

MUDAM

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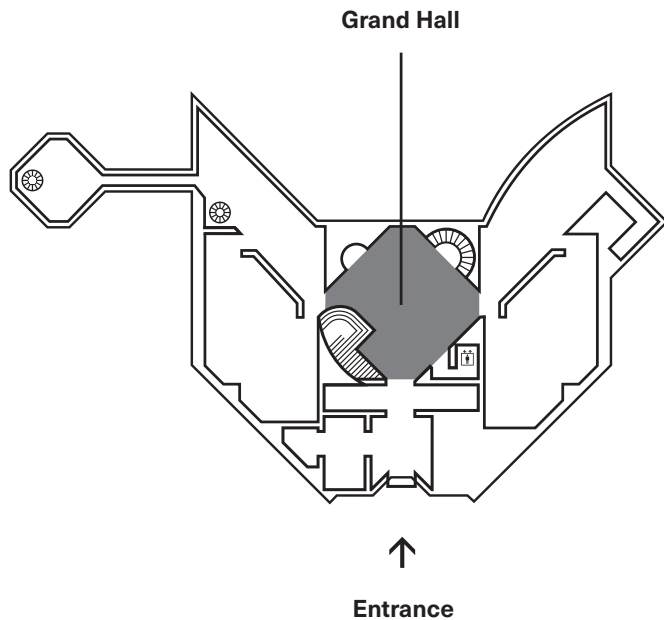
Michel Majerus

SINNMASCHINE

31.03 — 01.10.2023

mudam.com

MUDAM



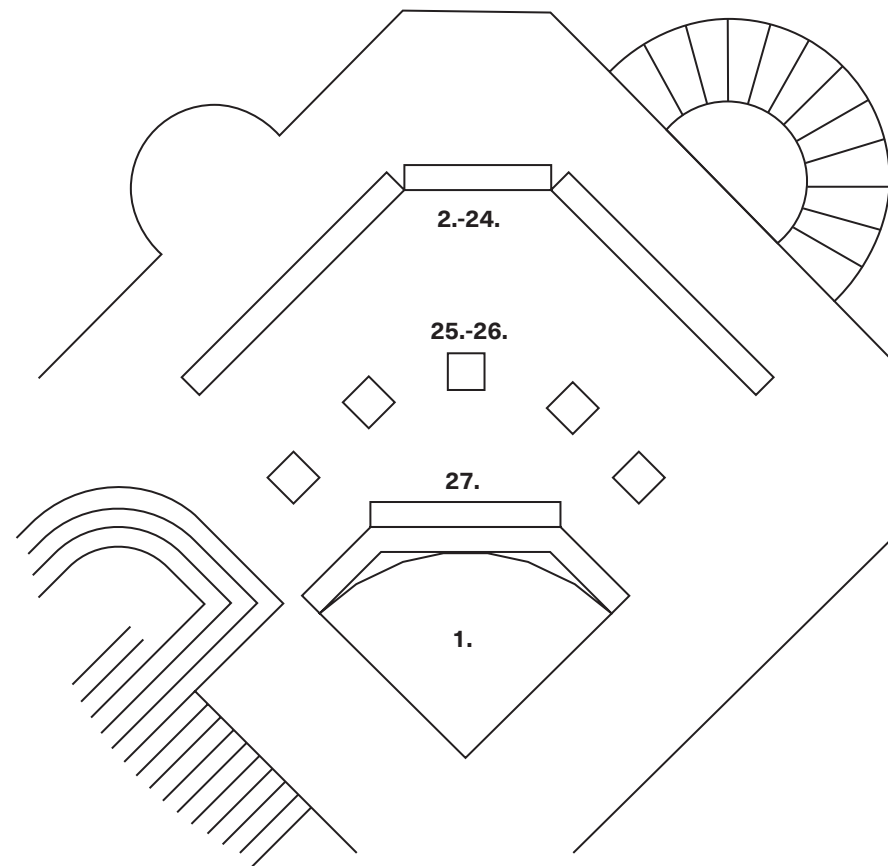
Michel Majerus

SINNIMASCHINE

31.03 — 01.10.2023

Curators

Bettina Steinbrügge
Assisted by
Clémentine Proby



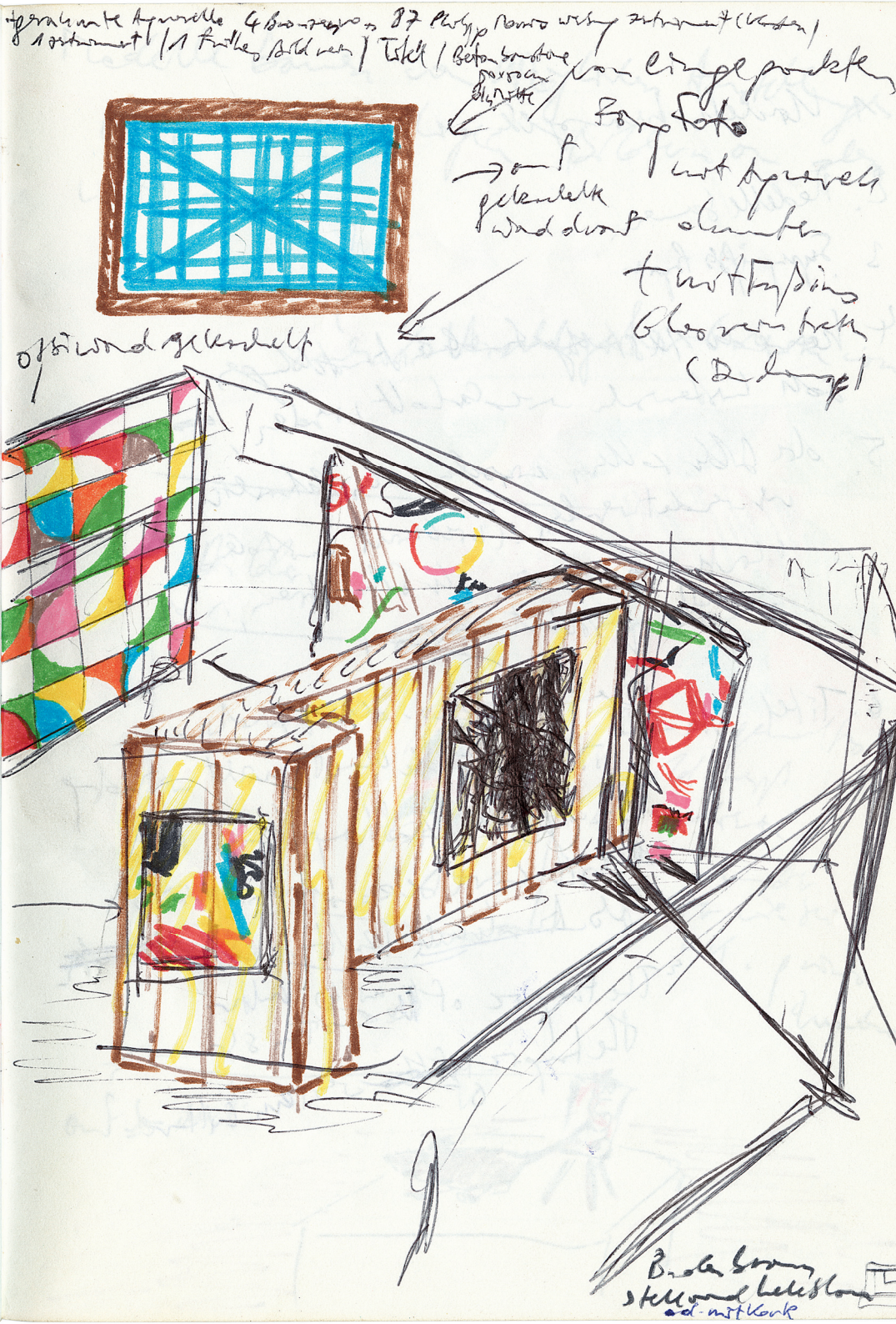
1. *SINNMASCHINE*

2.–23. Paintings by Michel Majerus

24. The artist's library

25.–26. VHS recordings; *Flockenpüree* by Susa Reinhardt

27. The artist's notebooks (facsimiles)



+ framed aquarelle, in the middle 4
bronzes of 87 Philipp Morris ad (boxes)
1 [?] / insert 1 early painting / panel /
concrete building blocks
50 x 50 cm
Bin Mitte

[Sketch] - photo of wrapped Förg

With aquarelle

Underneath
> put on a
+ kick in the glass

tiled

With foot

Wall

(Duchamp)

Ossi wall tiled

[Sketch]
Floor brown
Partition light blue
Or with cork

The exhibition

This exhibition of Michel Majerus's work is the result of a two-year engagement with the artist's work and is explicitly based on my experiences during this time of research. I first met Michel in the early 2000s and still remember standing in a small project room in Lüneburg with one of his friends when the news of his death reached us. Since then, I have often thought about his work and wondered about its essence.

For even then, he was recognised as a singular figure who had a very unique view of his own time. When I was asked to participate in the *Michel Majerus 2022* project, I took it as an opportunity to take a closer look at this large body of work. For the exhibition at the Kunstverein in Hamburg, which I had initiated, I had decided to pursue the 'digital Majerus' - the Majerus who was questioning and documenting the early beginnings of the digital age, working with the first computers and incorporating their graphics and principles into the creation of his works. When I was appointed director of Mudam, it was immediately clear to me that we should continue this work in Luxembourg. The question was how: Mudam had already honoured the artist, who played a key role in the recent history of art in this country, with a major retrospective. I did not want to repeat this, but rather wanted to emphasise what Majerus's work stands for today.

The first step was the symposium *what looks good today may not look good tomorrow: The legacy of Michel Majerus*, that took place last autumn, where we deliberately invited a younger generation of artists and theoreticians to examine

Majerus's work and its relevance today – a generation that has grown up with digital possibilities and as a result inevitably has a different approach to his work. While preparing for the symposium that would drive this project, Clémentine Proby and I began to work intensively with Michel Majerus's archive. We found a wealth of material that broadened our view of the artist's work. These findings led to the idea of a more experimental archival exhibition that would refer to Majerus's way of working and place his sources on an equal footing with the artistic work. What we are proposing with this exhibition is about understanding a particular time and what could come out of it. Markus Miessen helped us create the appropriate architecture for this process and shaped a space where visitors can linger and learn more about Majerus and his thought processes.

Throughout his short but prolific career, Michel Majerus captured the spirit of his time – decades marked by the expansion of globalised consumer culture and digital technology. His large-scale paintings and installations are characterised by the visual sampling and collage of an eclectic repertoire of imagery and text. Borrowing freely from art history, video games, advertising and electronic music, his work resonates with the frenzy of images and information that pervades contemporary society through the ubiquity of the internet. Thus, Majerus transgressed the rules of painting and reinterpreted the pop culture of the 1990s and early 2000s. He used these influences in a way that implied an engagement not only with broader cultural developments, but also with the parameters of artistic practice and reception in a way that is still relevant today.

Majerus's installations typically explored the growing role of the digital, allowing visitors to walk through and experience emerging visual cultures in an immersive way. *SINNMASCHINE* [Sense, or Meaning Machine] (1997), the departure point and entrance to the exhibition in the Grand Hall of Mudam, is one of these.

Referencing *The Man-Machine* (1978), the iconic album by German electronic music band Kraftwerk, its industrial metal floor resembles a dance floor on which visitors' footsteps resonate. Majerus worked with different techniques, themes and motifs from the world of computers, comics and advertising, and put them in dialogue with art history. In the installation of *SINNMASCHINE*, we can see these conversations happening: brands such as Nike are treated equally as references to artists such as Gerhard Richter and Majerus's own works. With this sampling method which freely and non-hierarchically combines different elements, Majerus created his own world of images and gave painting important new impulses. Through exaggeration, stylistic breaks, fragmentation or deliberate confrontation, he questioned the relationship of images to reality, creating his own artistic spaces within exhibitions, transforming his work into an environment.

In a scaffolding structure that refers to the architectures that he himself repeatedly built in a variety of formats, Mudam displays a selection of his multifaceted paintings from diverse phases of his creative career. In the manner of a research exhibition, *Michel Majerus. SINNMASCHINE* illustrates the multiple ways in which Majerus translated his research into

painting, offering a discursive space for visitors to delve into his working methods, artistic reflections and various influences. His library, integrated into the structure, gives a clear indication of his varied but time-typical interests; while his notebooks and collected publications allow for differentiated readings of his artistic practice. In addition, Majerus's VHS tapes – from copied video material from state television, MTV and VIVA recordings to documentaries and feature films – lend a new urgency to the artist's paintings, adding context and depth to the flatness of most of his works. The juxtaposition of archival material and paintings aims to shift and deepen our current understanding of Majerus's work, his relationship to art history and the discourses of his time. A publication based on the symposium that took place at Mudam in November 2022, *what looks good today may not look good tomorrow: The Legacy of Michel Majerus* will complete this expanded view and will be published in conjunction with the exhibition. This publication is the first volume of a new research-based series initiated to accompany the symposiums proposed as part of Mudam's programming and will be published in collaboration with Sternberg Press, with the generous support of Spuerkeess.

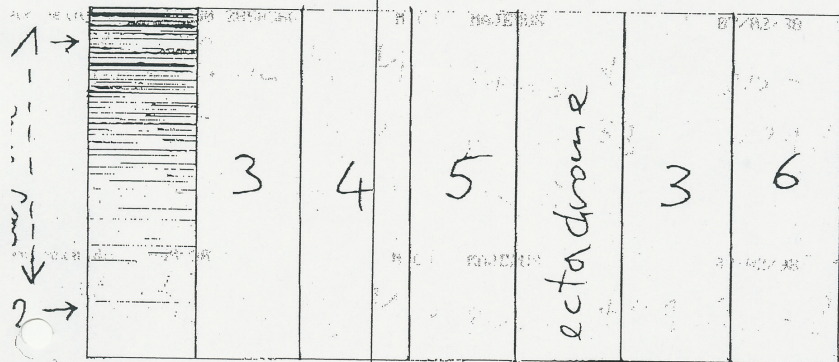
I would like to express my gratitude to the Majerus family, as well as to the Michel Majerus Estate, for their continuous support in the making of this exhibition.

I hope that this exhibition gives you a good insight into this artist's work.

Bettina Steinbrügge

fax from M. Majerus
to Mopasin
Den Alexandra :

Page 1



- colors :
- 1: pantone orange 021 C
 - 2: pantone yellow 012 C
 - 3: white
 - 4: pantone 189 C (rose)
 - 5: pantone 3105 C (light blue)
 - 6: pantone 1505 C (orange)

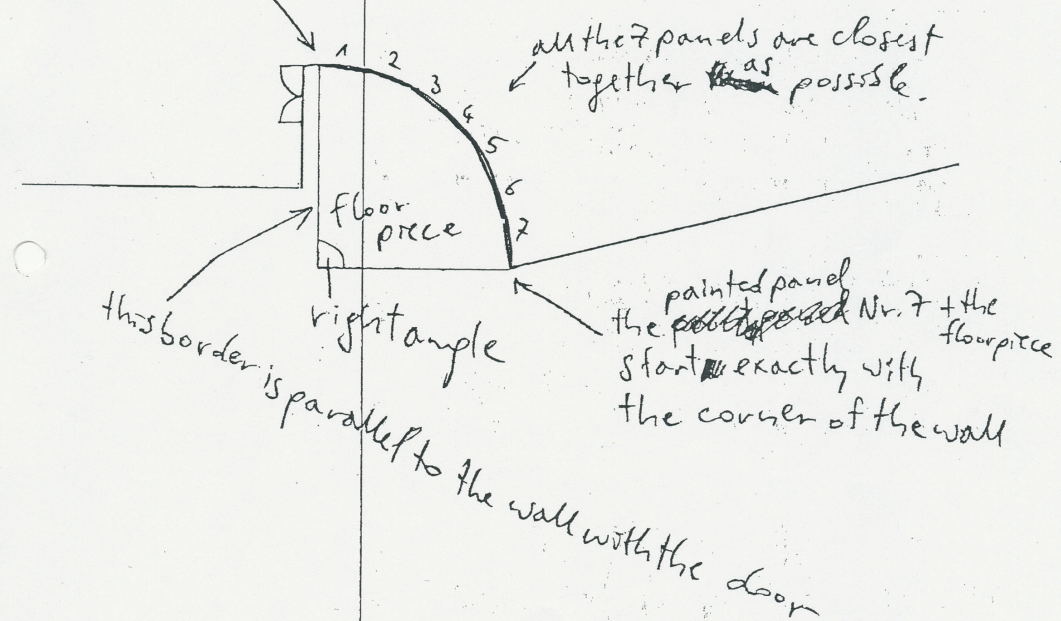
each panel is 150 cm x ca. 480 cm
the thickness of one panel is 4,5 cm

correction: on the slide is written: acrylic on canvas
1. → it should be acrylic + oil on canvas
2. → height → depends on height of Mopasin 480-500;

page 2

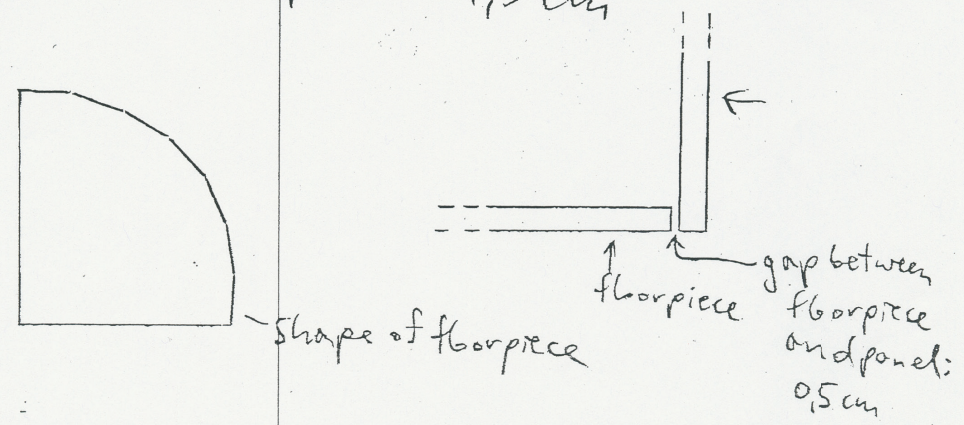
the left border of the whole piece depends on the 7 panels standing next to each other

(the numbers on this fax page stand for the panels, not for the colours like on page 1)



The panels are standing on the floor, not on the floor piece.

Height of the floor piece : 4,5 cm

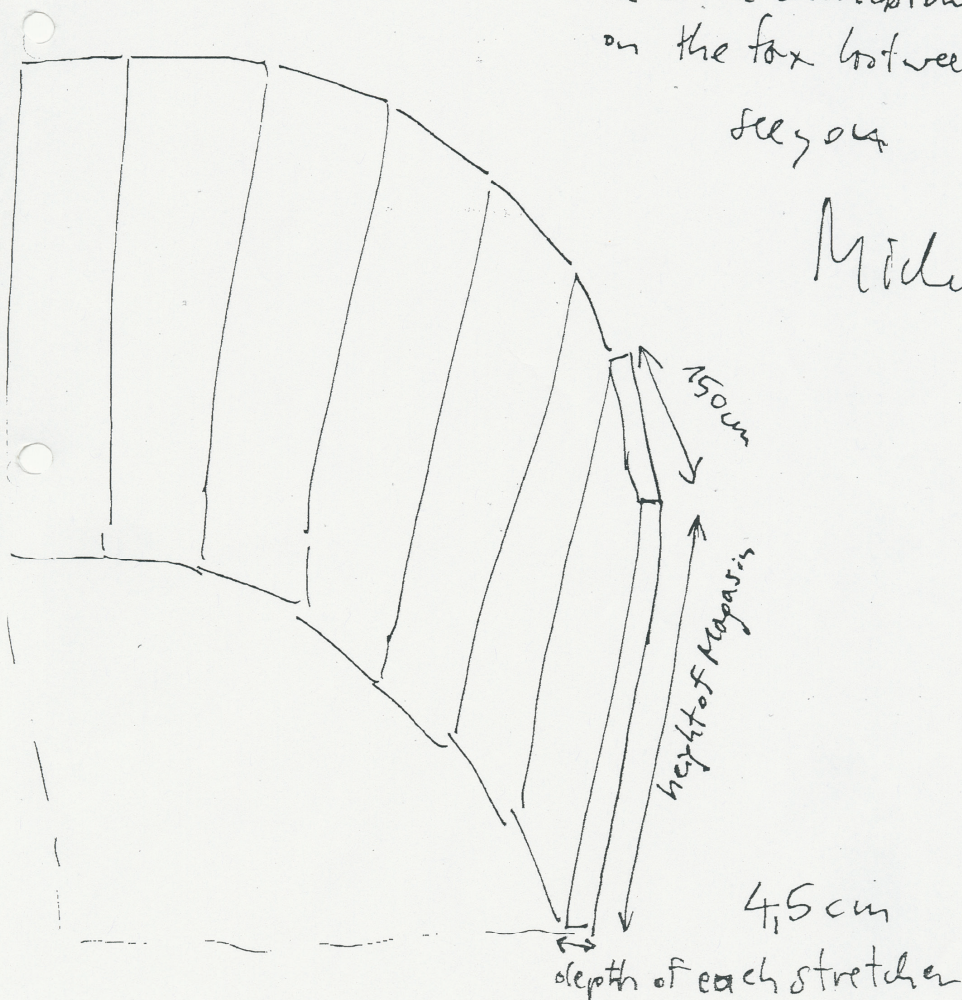


FAX from Michel Majerus
to Mayas

Berlin, 14.2.98

Hi Alessandra,
I think I mentioned
the whole dimensions
on the fax last week
see you

Michel



1. SINNMASCHINE, 1997

Acrylic and pencil on canvas and industrial metal floor

© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023

Collection Mudam Luxembourg

Acquisition 2023 with the support of members of the Cercle des collectionneurs of Mudam Luxembourg

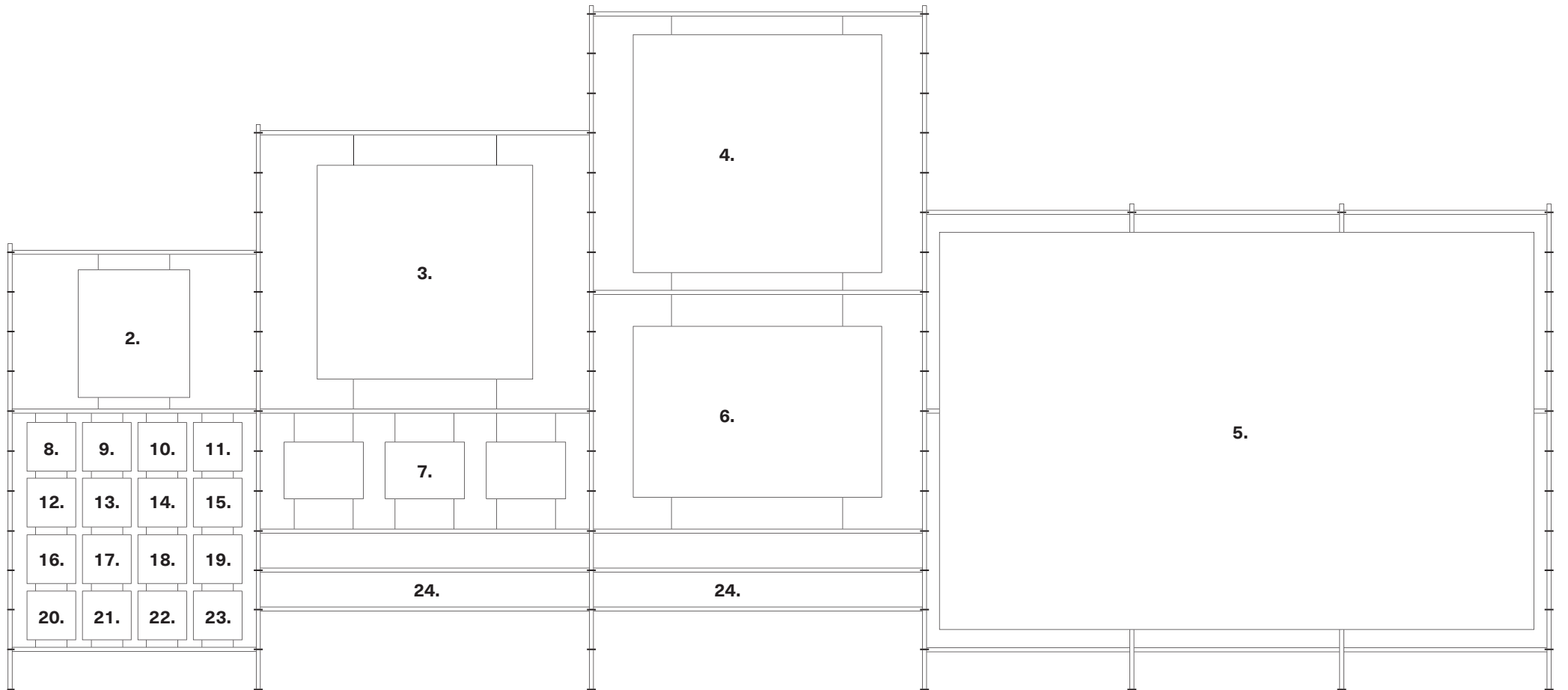
The installation *SINNMASCHINE* [sense machine], first shown in 1998, impressively shows how Michel Majerus creates his own artistic spaces within exhibitions, transforming his work into an environment that visitors are invited to experience from ever-new perspectives. Seven canvases, each 4,9 metres high and 1,5 metres wide in the original, are arranged in a curve, enclosing a non-slip industrial metal floor. To experience the paintings up close, visitors can (or must) step on the floor. Instead of walking past works hanging on the wall at a customary distance, the viewers are directly confronted with the coloured surfaces towering around them. The museum-like silence contrasts with the sounds that arise when walking on the shiny floor.

As early as 1996, in a solo exhibition at Kunsthalle Basel, Majerus covered the elegant parquet floor in the central skylit hall with a steel grid floor that vibrated when walked on and made visitors' footsteps audible. Two years earlier, at his first solo exhibition *gemälde* [painting], 1994, at neugerriemschneider, Majerus had an asphalt floor laid in the gallery, transforming the space into new terrain, complete with road markings. In the later gallery exhibition *sein lieblingsthema war sicherheit, seine these – es gibt sie nicht* [his favorite theme was security, his theory – it doesn't exist, 1999], the artist had a mirrored polystyrene floor laid,

attached projecting elements to wall works, and divided the space with various fixtures, forcing visitors to pay constant attention to the interior architecture as they watched themselves walk through the exhibition.

SINNMASCHINE also demonstrates other formal approaches that can be considered typical of Majerus: an interest in juxtaposing different materials, exploring large-scale coloured surfaces and their effects, and quoting other sources. As is often the case, in *SINNMASCHINE* he references his own works in whole or in part, superimposing them like a collage on one of the seven panels. These are accompanied by references to pop culture and art history. A group portrait of the band Kraftwerk, as typically found on their covers, crowns partial reproductions of abstract paintings by Gerhard Richter and Willem de Kooning. This 'picture strip,' which stands out from the monochrome-coloured surfaces of the other canvases, seems like a window into the artist's working practice – a glimpse into the experiments he conducted in his studio and a glimpse of what results from them.

Text by Michaela Richter, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.), 2022



2. *Ohne Titel*, 1998

Silkscreen on cotton

© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023

Musée national d'histoire et d'art,
Luxembourg

Ohne Titel (1998) is part of a larger series Majerus started in 1996, entitled *MoM Blocks*, as a reference to 'Modezentrum Mitte', the ex-GDR clothing outlet where the artist's studio was located in Berlin. Depicting a large green ball bearing the inscription 'motivation' on a white background, this painting is one of three silkscreens using a similar iconography and dimensions. However, the ball's angle and its position on the canvas varies in each of the works, giving the impression, when they are displayed side by side, of a bouncing movement that recalls a computer screensaver animation. The use of textual elements is a recurring motif in Majerus's practice. Here, the inscription 'motivation' reminds us of the motivational mantras typical of late-capitalist corporate imagery.

3. *Ohne Titel*, 2000

Acrylic on canvas

© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023

Private collection, Luxembourg

In his paintings, Majerus tried to capture the homogeneity and superficiality of surface. But, as the art historian and curator Veit Loers stated, the year 2000 brought – for a brief time – some change: 'A group of pictures dating from 2000 is therefore all the more remarkable. They are painted in a rather pasty way, and in contrast to earlier pictures and the later Los Angeles set they display scrupulous painterly consistency. This is not so much the dialectic of cool designer surface and artificial gesture mentioned earlier as a pervading oppressive heaviness weighing upon them. ... An ironic commentary on the same gestural abstract painting which he prescribes himself, only to break

through it with the writing, as in a change of paradigms, while still remaining in the idiom of painting. Yet it is significant that, in Los Angeles, Majerus continued this type of painting only marginally, for example in *slayer*, 2001. A new conceptual transparent would define the painting of 2001.'

4. *Ohne Titel*, 1997

Acrylic on canvas

© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023

Collection Mudam Luxembourg

Donation 2006 – Les Amis des Musées
d'Art et d'Histoire Luxembourg

Ohne Titel (1997) is a non-figurative, gestural work that appears initially to refer to the language of abstract expressionism. Yet the area of pictorial action is confined to the upper left corner of the canvas, drawing attention to the splashes of paint, and revealing the process of painting. The 'splash' motif, which is recurrent in Majerus's work, alludes to the frantic pace of our modern world and to the pace of visual acceleration in the information age. Despite the brevity of his career, Majerus built an international reputation, becoming renowned for large-format paintings drawing upon the colourful iconography of advertising, comic strips and digital art, along with the vocabulary of pop art and gestural abstraction. This work, which is deceptively impulsive in appearance, is the result of a carefully thought out and premeditated execution. What Majerus presents with irony to the viewer is not an abstract painting but the image of an abstract painting, in which spontaneity is staged.

5. *running in cycles*, 2001

Screen printing ink on PVC

© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023

Collection Mudam Luxembourg
Acquisition 2002

This monumental painting is characteristic of Majerus's affinity with large-scale canvases and installations. Featuring splashes of colours, a large '1', circles and half-circles, and what recalls a deformed cycle track, running in cycles seems to be spinning in every direction. On the top-left, the words 'fuck the artist' echo the artist's provocative reflections on authorship and the legacy of figures such as Joseph Beuys or Georg Baselitz, which appear in several of his paintings, as well as in the notebooks displayed in this exhibition. The inscription 'burned ou[t]', spread horizontally and bleeding outside the top-right corner of the canvas, is mirrored in the same rounded font in the untitled painting from 2000 displayed here (*Ohne Titel*, 2000). The expression, today widely employed to define a state of physical and emotional exhaustion often linked to a work overload, could be tied to the bold statement 'fuck the artist', perhaps translating a disillusion regarding Majerus's own condition as an artist. Although painted in the early days of the internet, the work seems prescient of the phenomenon of 'burnout' that has recently become widespread in societies ruled by capitalist incentives.

6. *Untitled*, 1993

Acrylic on canvas

© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023

Private collection

This early painting depicts a cartoonish scene, deceptively close to an illustration from a children's book: a black kitten (a figure present in a number of Majerus's works, such as *Katze*, painted the same year) playing in the snow with other small animals, all taking part in happy and

innocent play. Another cat, appearing in a window frame in the background, recalls a character displayed on packaging from the German confectionary brand 'Katjes'. A seemingly naïve text reads 'maybe you should annihilate'. The meaning of these words, at odds with the apparent light-heartedness of the image and cheerful font, suggest the irony of the artist, while leaving his exact intentions open to interpretation.

7. *Ohne Titel*, 1998

Serigraph on reflective cardboard

© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023

Majerus Collection, Luxembourg

In 1998, curators Peter Pakesch and Veit Loers commissioned Michel Majerus to produce these three silkscreens as part of the *Europa-Edition* project, a portfolio gathering printed works by fifteen artists from the then fifteen member states of the European Union. Majerus was chosen to represent his native country, Luxembourg. These works are collages that include common motifs in the artist's practice, displayed on bright, striped or blocked backgrounds: text that seems to come from signs and branding slogans; images of objects from popular culture such as action comic characters, sport garments or gaming equipment; photographs from urban places such as the metro or a laundromat; and references to his own work – notably the work *Ohne Titel* (1998) included in this exhibition. The voluntarily scattered, dissonant compositions are lacking any narrative content, simply displaying a broad range of signs encountered in everyday life in Europe in the 1990s. In doing so, the artist blended the field of art with the vocabulary of media, consumption, and corporations.

8. *Ohne Titel* 138, 1997

Acrylic on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Sammlung Lobeck, Wuppertal

9. *Ohne Titel*, 2001

Silkscreen on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin and
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

10. *Ohne Titel* 787, 2001

Acrylic on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Private collection
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin and
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

11. *Ohne Titel* 396, 1999

Acrylic on canvas
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Private collection
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin and
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

12. *Ohne Titel* 184, 1997

Acrylic on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Sammlung Lobeck, Wuppertal

13. *Ohne Titel* 127, 1997

Acrylic on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin and
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

14. *Ohne Titel* 1004, 2002

Acrylic on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Private collection
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin

15. *Ohne Titel* 39, 1996

Acrylic on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Collection Mudam Luxembourg
Long-term loan 2019 –
Collection American Friends of Mudam,
donated by Raymond J. Learsy

16. *Ohne Titel* 781, 2001

Silkscreen on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Private collection
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin

17. *Ohne Titel* 647, 2000

Acrylic on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Sammlung Lobeck, Wuppertal

18. *Ohne Titel* 144, 1998

Oil on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Private collection
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin

19. *Ohne Titel*, 2001

Silkscreen on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Private collection
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin

20. *Ohne Titel* 547, 2000

Acrylic on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Private collection
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin

21. *Ohne Titel* 5, 1996

Acrylic on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Collection Mudam Luxembourg
Long-term loan 2019 –
Collection American Friends of Mudam,
donated by Raymond J. Learsy

22. *Ohne Titel* 891, 2001

Acrylic on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Private collection
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin

23. *Ohne Titel* 504, 1999

Acrylic on cotton
© Michel Majerus Estate, 2023
Private collection
Courtesy neugerriemschneider, Berlin

This untitled series comprises a large number of paintings, each measuring 60 x 60 cm and using a variety of techniques and iconographical styles, meant to be presented in mosaic-like displays. Their square format and the infinite range of possible combinations recall the pixel format and the very nature of digital images. These works were produced in the years preceding Majerus's passing, in his studio located in the Berlin Mitte area. They can be considered as an inventory of his gestural, typographical and figurative vocabulary.

24. The artist's library

The exhibition gathers Majerus's book library, usually located in the artist's former studio in Berlin, now home to the Michel Majerus Estate. Inserted within the scaffolding structure as signifiers to the physical and metaphorical basis of his paintings, the books illustrate Majerus's boundless curiosity and the extensive scope of his research interests: from philosophy to art books, pop magazines, computer software manuals and comics. It is worth noticing the large number of monographs and art books he owned, demonstrating the importance art history played in his practice. Some titles from his book collection are available to consult in the exhibition.

25. VHS recordings

The VHS displayed on the monitors have been selected from the artist's collection. Most of them are recordings Majerus made of various television programmes broadcasted on public channels such as Arte or RTL, or from channels dedicated to music and emblematic of the 1990s and early 2000s, such as MTV or VIVA. They reveal his fascination for mass media and pop culture, but also highlight the eclecticism of his interests, with programmes ranging from documentaries about artists or author filmmakers (Andy Warhol, Roy Liechtenstein, or Ingmar Bergman); a reportage on the Berlin neighbourhood of Prenzlauer Berg; Hollywood films (*A Woman Under the Influence*, by John Cassavetes); a large selection of pop, rock and rap music videoclips; and a Superman cartoon. While the internet has now arguably superseded television for the diffusion of information, these recordings are a reminder of the prominence of television and encapsulate the cultural spirit of the time.

**26. Susa Reinhardt
Flockenpüree, 2012**

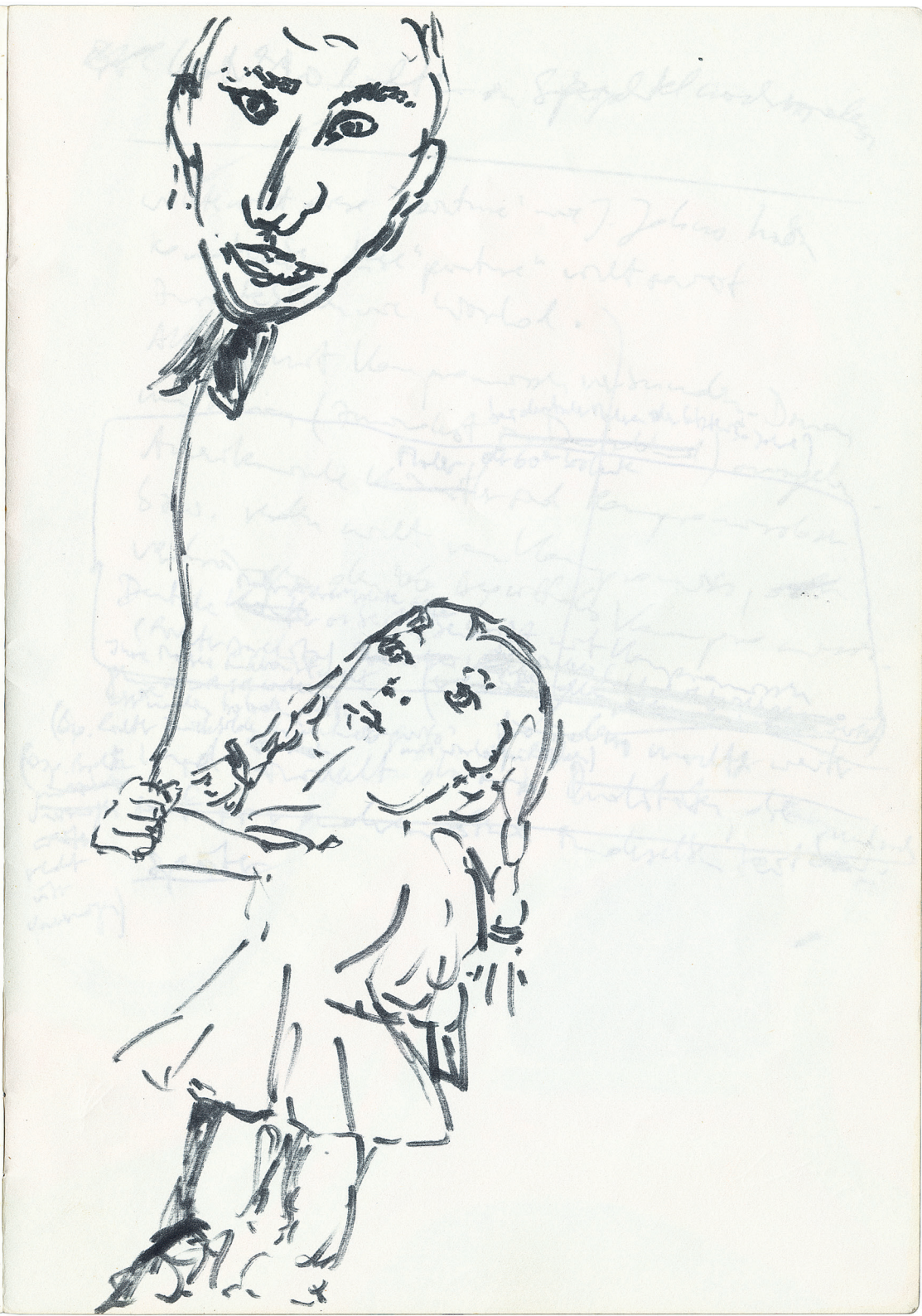
MPEG 4 HD Film
25 min
Courtesy Susa Reinhardt

Flockenpüree [flake puree] is a film by Susa Reinhardt, made of photography and film archives of Michel Majerus and the artist group 3K-NH he co-founded with Nader (Ahriman), Stephan Jung, Susa Reinhardt and Wawa (Wawrzyniec) Tokarski in 1992, while they were all studying at Kunstakademie Stuttgart. For two years, under this name made of each of their nicknames' initials, they produced collective works, exhibitions and publications alongside their individual practices.

27. The artist's notebooks (facsimiles)

The note- and sketchbooks in which Michel Majerus recorded his reflections, his ideas and his working processes hold a central role in this exhibition driven by and giving primacy to research. Three notebooks from 1995, published in *Michel Majerus. Notizen. Notes 1995*, are available for consultation in the exhibition, with full transcript of the artist's handwritten notes as well as English translations. In addition, one notebook from 1991 has been digitised for the exhibition at Mudam and is displayed here for the first time. Those enable an insight onto the artist's personal archive. In total, the artist left some fifty notebooks behind: the oldest is dated 1989 – while Majerus was enrolled at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Stuttgart. The last notebook dates to the beginning of 2000. At this point in time, Majerus was increasingly turning to the digital medium to expand his line of thinking and aesthetic. The notebooks reveal rough notes, quickly jotted down without any detailed elaboration, in pencil, ballpoint, felt tip and watercolour. The artist circles in on ideas for works and concepts for exhibitions and publications. The dense, handwritten texts are aphoristic and associative in character and give an insight into how the artist strove to determine his own position in the lineages of art history and where he stood within the contemporary art scene. They are a cornerstone of Majerus's work, and essential to understanding it.

Text adapted from an excerpt of the 'Editorial Note' by Michel Majerus Estate/ Bettina Friedli, Barbara-Brigitte Mak & Brigitte Franzen, in *Michel Majerus. Notizen. Notes 1995* (eds. Michel Majerus Estate and Brigitte Franzen, published by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Koenig).

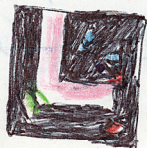



Robertson

Red 1st pin. In figure of pin should
now be ~~red~~ ^{black} pin with knots.
(Unk) ^{finally} (Ther. both)

In. only the = knot, and
+ also knot with not knot
in line)

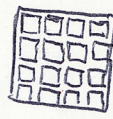
- 2mm. Webster's



- zum Klebstreifen
+ festschweißen Spindel
A  durch streichen



*Grafik Schwestern
+ Tochter (Keller)
- alle durch Vorhang
grünatt
- alle 87g ~~Aus~~ Torney
wird*



know +
que
Londres



-2x01
reports



10/11/19

best volume
present
(Pulchra Boe)



abgelebte Form
auf Kopf in einem
Glas oder verschlossen



- Bar Bunker
Bunkelsh
Zurich
Om Boln
sk + loks
+ Rot Gunkelsh

(Rehberger vase) – also horizontal format, lots of small

Ossi colours
> center dabs in
oils + red
graffiti in it.

[sketch]	[sketch]	[sketch]
made white	- 2 x oils applied	
Beforehand	with painting knife	



[Sketch] – like Baselitz ca. [?]

[Skizze: AEG SIEMENS THYSEN]

paint

Grosz in de Kooning

colours + Baselitz background

The artist

Michel Majerus (b. 1967, Esch-sur-Alzette – d. 2002, Niederaanven) studied at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart before moving to Berlin, where, apart from a one-year stay in Los Angeles, he lived and worked until his untimely death in 2002. His work has been shown in solo exhibitions at KW Institute for Contemporary Art; Kunstverein in Hamburg and Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, among thirteen other museums featuring works from their collections as part of the Germany-wide exhibition series *Michel Majerus 2022*. Previous solo presentations have been held at Kunstmuseum Stuttgart (2011); Mudam Luxembourg (2006); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2005); Kunsthau Graz (2005); Deichtorhallen Hamburg (2005); Tate Liverpool (2004); Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2003) and Kunsthalle Basel (1996), among others.

Grosz in de Kooning
in de Kooning + Baselitz
Nale

Newsletter

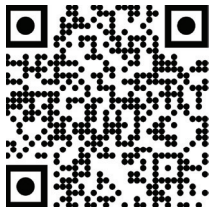
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#MichelMajerusSINNMASCHINE

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as well as

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The exhibition is the last chapter of a programme dedicated to the work of Michel Majerus which begun in November 2022 with the symposium *what looks good today may not look good tomorrow: The Legacy of Michel Majerus*, whose interventions will result in a publication, published by Mudam and Sternberg Press, with the generous support of Spuerkeess.

Credits:
Notebooks, sketches and texts © Michel Majerus.
Courtesy of Michel Majerus Estate, 2023.

Scans:
Archival material. Sketches of *SINNMASCHINE* for Magasin Grenoble
© Michel Majerus | Courtesy of Michel Majerus Estate, 2023.