



Education Box      March 31 – October 1 2023

# Michel Majerus

## SINNMASCHINE

Cover:

Exhibition view **Michel Majerus. SINNMASCHINE**, 31.03.2023 — 01.10.2023,  
Mudam Luxembourg

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# EduBox

## Educational folder

Foreword and instructions for use

**Dear teachers and students,**

The EduBox is a folder created by Mudam Publics (the museum's educational team) that offers secondary school teachers the possibility of linking their lessons to contemporary art and giving students access to the artworks in the ongoing exhibition *Michel Majerus, SINNMASCHINE*.

Through this approach, school classes have the opportunity to prepare their visit to the museum and to deepen the impressions and experiences of the students afterwards in the classroom and, if necessary, to expand them via corresponding practical activities.

The contents of the folder include a brief description of Michel Majerus' artistic approach and offers possible themes and starting points for reflection, exchange and discussion. Additional tasks and activities invite active, creative participation and creation.

The difficulty of each task varies, but they are adaptable for all levels of secondary education as they follow Ministry of Education guidelines.

We would be pleased if you would send us reactions or results of the practical activities in the form of photos or texts (indicating the class, school and students) to [workshop@mudam.com](mailto:workshop@mudam.com) as feedback.

For more information on Mudam's activities and workshops, visit [www.mudam.com](http://www.mudam.com).

To be informed about current offers and activities for schools in the future, you can subscribe to our newsletter for teachers.

We are looking forward to your visit,

Mudam Publics

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In the footsteps of Michel Majerus

# Michel Majerus

## SINNMASCHINE

In the short duration of his extraordinarily prolific career, Michel Majerus (1967, Esch-sur-Alzette - 2002, Niederanven) managed to capture the spirit of his time, of those decades marked by global consumption and the expansion of digital technology. His large-format paintings and installations are characterized by a collage-like sampling of motives, which he draws from an extremely heterogeneous pool of images and texts from art history, video games, advertising or electronic music, and with which he responds to the frenzy of images and information in the age of the still young internet, which is still penetrating society. In his work, Majerus transcended the usual rules of painting and created distinctive interpretations of pop culture of the 90s and early 2000s, the relevance of which has not diminished to this day.

Majerus' painterly installations typically explored the growing importance of the digital. They allowed visitors to enter them, giving them an immersive bodily experience of this increase in the visual. *SINNMASCHINE* (engl. 'sense' or 'meaning machine') (1997), which is part of the exhibition at Mudam's Grand Hall, is one of these works. In a nod to German electropop band Kraftwerk's album *The Man-Machine* (1978), its floor is designed as a dance floor, from which the footsteps of visitors resonate. By playfully blending the vocabulary of entertainment, advertising and news, this artwork references the uniformity of taste in a society shaped by globalized capitalism. Majerus worked with the pool of images from the internet when the information age was still in its infancy.

In addition to *SINNMASCHINE*, the exhibition also presents a number of other paintings by Majerus. But instead of wanting to give a retrospective overview, the exhibition focuses on Majerus' working methods by showing archival documents from Michel Majerus' estate for the first time. Through his notebooks, his books, and through video recordings, one gets a glimpse of the fascinating ways in which Majerus made sense of the world in which he lived - literally constructing a 'sense machine'. As an attentive observer of the world around him, i.e. the scene of a newly developing global digital visual language, he recorded his thoughts and impressions in the drawings and texts in his notebooks. The books from his library and his video recordings in VHS, which are on view in the exhibition, introduce us to the world of the artist and allow an understanding access to his varied interests as well as the things that inspired him and from which some of his most important works like *SINNMASCHINE* emerged.

## Biography

**Michel Majerus** (1967, Esch-sur-Alzette - 2002, Niederanven) 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 solos exhibitions at KW Institute for Contemporary Art; Kunstverein in Hamburg und 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); Kunsthaus Graz (2005); Deichtorhallen Hamburg (2005); Tate Liverpool (2004); Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin (2003) and Kunsthalle Basel (1996), among others.



Michel Majerus with *your bad taste* in his atelier in Berlin, 2002



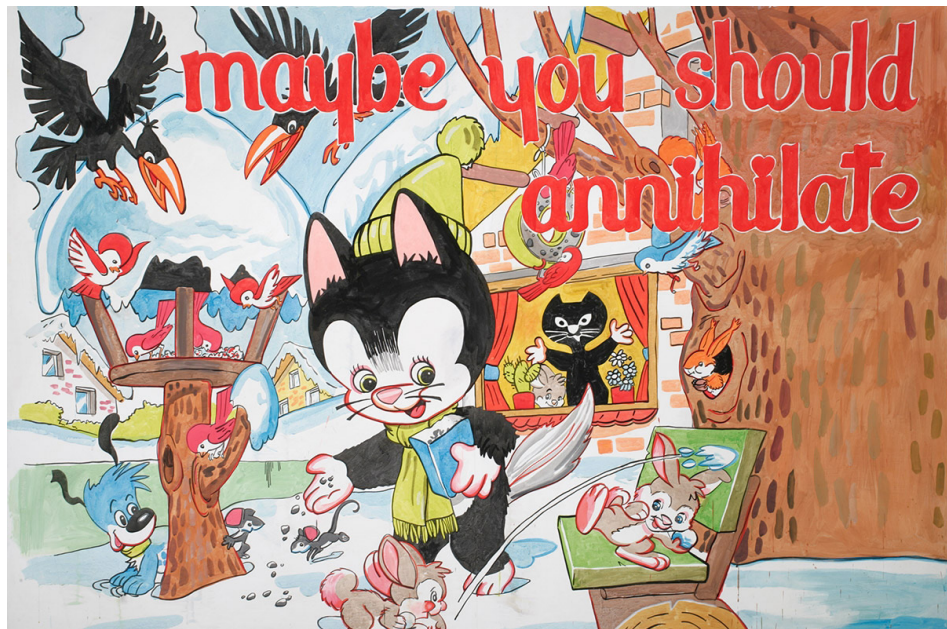
# Majerus' method

## Sampling as a method

Majerus freely drew his motifs from the fields of *graphic design*, *video games*, *cartoons*, *magazines* and other printed works, as well as from 20th century art (especially *Pop Art* and *Abstract Expressionism*), and combined the technological and popular imagery of the information age.

With intelligent insolence, Majerus assembled stylistic elements of other artists like art-historical motifs and at the same time he mixed in the landmarks of contemporary popular culture and thus actually only transferred the musical technique of “**sampling**” to his art.

“Sampling” means remixing structural parts of existing pieces of music in order to arrive at sound images that have never been heard before.



Michel Majerus,  
 Untitled (maybe you should annihilate), 1993  
 Acrylic paint on canvas, 213 x 311 cm

With the artistic transformation of banal everyday objects, Michel Majerus stands in the tradition of *pop art* and this not only results in many parallels to Andy Warhol, but also to other pop artists such as **Roy Lichtenstein, Tom Wesselmann, Robert Rauschenberg, Frank Stella, ...**

His partly deconstructivist practice aimed to eliminate the difference between the “high art” of the art-historical tradition and the “low art” based on products of the consumer industry.



**Andy Warhol**  
**Electric Chairs, 1971**  
10 screen prints



**Claes Oldenburg,**  
**Pepsi Cola Sign, 1961**  
Cotton, plaster, wood, wire 152 x 121 x 19 cm

At first glance, many works seem to be inscribed in the tradition of **abstract-expressionist painting**. The splashes of paint, a frequent motif in Majerus's paintings, allude to the frenetic rhythm and visual acceleration of our modern times.



**Michel Majerus,**  
**Untitled (violet), 1997**  
Acrylic paint on canvas, 300 x 320 cm, MUDAM Collection



**Willem De Kooning,**  
**Untitled XLII, 1983**  
Oil on canvas, 203 x 177 cm



# Ikönografie

## SINNMASCHINE

Seven panels, originally 4.9 meters high and 1.5 meters wide, are arranged in a curve and enclose a non-slip industrial metal floor. Instead of walking past the works hanging on the wall at the usual distance, the viewer is directly confronted with the colored surfaces surrounding them.



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*SINNMASCHINE* also demonstrates other formal approaches that can be considered typical of Majerus: the interest in juxtaposing different materials, exploring large areas of color and their effect, and citing other sources. As is so often the case, in *SINNMASCHINE* he refers in whole or in part to his own works and places 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 is typically found on their covers, crowns partial reproductions of abstract paintings by *Gerhard Richter* and *Willem de Kooning*. This "strip of images", which contrasts with the monochrome areas of color on the other canvases, acts as a window into the artist's working practice - a glimpse into the experiments he carried out in his studio and a glimpse of the results of that.

The fifth panel of SINNMASCHINE contains references to **several main themes** of Majerus' work.

1

### Consumption and advertising

The monumentally enlarged sports shoe - the sneaker - which has been a theme several times in his works, appears again and again as a significant icon in the world of advertising and consumerism. The *Nike Air Zoom Alpha "OG"* was originally released in 1996 and was the very first *Nike Runner*.

2

### TV and gaming culture

Here, Majerus uses the Japanese lettering from the TV series *Gekisou Sentai Carranger*, as well as a section of the character *Gekisou Gattai RV Robo* as a painted background. This so-called "**Carranger**" is a robot consisting of a constellation of five cars.

3

### Comics and cartoons

**Tickle Me Elmo** is a plush toy for children of the Muppet character Elmo from the children's television show *Sesame Street*. When pressed, Elmo shakes, vibrates, and recites his signature giggle.

4

### Print media

A detail of the cover of the **Financial Times Newspaper** magazine, a London-published newspaper that has traditionally had a strong influence on the UK government's fiscal policy, is shown in black and white. Majerus often uses elements from well-known newspapers and print media, such as *LA Weekly*, which is read by a wide audience.

5

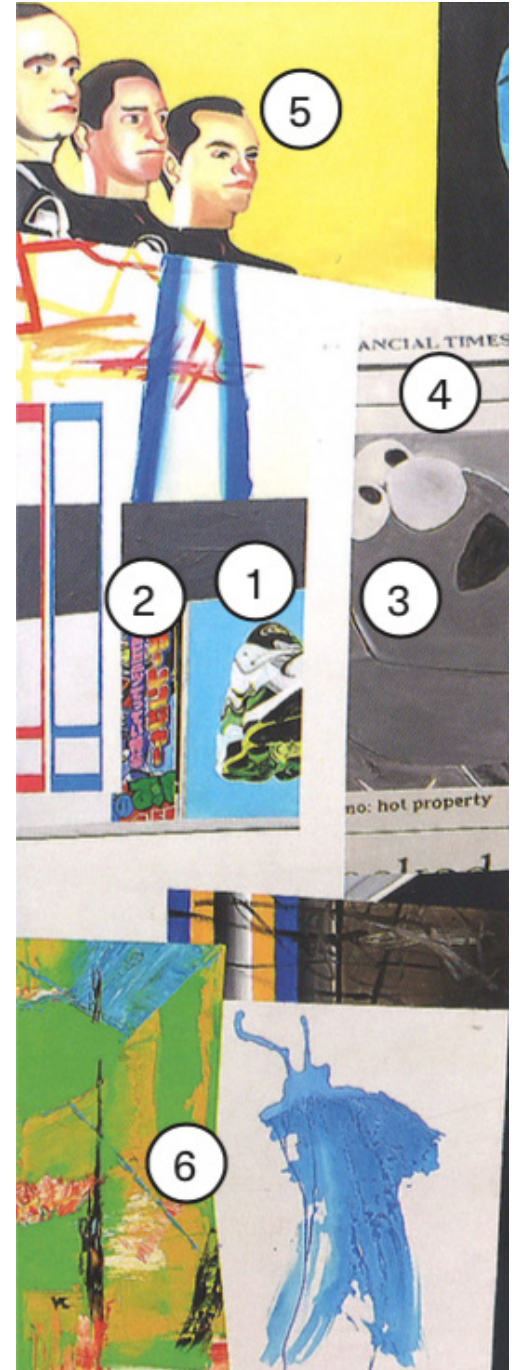
### Techno and pop culture

Music plays a major role in Michel Majerus' work. Above all, techno, rave and hip hop, but also the world of pop music and pop culture have had a strong influence on him. Here is an excerpt from the German band **Kraftwerk**, which is best known for its pioneering work in the field of electropop (and krautrock). In reviews, Majerus is consistently referred to as a master of sampling and remixing given his approach.

6

### Art history and abstract expressionism

This detail shows a partial reproduction of an **abstract painting** by **Gerhard Richter** and **Willem de Kooning**. Majerus thus shows his interest in famous artists, **abstract-expressionist painting** and the attempt to position himself in relation to art history.



# Sketchbooks

## In the footsteps of Michel Majerus

The **notebooks and sketchbooks** in which Michel Majerus recorded his reflections, his ideas and his working processes play a central role in this exhibition.

The artist left around fifty notebooks in all: the oldest dates from 1989 – while Majerus was enrolled at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart. The last notebook dates from the early 2000s, at which point Majerus increasingly turned to the digital medium to broaden his mindset and aesthetic.



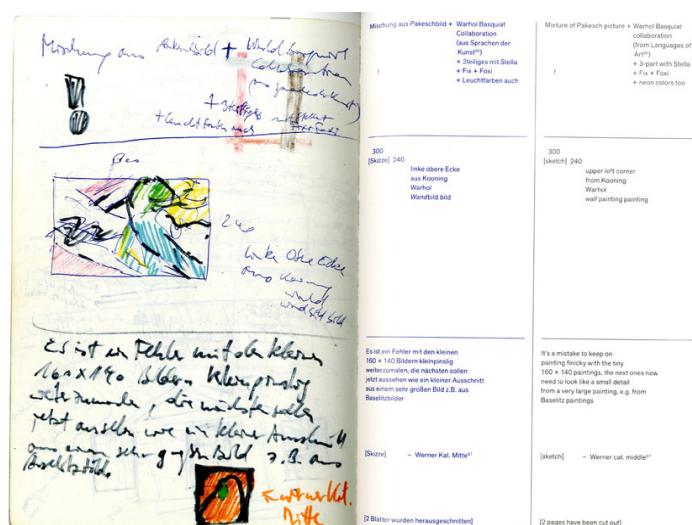
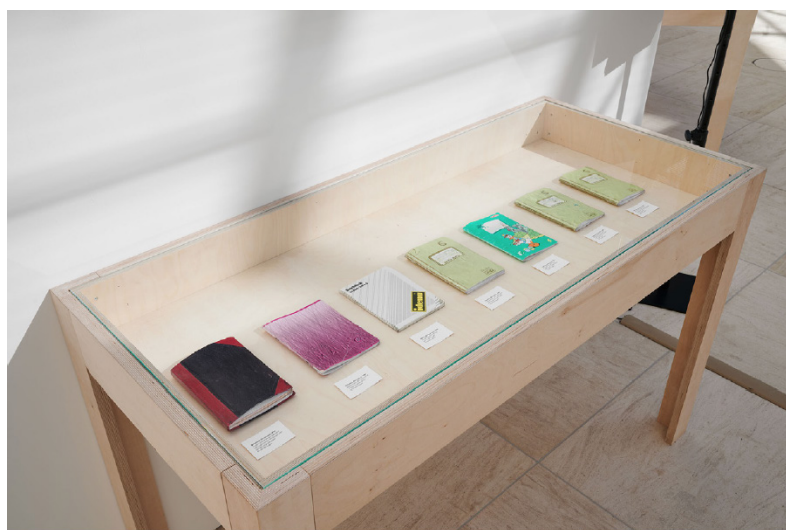
**Berlin notebook of Michel Majerus, 1995**

Ballpoint pen, chalk and pencil on paper 21 x 15 cm, 32 pages,

Photo: Jens Ziehe © Michel Majerus Estate, courtesy Michel Majerus Estate



The notebooks reveal rough notes, jotted down quickly, without detailed elaboration, with pencil, ballpoint pen and watercolour. The artist revolves around ideas for works and concepts for exhibitions and publications. The dense, handwritten texts have an aphoristic and associative character and give an insight into the artist's efforts to determine his own position in the lines of art history and where he stood within the contemporary art scene. They are a cornerstone of Majerus' work and essential to understanding it.



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## Michel Majerus Notizen. Notes 1995

Edited by the Michel Majerus Estate & Brigitte Franzen  
15,5 x 22,4 cm, 376 pages

### ACTIVITY:

Michel Majerus transferred his ideas to A5 notebooks for ten years. They were "reminders" but also "reflections" on art history.

### TASK : Visual diary

Find or assemble a sketchbook that fits neatly in your pocket so you can take it with you wherever you go. Now, complete visual diary entries for seven days, also allowing experimental techniques (drawings, texts, collage of found materials, ...)

## Practical information

Mudam invites all school classes to discover the exhibitions with or without a guide. Admission is free, but we ask that you register in advance.

### Arrival

Tram stop : Philharmonie/Mudam  
Bus 1, 16 & Eurobus – Stop : Rout Bréck / Pafendall  
The Mudam can be reached via the “Place de l'Europe”.  
All gallery spaces, with the exception of the basement of the pavilion, can be reached by wheelchair.

### Opening hours

Opening hours for free tours:

Thursday - Monday 10am - 6pm  
Wednesday 10am - 9pm  
24.12. & 31.12.: 10am - 3pm

Mudam is closed on Tuesdays and December 25th.

Mudam opens its doors to school groups before opening hours, Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 9am, only on reservation of a guided tour or workshop.

### Book guided tours

Please book guided tours and workshops via the e-mail address [visites@mudam.com](mailto:visites@mudam.com). The responsible teacher is asked to provide the following information:

- Date and time of visit
- grade level
- Number of students
- Desired language of the guided tour
- Contact details of the teacher

Each tour can be adapted to the level and time frame of the class. Please also state your wishes in this regard.

### Offers

- Guided tour (60 or 90 minutes): free or €30 for Luxembourg schools
- Guided tour with activity (90 or 120 minutes) : 30€ or 60€ for Luxembourg schools
- Guided tour with drawing (60 or 90 minutes) : free or 30€ for Luxembourg schools

### Contact

[visites@mudam.com](mailto:visites@mudam.com) | t +352 453785-531



**Cancellations**

A guided tour should be canceled at least 48 hours before the agreed date. If this deadline is exceeded or if there is no cancellation at all, we will have to charge the full price of the tour.

We believe we can guarantee your tours, however last minute cancellations due to unforeseen circumstances may occur.

**Delays**

In case of delays, the museum should be informed immediately. The visit may need to be shortened. If the art mediator is able to keep to the agreed duration, his waiting time will be remunerated according to the guide tariffs.

A few rules must be observed:

- Teachers are asked to inform their students about the generally applicable rules of conduct before the tour. To protect the works of art, it is forbidden to touch them. The walls of the exhibition rooms must also not be touched. Racing in the museum is forbidden!
- Teachers are responsible for your group, an accompanying person must be present throughout the tour.
- It is permitted to make sketches or drawings in the halls, but not with oil and water techniques. We ask the responsible teachers to ensure that the classes stay together and that access to the exhibition rooms and the artworks is not restricted for other visitors.
- Non-flash photography and non-tripod photography is permitted inside the museum, but film and video recording is not.
- It is not permitted to bring food and drinks into the museum. If time and weather permit, you are welcome to have a picnic in the park.

The complete visitor regulations are available on [www.mudam.com/plan-your-visit](http://www.mudam.com/plan-your-visit) under the heading "Practical infos".

The educational program can be found at: <https://www.mudam.com/groups-schools>