

THE NAME GAME / FRANZSEPP WÜRTEMBERGER

Franzsepp (short for Franz Joseph) Würtenberger, a highly *selbstbewußt* professor of art history at the University of Karlsruhe, was born into a family of artists. His own artistic achievement consisted in turning the signing of his full-name into a pictorial exercise that went well beyond calligraphic effects. For decades, he practiced his art on the title pages of the art books and catalogues he bought and read, using his signature as an expression of his appreciation or depreciation, as well as a psychological barometer. In this dual ritual of appropriation and self-encounter, he symbolically acted out the continuity of ideas or inspiration he felt between himself and the author or artist. While word and image easily walk arm in arm, strange things can happen when egos rub elbows. Franzsepp never exhibited, but took great pleasure in exploring and playing with his signature, often perceiving it as a gesture of cosmic import. His private passion finally culminated in a public performance in 1976 in which, dressed in a carnival costume stitched with his first name in appliqué, he traced variations on his signature in space with a light pen. He likened the continuous line to the thread of life spun by the Fates and made this very interesting observation:

"Many people are artists only on one occasion in their lives; namely when they are signing their names. The rest of the time, when they are writing other things, they are usually tame, modest, and reserved."

(Meine akrobatischen Unterschriften, 1976)

