

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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Michel Majerus

★★★★★

Matthew Marks Gallery, through Apr 19 (see Chelsea)

As the examples of Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat attest, there are few things that can put an artist more firmly on the path to mythological status than an early death. Michel Majerus may be another case. This show is the Berlin artist's first here since 2002, the year he died in a plane crash at age 35.

Employing an exuberant mix of Pop Art, Minimalism and gestural abstraction, Majerus, who hailed from Luxembourg, plumbed postwar art history and the youth market of the late 1990s and early 2000s, a time when the Internet's impact was just beginning to be felt. That moment, perhaps, accounts for the uncanny quality of his appropriative paintings, which look like they were made yesterday, while speaking of a recent past that already seems oddly distant.

It also may figure in the way Majerus peppered his work with pop-cultural referents that were both worldwide in their familiarity (*Super Mario Bros.*) and not (flyers for Berlin raves), suggesting a tech-enabled melding of global and local. The same may hold true for his trio of paintings alluding to the movie *Tron* and also to a German hacker known as Tron, who was supposedly killed by government authorities.

Art history provided another sort of lingua franca for Majerus, who channeled other painters in various ways, from straightforward Warhol borrowings to abstractions complied from a visual archive the artist kept of De Kooning's blown-up brushstrokes. Though cut down in his prime, Majerus created works that still resonate with the possibilities for reinvention he found in our continuously recycling, Web-connected culture.—Howard Halle

THE BOTTOM LINE Pop Art from the turn of the millennium still looks fresh.