

Art in America

MICHEL MAJERUS

Matthew Marks

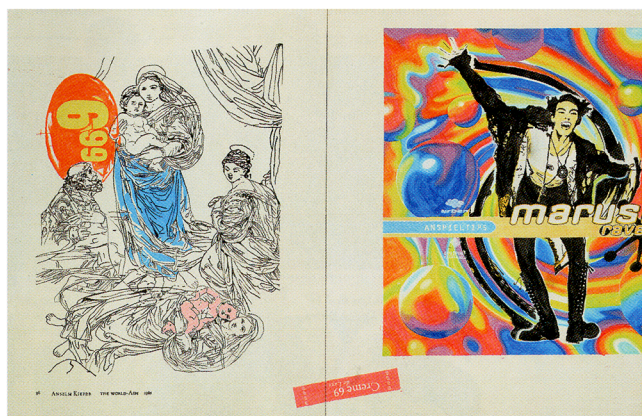
ON VIEW THROUGH APR. 19

This sprawling exhibition of work by Michel Majerus, who was born in Luxembourg and lived in Berlin, was the first in the U.S. since his death, in a 2002 plane crash, at the age of 35. His only other solo show in this country opened at New York's Friedrich Petzel two months before he died. It featured big paintings that combined brushwork with photo-silkscreen and juxtaposed abstract passages with images taken from art history and mass culture. These in turn were incorporated into a gallery-filling matrix that included colored beams, mirrored panels and printed vinyl banners. Not quite appropriation art, not quite Pop, the work seemed fresh and important, mimicking the speed and fluidity with which images and information were coming to circulate in the world.

Taking up three of Matthew Marks's four New York galleries, this survey of some two dozen pieces made between 1994 and 2002 was more conventionally installed. For the most part it comprised works on either canvas or aluminum honeycomb panels that sampled and remixed visuals from advertisements, product packaging, computer games, record albums, animated movies, and paintings by Warhol, de Kooning and Basquiat.

Dominating a long wall in Marks's main gallery was *a.T. (69)* from 1994, a spectacular, over 15-foot-long acrylic-on-cotton diptych. An enlarged catalogue caption along the bottom reads, "Anselm Kiefer, *The World Ash*, 1982." But Kiefer's dour, history-laden painting of a muddy field has been replaced by a reproduction of Warhol's *Raphael Madonna, \$6.99* (1965). The work's right-hand panel is a hand-painted blowup of a promo for German techno DJ Marusha's 1994 album *Raveland*. Clad in combat boots and leathers, Marusha is depicted dancing ecstatically through a swirl of rainbow colors. Running across both panels is the logo for a flavored oral sex cream. In Majerus's irreverent worldview, a Madonna of the past and a Madonna of the moment might hook up with cheerful abandon, perhaps at Berlin's Love Parade.

From the late 1990s are two silkscreened copies of a painting made jointly by Warhol and Basquiat; they are placed slightly to the left on the canvases to accommodate



a single vertical brushstroke (blue in one work, pink in the other), applied by Majerus as his "collaboration" with the two artists. By this time, in addition to appropriating existing images, the artist had begun to channel certain commercial and artistic tropes. The blue, green, red and yellow abstraction *MoM Block Nr. 31* (1997) might almost be a detail from a Warhol camouflage painting, while an untitled 1998 piece, featuring a digitally produced green sphere around whose equator runs the word "motivation," looks like something from a corporate training film.

Sometimes the found and the improvised are combined in one painting, such as an intensely expressionist untitled piece (ca. 2000), in which de Kooning-esque brushstrokes provide a backdrop for the word "Scratch!," executed in an ugly faux 3-D font. But Majerus also created many small, single-element works that could be arranged and rearranged in groups. Covering one large wall was a grid of 24-inch-square canvases, some of them bearing silkscreened images from newspapers or magazines, others hand-painted words or phrases. Still others are scruffy abstractions, with affinities to those being made now by the likes of Josh Smith, Joe Bradley, Richard Aldrich and Matt Connors.

At the time of his death Majerus was still evolving as an artist, making ever-more ambitious installations, including a painting that served as a giant half pipe for skateboarders. His work was unmonumental art executed at monumental scale, and it still looks fresh.

—Anne Doran