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### **The Three New Janez Janšas**

In a week when the media was short on events to report, the artistic community and general public were surprised and amused by the curious news that three well-known Slovenian artists: theatre director Emil Hrvatin, painter Žiga Kariž and visual artist Davide Grassi, officially changed their names to Janez Janša<sup>1</sup>. Many might think that we should ignore this as a bad joke or ill-advised personal decision, and—indeed—the artists argued that this action had nothing to do with art or even the artistic flair the three employed in dodging the questions of baffled journalists.

Nonetheless, I believe that their gesture concerns the very essence of contemporary art. Now, after the break of the historic avant-gardes, when not only the final artistic product but also the process of the creation of a work of art becomes a constituent part of art, when the artists' everyday attitudes – the way they dress, what they eat etc. – become important as well, the artists' private lives cannot be subtracted from their art; whatever artists do in their private lives can at any moment become part of an artistic action or performance. The artists' very denial that the renaming is an artistic gesture can be understood as part of their artistic attitude. After all, we can see that with the break of the avant-gardes the boundary between private and public can no longer be clearly defined, which-- returning to our case--means that we will now be viewing paintings by Janez Janša, performances by Janez Janša and visual works by Janez Janša. The change of name, no matter how intimate an act it is, directly affects the understanding of the works of art.

In contemporary art, the name has a key role. The only thing that distinguishes a ready-made by Marcel Duchamp from an industrially-produced object is Marcel Duchamp's signature. The difference between a urinal and *Fountain* lies, therefore, in the fact that the Fountain is signed by artist Duchamp while a urinal is not signed by anyone. Duchamp's signature alone transforms a banal object into a work of art.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a relatively rare combination of a Slovene name and surname by which approximately 10 Slovene citizens are identified, including the Slovene Prime Minister and President of the leading party in parliament - SDS (Slovenska demokratska stranka, i.e. Slovene Democratic Party).

The name change also highlights the modernist break, as art reaches beyond its field encroaching upon the socio-political tissue. The three claim that there are more than ten people called Janez Janša in Slovenia and that seeing in their change of name a kind of affinity for Slovenia's prime minister is just the result of public jumping to conclusions. However – is it not also true that a constituent part of a work of art is indeed its interpretation, its understanding established by the critical public? In other words, a work of art is not a final answer, but, rather, always a question addressed to a certain public, meaning that the artists do not have exclusive rights to interpretation. In this case, the first thing that comes to mind is the Slovenian prime minister, and therefore it seems to have some political connotations. However, the renaming is not political in the sense of commenting on the daily political events in our country or commenting on the life and work of Prime Minister Janez Janša, but political in the sense that it instantly swings the net of meanings in our society, it shakes the boundaries between art and politics, the public and the private, and offers itself as a riddle still waiting to be solved.

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