

# TRULY MODERN MICHEL MAJERUS

The prestigious Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York has acquired a second painting by the late Luxembourg artist Michel Majerus regarded as one of the most promising artists of his generation to hail from the Grand-Duchy.

The painting "Splash Bombs I" (2002) follows "What look good today may not look good tomorrow" (2002) acquired by the museum in September 2014.

Michel Majerus's international career was in its prime when his life was cut short in a plane accident in 2002, while working on an exhibition "Project Space" for Tate Liverpool.



Michel Majerus  
*splash bombs I*, 2002  
Acrylic on canvas 110 1/4 x 157 5/8" (279.4 x 398.8 cm)  
Gift of Marie-Josée and Henry R. Kravis in honor of Martin Eisenberg

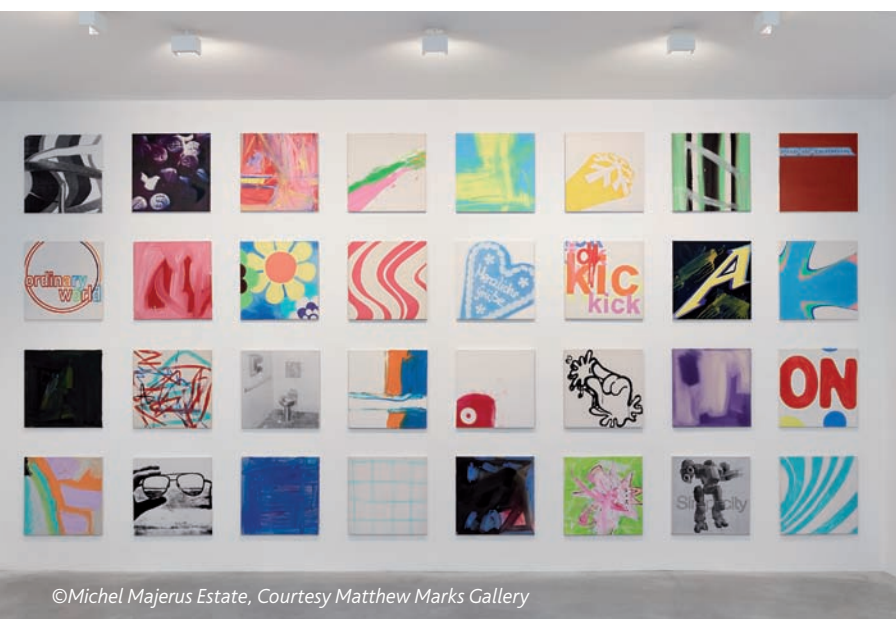
*"We acquired these two paintings because I and a number of my colleagues have admired Majerus' work for many years and became convinced that it should enter our collection. Although his career was brief, Majerus created a body of work that makes a forceful impact as a herald of twenty-first century painting", says Ann Temkin, Chief curator of painting and sculpture at MoMA.*

Working from his base in Berlin, Michel Majerus came under the international limelight during the late 1990s, with a series of participations to prestigious exhibitions such as the Kunsthalle in Basel for a mid-career retrospective, the Itinerant European Biennale of Contemporary art "Manifesta 2" in Luxembourg in 1998

and the 1999 Venice Biennale where he covered the façade of the main Italian Pavilion with a monumental wall drawing he designed for the occasion.

Majerus produced work with nearly electronic speed, creating over 1,500 paintings and silk screens by the time of his death at 35 years old.

The work purchased by MoMA – "What looks good today may not look good tomorrow", a painting completed in 2000 measuring over three by three meters, was also the title given to a retrospective in his honour, exhibited in several museums across Europe.



©Michel Majerus Estate, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery



*"Majerus created a body of work that makes a forceful impact as a herald of twenty-first century painting"*

Michel Majerus  
what looks good today may not look good tomorrow, 2000  
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas  
119 5/16 x 134 1/4" (303.1 x 341 cm)  
Purchase



Oscillating between paintings and large-scale installations, Majerus's creative horizon draws from the large repertoire of popular culture, commercial mainstream and next-generation technologies combined with a whole repertoire of art history references, most notably inspired from pop art and minimal art.

Majerus borrowed inspiration from the world of advertising, comic books, computer games, techno music and included references to the Super Mario brothers, Lara Croft or even the animated Disney movie Toy Story.

*"Since his death the paintings have continued to speak with great eloquence to key artistic issues of our time, and like Pop art fifty years earlier, to bring the imagery and language of the everyday world into the context of the grand tradition of fine art",* points out Ann Temkin.

Majerus' fascination for popular culture can be seen in the painting *"Splash bombs I"*, a giant acrylic in which the artist incorporates washing powder packaging amid swaths of bold color.

At the time of his death, Majerus was still evolving as an artist, making even more ambitious installations as demonstrated in a giant skateboard vamp created in 2000 and measuring 42 m long and 10 m wide or more politically engaged work such as the picture which covered entirely the Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, on display for three weeks in September 2002 and which remains his major last project.

### SPEARHEADING THE TECHNOLOGICAL TURN OF THE CENTURY

Coinciding with the emergence of the technological revolution, Michel Majerus's work epitomised the rise of the Internet as a new phenomenon and anticipated many of the issues now confronting image-makers more than a decade after his death. Through his pioneering use of digital methods of production (he stored and processed his pictorial subjects on a computer before he painted them), Majerus's work gave us a profound reflection on the mad-pace of our time.

*"Perhaps more than any other artist of his generation, Majerus exemplified what art historian Daniel Birnbaum calls "painting in the expanded field", his prolific oeuvre*



©Michel Majerus Estate, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery

reflecting the pre-packaged newness and hybrid spaces of the Information Age", points out Gilles Heno-Coe, representative of the Matthew Marks Gallery in New York who organised in conjunction with the Michel Majerus Estate, earlier this year, the most comprehensive solo exhibition of the artist's work in the United States with some two dozen pieces made between 1994 and 2002 and the first in the country since his death in 2002.

Majerus was fascinated by technology, especially the Internet and its ability to quickly disseminate images and information on a global scale. One is right to ask what would Majerus have made of today's social-media networks, overflowing with images generated on computers and mobile devices.

Having spent a lot of time in Los Angeles on a DAAD fellowship, this time impacted greatly his artistic production as it was already the case for many of his American artistic predecessors. "Michel, in many ways, spearheaded the technological turn in contemporary painting, which has since become a prominent aspect of work by many celebrated American painters", adds Gilles.

## HIS ART STILL LIVES ON

"When we were conceiving the exhibition, there had already been at least two posthumous retrospective exhibitions of his work in Europe, but none in the United States. The exhibition was very well received, drew large numbers of visitors, and got positive press from prestigious publications such as *The New York Times*, the *New Yorker Magazine* and the *New York Observer*, among others", points out Gilles.

In addition to MoMA, Majerus' work is featured in many prestigious international museums, including the Tate London, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and the Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt. More than a decade after his passing, prestigious European, US museums and galleries still celebrate Majerus's art through posthumous exhibitions of his work.

## INTERNATIONAL ART SCENE

The recent MoMA's acquisition of Michel Majerus' s painting marks the second time a Luxembourg artist enters the collections of the MoMA after the graphic designer Paul Kirps in 2002.

"Since 1995, Luxembourg has been increasingly perceived, nationally and internationally, as a city with a dense and diversified cultural scene. During the same period, it also became a respected participant in European cultural developments in several artistic fields, such as the visual arts, contemporary music, dance, theatre and literature" says Enrico Lunghi, Director of the MUDAM.

Luxembourg's recognition as an international art centre is best exemplified in its numerous acclaimed participations to the prestigious Venice Biennale. From occupying just a small room at the Biennale to finally having its own pavilion, Luxembourg has managed to reach international recognition as shown in the Golden Lion awarded to the Luxembourg artist Su-Mei Tse for Best National Pavillon at the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003. **OB**

### Impressum

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