

THE NAME GAME / PABLO PICASSO

Picasso's eye and hand, like matador and picador, worked in such perfect coordination that it is not surprising that he arranged the atavistic quintet of his voyeuristic manifesto, Les demoiselles d'Avignon (1907), in the shape of an open hand, held palm up. As key or subtle *mise-en-abîme*, he included an upraised hand at the top right opening a curtain; it's a wild show, but the artist has it firmly in hand. Hands are to draw, but as the "hand stencils" in Paleolithic caves show, they were among the earliest and most widespread motifs in art.

The name "Picasso" came from his mother's side, and he began signing his works with it very early in his career. Apart from its sentimental associations and alliteration with "Pablo," this name was intuitively fitting for a pictorial artist born under the sign of the Scorpion (*picador*), an association that he surely would not have disowned. His standard signature was characterized by minimal legibility, emphatic underlining and a consistent separation of the letters: P.i.cas.s.o. The "P" is shaped like a rapier, and if I imagine him in the act of signing with a brush on canvas, I see the miniaturized motions of a toreador going for the kill.

During her first visit to Picasso's bank vault in Paris, Françoise Gilot noticed that all his own paintings there were signed, while those still in his studio were mostly unsigned. Picasso explained that he considered signatures blemishes in a painting, so he signed his pictures only at the end, when he felt that he had nothing more to say. He also pointed out that, in case of theft, stolen paintings were harder to sell when they were unsigned—so heavily does this blemish weigh on the scales of cultural value (see entry 68)

