

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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ARTFORUM

Michel Majerus

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY | 522 W. 22ND STREET

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by Ali Pechman | March 25, 2014



depressive neurosis, 2000, acrylic on cotton,
102 1/4 x 88 1/2 inches; 260 x 225 cm

The latest presentation of the late Michel Majerus work takes over all three of Matthew Marks's New York spaces. The smallest gallery presents his 1999 "Tron" series, in which monochrome wall paintings have been overlaid with identical silk screens from the titular movie's poster. Majerus understood the power of repetition of commercial images, but in a far less sardonic way than his Pop forbearers. He would have reveled in memes, blogs, and social media: that is, the non-ironic appreciation for vociferously sharing and putting one's mark on what everyone else is looking at.

Majerus produced work with nearly electronic speed, creating over 1,500 paintings and silk screens by the time of his death in 2002 at age thirty-five.

A quickly identifiable color palette of snack-food orange, cereal yellow, Barbie pink, and video-game green unites the show. Majerus sources from Basquiat and Warhol with equal fervor as from Gameboy and Nintendo. The tone of such sampling remains ambiguous, giving the works an added heft decades later. In two untitled 1996 works, Majerus silk-screened images of Toy Story characters and Super Mario, respectively, onto monochrome-painted aluminum. By giving these technologically produced characters an effective spotlight, he highlights how rapidly they would become obsolete images. The quick, ironic joke also reads as superior prescience for how image and humor would come to be so entwined in the digital age.

On view at Marks's midsize location is work made between 1994 and 2002, all which toys with the desperate language of cheap entertainment: In one gallery we find PORNOGRAPHY NEEDS YOU in billboard type, MOTIVATION in corporate sanserif, and NEW COMER in a faux-galactic font. But the come-ons aren't always so concrete: The largest of Marks's galleries presents large-scale work in which the results unravel. The phrase NEW COMER reappears in an untitled 2000 work, competing with motivational speak, graffiti, and painted blurs. And sometimes thoughts collapse into half-formed texts, floating between actualization and paint, as in Ding On, 2000, in which unformed text searches for a surface. Here, even as paint should bring figurative definition to disposable pleasures, it only makes their flimsiness more pronounced.