arrighi. With the gradual development of graphic techniques it was possible to copy and spread

manuscripts. The skill of handwriting, in fact, implies motion of the writing tool (coal, graphite, pen). It requires a motoric coordination of the body – gaze, muscles, skin ... Skilful writing can become an instance of motoric automatism. A characteristic mode of handwriting is termed “style” or “manner”. Handwriting and copying belong to the grand Western tradition of “transcribing” the books before the discovery of printing techniques. The skill of penmanship or “calligraphy” was a part of school instruction commanding great attention since the 18th century. “Technical writing” differs from calligraphy in overriding the personal character of writing, and emphasising its neutral or impersonal style.

The personal signature has had a different status in various epochs. Seal, anagram, coat-of-arms or a plain symbol preceded the personal, i.e., handwritten, signature (autograph). The personal handwritten signature relates to the “modern” age, when an individual detached himself from the tribe, family, caste, guild or workshop, becoming a bearer of the self: “I leave a trace” by which I verify myself – my presence or my intention to accomplish this or that. The modern subject is recognised and identified with his signature on a bank check, voting form, business or personal letter, etc. In law and economy, a signature may be consigned in the court, with the notary or a bank, enabling verification of written and signed resolutions and petitions from an authorised official. However, today in the times of the Internet and e-mail communication, the authentic personal signature has been replaced with the “electronic” one. In the context of the discussions on hand writing and signing, one should mention graphology. Graphology as a “study of handwriting” is a science or pseudo-science. It probably emerged in the late-16th century with the constitution of the modern subject and the demand for leaving an authentic trace-signature on documents and letters. The first graphological society (Société Graphologique) was

established in 1871. Graphology emerged as a technique or skill of interpretation of handwriting, especially in relation to the human psyche and was connected with diagnostic practices treating brain diseases or those of the nervous system. It became a part of police studies, used in verifying true or false, i.e., falsified, signatures. The relation between the authentic and false signature is one of the great mystifications of the Western civilisation – there has always been the question: Who is really the person behind the signature?

The signature (*signare*) is a mark for the authentic and legible trace of an individual, for the authentic author of an artwork. For example, Ludger tom Ring *signed* his works with a ring-shaped symbol. The anonymous master of Bern marked his works with a symbol of a carnation. Rubens signed his paintings with *capital letters* PPR. Since the 15th century the mark of the artist contained in the work became more widespread. For the modern artists of the 19th and the early-20th century, the signature became a “sign for authenticity of the work” and its “trademark” – note, for instance, the signatures of Van Gogh or Picasso. Dadaists like Marcel Duchamp or Francis Picabia used the signature as a confirmation that an artwork or an ordinary object was appropriated by the signing act. Picasso and Duchamp signatures were conceived inversely. With the signing act, Picasso confirmed that a piece was “made” by his hand. Duchamp, with his own or adopted name (pseudonym), demonstrated that the act of naming was in fact an act of cultural appropriation and shifting of the object to the realm of the symbolic capital.

After the Second World War, certain artists worked with signatures or simulacra of signatures, shifting the value of an authentic inscription of the artist towards a de-centred, displaced or over-identified token. Robert Rauschenberg erased a de Kooning drawing. All that was left from the art-

work was the signature indicating the name of the author of the erased piece. The name of the painter/draftsman was the only trace informing the work created in appropriation and transformation of another artwork (*Erased de Kooning Drawing*, 1953). Cy Twombly paints the surface and leaves a graphic trace of expressive gesture. This inscription of an abstract gestural trace may be related to a personal name (*Virgil*, 1973), but also to the painter's *written* signature (*Untitled*, 1970). Twombly⁷ annuls the analogical potentiality of a painting, indicating that the painted gesture is performed as a graphic form of inscription of his body. Writing emerges in exposedness of signifying punctuations. It turns out that the inscription of a name has no referent, description or a causal chain of communication. What is demonstrated is the very presence of writing, as an inscribed trace of painting as art. Robert Ryman executed some pieces by inscribing "R. Ryman" on the surface of a painting (*Untitled*, 1958 or *Untitled*, 1961). Ryman eliminated from the painting all the essential aspects of presentation, except its constitutive elements: surface, colour, signature, date. The centring of the signature in painting does not imply "fetishisation of the name of the painter and the value of his work", but trivialisation of the non-painterly content of a painting. Neša Paripović executed a series of graphics *Potpis levom rukom* [Signed with Left Hand] (1978) and *Potpis desnom rukom* [Signed with Right Hand] (1978) aiming at deconstruction of the signature as verification of an authentic graphic product. A signature is something that should be questioned and deferred into the realm of cultural contingencies, instabilities, and slip-pages of the signifier when confronted with the expected signified.

7 Roland Barthes, "Cy Twombly: Works on Paper ... Readings: Gesture", in *The Responsibility of Forms / Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1985, pp. 157–176.

The new paintings by Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša align with the tradition of work with signatures in art. They executed a series of performative, multimedia and visual works based on representation of a signature:

Janez Janša
Podpis
 (plaža Copacabana),
 Rio de Janeiro, 2008
 Instalacija
 136 sončnikov
 na peščeni plaži
 15 x 120 m
 Fotografija: Janez Janša
 Z dovoljenjem: Maska

Janez Janša
Signature
 (Copacabana beach),
 Rio de Janeiro, 2008
 Installation
 136 beach umbrella
 on beach sand
 15 x 120 m
 Photo: Janez Janša
 Courtesy: Maska



Janez Janša. Quite different works were conceived for different occasions:

Signature (Horse Saddle), Konjsko sedlo, 2007;
Signature (Hollywood Walk of Fame), Los Angeles, 2007;
Signature Event Context, Berlin, 2008;
Signature (Conspire. Transmediale 08), Berlin, 2008;
Signature (NAME Readymade. steirischer herbst), Graz, 2008;
Signature (Kunsthau Graz), Graz, 2008;
Signature (Copacabana beach), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2008;
Signature (Ars Electronica), Linz, Austria, 2009.

For their current project *Signature* they conceived an exhibition of paintings. Nine triptychs are to be on display. Three of them contain three paintings signed “Janez Janša”. Every painting represents the signature of one of the three artists. Each triptych is signed by one of the three artists: Janša, Janša and Janša, and each of them belongs to a different author. The fourth triptych is a joint work of the three artists, and signed by each of them. The fifth triptych is signed by a Janez Janša with his official name from his Croatian documents: Emil Hrvatin; and the sixth triptych is signed with his name from Italian documents: Davide Grassi. The seventh triptych is signed as “Žiga Kariž” because this artist

changed the name Janez Janša to his former name in November 2008. The eighth triptych is signed with the “original” names of all the three artists: Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi and Žiga Kariž. The ninth triptych is signed with their currently official names in Slovenia: Janša, Janša, and Kariž.

What has been conceived is a contradictory installation of paintings, in its visual phenomenality based on the monotonous repetition of signatures with different underlying potentialities of identification and authorisation of the identity of the artist-creator. There is a *slippage* between the symbolic and the imaginary order of identification of an artwork (signed painting) and its creator. An exceptional, enigmatic complexity between conceptual and visible, personal and public, indeed, between “hard” and “soft” denominations had been revealed. The potentialities of the “who” for the painting and the “who” in the painting have been distinguished. The pictorial essence of the paintings had been refracted through the “spectacles” of nominalist⁸ expectations from the relation of the name as content of the paintings, name as identification-signature, i.e., verification of their authorship, and, indeed, our complex discursive (but also emotional) relations to the artists and their place in life, knowledge of life, and impossibility of conceiving a straightforward message, idea or motto for this work. Breaches between the symbolic and imaginary order of the artists’ “forms of life” appear as nonnegotiable obstacles, although the paintings look like simple repetitive/minimalist representations of graphic/inscribed traces resembling a signature of the name Janez Janša.

A signature or sign is not merely a graphic trace – writing (*écriture*) indicating an absent⁹ scriptor. Somebody has left his mark for the future. What is at work is the deferring (*différance*) of an individual in writing. The individual thus becomes a subject.

⁸ Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism / On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1991.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context”, in *Margins of Philosophy*, University Of Chicago Press, Chicago 1985, pp. 307–330.

Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Žiga Kariž have conceived a quite complex situation. In other words, the signed paintings featuring at this exhibition are not merely traces of the absent subjects who created those artworks. They are rather “polygons” allowing for the individuals who created the paintings to become subjects in the realm of all the complex and ambiguous intersubjective relations between Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi and Žiga Kariž alias Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša; between Ivan, i.e., Janez, Janša who happened to be the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, and other people in the country named Ivan or Janez Janša; or, perhaps, between Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Žiga Kariž, and Janez Janša who is also Emil Hrvatin, Janez Janša who is also Davide Grassi, and Žiga Kariž who used to be Žiga Kariž, then Janez Janša, and, finally, again Žiga Kariž, etc.

In terms of signification, this complex intersubjective map affectively accounts for the “ready made delirium” accommodating the crisis of modalities of an identity/ name and the potential stability of the possible worlds. This simulated crisis of the personal name concurs with the grand global crisis of the neoliberal economy. Is *this* the explicit message of these artworks, or is it a new rebus to be solved? Is it, perhaps, a new trap of inscription and signing,¹⁰ i.e., conceiving, the potentiality of selfhood!? Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša have raised this issue, and now they observe, index and test the potentialities of contradictions and confrontations of identification in utterly different possible worlds.

¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben, “Theory of Signatures”, in *The Signature of all Things – On Method*, Zone Books, New York 2009, pp. 33–80.

Translated by Irena Sentevska.

Dela
Works

10000

10000

Janez Janice

Handwritten signature

James Fortin

James Fortin

1000

1000

Janez Janša

Janša

James Joyce

James Joyce

1/10/10

10/10

Janez Janša

Jan

James Fortia

James Fortia

1000

1000 Jan 10 1960

Janez Janša

Janez Janša *Janša*

power factor

power factor

1000

Pinch

Janez Janša

Janez Janša

James Fortia

Chloe

1000

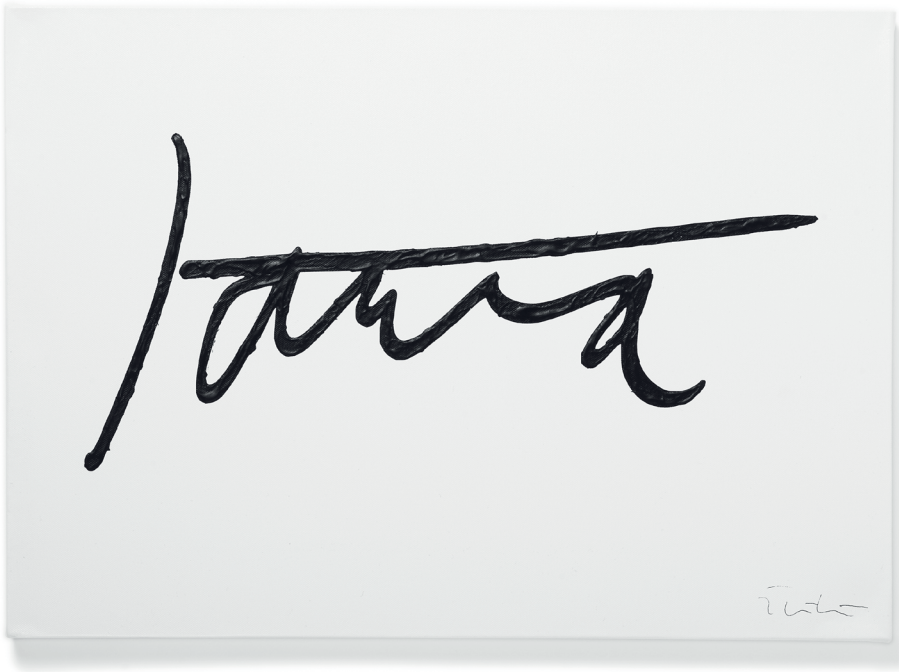
William

Janez Janša

Janša

James Foster

Franklin



Janez Janša

Janša

James Fort

20th

Janez Janša

22. 12. 2018

Power Point

2014-2015
Davidson

1000

1000

Janez Janša

25. 12. 2018

James Fortu

2 to 6 June 2011

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
SIGNATURE

www.aksioma.org/signature

24 September - 24 October 2010
The Dr. Franc Sušnik Central Carinthian Library,
Ravne na Koroškem, Slovenia

Exhibition

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