

“He had the freedom I wish I had”

TAKASHI MURAKAMI *on* Michel Majerus
and his “collaboration” with the late artist



6 Hearts Princess





Takashi Murakami

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HIROPON 6HP
MICHEL MAJERUS, 2019
Acrylic on canvas mounted on
aluminum frame, 243 × 277 cm

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6HP SUPERFLAT
BUBBLEWRAP
MICHEL MAJERUS, 2019
Acrylic on canvas mounted
on aluminum frame, 138 × 106 cm

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MICHEL MAJERUS, 2019–20
Acrylic on canvas mounted on
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MICHEL MAJERUS DORAEMON
ANYWHERE DOOR
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Acrylic, gold leaf, and platinum
leaf on canvas mounted
on aluminum frame, 190 × 220 cm

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COMING AND GOING, 2019–20
Acrylic and platinum leaf and
gold leaf on canvas mounted on
aluminum frame, 200 × 200 cm



I've always loved German art. The German art world has so many strong characters: Beuys is the magician, Kiefer the nationalist, Kippenberger the bad-taste guy, and so on. If it were a film, the individual roles would be perfectly cast. When I was a young artist, Kippenberger was one of my greatest heroes, alongside Mike Kelley.

Kippenberger drank a lot, fell down, took a picture of his bashed-up face, and turned it into a poster. For me, that was rock'n'roll. He was like a loud billboard for his already loud work—I liked that very much. And since he drank so much, he found it difficult to concentrate, so all the pictures had to be painted quickly, almost like calligraphy, which of course inspires me, coming from Japan.

From the generation of German artists after Kippenberger, it is Michel Majerus that I most admire today—even though I now know that he was born in Luxembourg. I only discovered him when I signed up for Instagram, however. An algorithm introduced me to him. Algorithms are fantastic because they know exactly what I'll like. I asked my assistant to create a folder with all the Majerus pictures that were on the internet. It turned into a real book of printouts. Then I asked my European friends about him and heard the sad story of his plane crash.

A little later I had a show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, and my curator there, Michael Darling, introduced me to Virgil Abloh. We talked and became friends, and I was immediately drawn to his fashion. For me, it is clearly influenced by a 1990s techno aesthetic, even if Virgil denies it. We started working together, and I unexpectedly came across the Majerus book that my assistant had made. It became clear that one of the reasons for my enthusiasm for Majerus is his proximity to techno aesthetics, which I also love in Virgil's work.

The first place I exhibited as a young artist in Tokyo was a record store called Shop33, where I had made friends with the owner. The shop specialized in Belgian and German techno. At that time, the European DJs who played the Love Parade were also invited to perform at the Yellow Club. It was my scene for three or four years, and I bought a lot of T-shirts and bags during that period. Two revolutions came together in this world: that of electronic music and that of the design suddenly made possible by Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop. Now, 25 years later, I rediscovered those same fonts and styles in the pictures of Majerus.

As I dove deeper into his development over the years, I got a little jealous. In the short time he was alive, he had so many opportunities to exhibit in very different places, both big and small, and people seemed to really get him. There was an audience, a real sense of communication. Majerus got exactly what I dreamed of when I graduated from art school and became a professional artist. But that was just not possible in Japan. I had to think about how I would be accepted abroad as a Japanese artist, and so I had to strategically pull from manga and Japanese subcultures.

I have recently painted a series of “excuse paintings,” paintings that have a lot of text explaining why I haven't finished them, why the artist's life is so hard that sometimes they just fail. Majerus also made excuse paintings. Only with him they were the kind of perfect, beautiful paintings that everyone liked. He called them by that name because it was easy for him to paint such pictures. If you're a good painter, it is very easy to make a good, clean painting. But it is very difficult to intentionally go away from that, to make this shift. That's why painters do drugs and alcohol—to help them make this shift. My way to shift is to employ bad-technique assistants to bring in bad taste. Majerus could do it himself. That's a great freedom for an artist.

If I'd been completely free, I think I would've done something very similar to Majerus. The fact that he, with all his freedom, also had hang-ups about American art, about its dominant scene, only makes him more likeable. In his work, a certain purity mixes with this hang-up, and the conflict is exciting. What Majerus did touches me in an almost raw way. It just makes sense to me.

So much so that, in early 2019, I decided to continue his work, in a way. I made the first test combinations of his paintings and my motifs—and it was love at first sight. Then I suddenly realized: our “collaborations” have the same grammar as Jeff Koons's paintings. Koons, of all people! I finally knew that I was on the right track and I made eight paintings within three weeks. Of course they had to be really big. So many things mattered to Majerus—size was one of them.

The Michel Majerus Estate in Berlin will show TAKASHI MURAKAMI: MICHEL MAJERUS SUPERFLAT from September 2020



TAKASHI MURAKAMI photographed by KEIZO KITAJIMA for BLAU International



DORAEMON AND ANYWHERE DOOR (DOKODEMO DOOR):
HAPPINESS IS ALWAYS BEING TOGETHER, 2019
Acrylic on canvas mounted on aluminum frame, 160 × 140 cm