

Takashi Murakami: Michel Majerus Superflat

curated by Tobias Berger

September 12, 2020 – February 26, 2022

Open Saturdays 11 am – 6 pm and by appointment

Extended opening hours Gallery Weekend Berlin

Wednesday, September 9 to Sunday, September 13, 10 am – 7 pm

The Michel Majerus Estate is delighted to present *Takashi Murakami: Michel Majerus Superflat*, curated by Tobias Berger. Takashi Murakami (b. 1962) and Michel Majerus (1967–2002) both started exhibiting widely in the mid-1990s and can be considered the first generation of artists who fully embraced the post-analog. As early as 1995, Michel Majerus remarked in his notes: “unplugged (...) -> analog digitalized -> fragmented the analog,” perhaps one of the pithiest descriptions of the paradigm shift towards the full digitalization of the world at the end of the 20th century—a time that we are only starting to grasp as being one of the past decades’ most innovative periods for creative minds of all disciplines.

Strongly inspired by Michel Majerus’ treatment of street and computer culture, Murakami became interested in Majerus after observing that he was “much more mysterious” than his American counterparts, pushing forward from the “New Painting Movement” of Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, and “twisting things”—a general observation of German art that Murakami is intrigued by and is an approach close to his own practice. This twist is especially interesting in the work of Michel Majerus, “who mixed late ‘80s culture, gaming culture, Japanese pop—everything, but on the surface.” As Murakami states, “It is completely dry—opposite to Anselm Kiefer or Gerhard Richter. This is a new freedom in a painting.” Having only discovered the works of Michel Majerus a few years ago, Takashi Murakami devoted three years to this series; using mostly silkscreens stoked a certain kind of jealousy of how Majerus could achieve the same result with freehand painting.

Both highly influential figures and inspirations for many visual artists and other creatives, Michel Majerus and Takashi Murakami also happily absorbed everything around them, which they incorporated into their art. From contemporary graphic design to historical drawings, from machine instructions to computer game graphics and from club flyers to manga heroes—all have been consumed to serve as some sort of springboard to be appropriated wherever suitably inspired. Where Takashi Murakami has appropriated Japanese anime, post-World War II images and the Japanese art historical canon, Michel Majerus was perhaps more influenced by *Capitalist Realism*, making use of the newest signifiers of the ‘90s like sneakers, computer fonts, company logos and album art created for electronic music.

Analyzing Takashi Murakami's "Majerus series" reveals not only the foresight of Michel Majerus as an artist but also how art, especially art of the Pop and post-Pop periods, is so relevant today. Murakami's works lay bare how these first flirtations with popular culture have anticipated and shaped our contemporary world dominated by brands, slogans, franchised comic characters, Key Opinion Leaders, Internet memes and fake news, in turn shifting viewers' perceptions of the image. Murakami is fascinated by Majerus because he, like Murakami, enjoyed the critical twist in this depiction, the twist that defined German art of the post-war generation, filtering global pop culture in a distinctly distanced way. One can observe this critical distance in Takashi Murakami's works, which grew out of the same postwar generation, albeit on the other side of the world. This distance bred a love-hate relationship with the superficial proposal of pure Pop—a relationship that is summarized in Michel Majerus' early painting from 1991: *Europe - U.S.A.*, emblazoned with the text "in EUROPE everything appears more serious than in the USA."

▶ Looking back to Michel Majerus' works from the turn of the century and witnessing the impact that they still have and how inspirational they have been for Takashi Murakami—one of the most knowledgeable connoisseurs of art and artists that I have ever met—Michel Majerus' wall work *what looks good today may not look good tomorrow* from 1999 comes to mind. In the case of both artists, one might even dare to proclaim: "What looks good today may even look better tomorrow."

Tobias Berger

The current program can be found on the website www.michelmajerus.com.

Now more than ever, our top priority is affording you the opportunity to experience art in person. We have implemented a number of measures to keep you safe during your visit and to make for a pleasant, fulfilling gallery-going experience in the face of the ongoing pandemic.

For additional information and press requests, please contact the Michel Majerus Estate: +49 30 47377300 or press@michelmajerus.com