

69/96

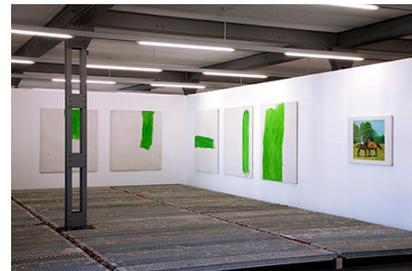
Alte Fabrik, Rapperswil, Switzerland

'69/96' is two exhibitions in one. '96' is chosen by Fredi Fischli and Nils Olsen, the most recent incumbents of the *Kurator programme for emerging curators. This fellowship involves a period of research after which the participants will present a year-long programme of exhibitions. Fischli and Olsen have chosen to share their spotlight with the New York-based curator Bob Nickas, whom they have made both their subject and collaborator. Nickas, who selected '69', is known for exploring alternative, anti-heroic curatorial approaches; in his 1986 exhibition 'Red', for example, everything was that colour. Fischli and Olsen – who picked '96' – will revive the red concept later in their *Kurator tenure, consistent with a joint curatorial practice that frequently mines recent history for artists that were prominent in past decades and have since slipped from the mainstream.

'69/96' is the first exhibition proper in the Fischli/Olsen programme. According to Fischli, Olsen and Nickas, 1969 and 1996 were formative years for each of them. The experienced Nickas and the already worldly young curators have chosen works from those times that inspired their enterprises thereafter. The show opens with a statement from Michel Majerus: *what looks good today may not look good tomorrow* (1999), applied to a temporary wall in blocky video-game letter outlines. This wall and those adjoining it in the middle of the gallery are hemmed in by metal industrial flooring about 10 cm tall, with which Majerus covered the floor of the Kunsthalle Basel in his first major institutional exhibition in 1996. Soon after, in May 1997, Daniel Birnbaum would write in *frieze* that 'all images that have ever existed appear to be represented in [Majerus's] work simultaneously, in an infinitely rich and hospitable present.' (One can sincerely envy any impressionable youth who encountered this exhibition in situ, though it stretches this viewer's credulity to suggest that the then seven-year-old Olsen set his future path from an exhibition viewed at that tender age.)

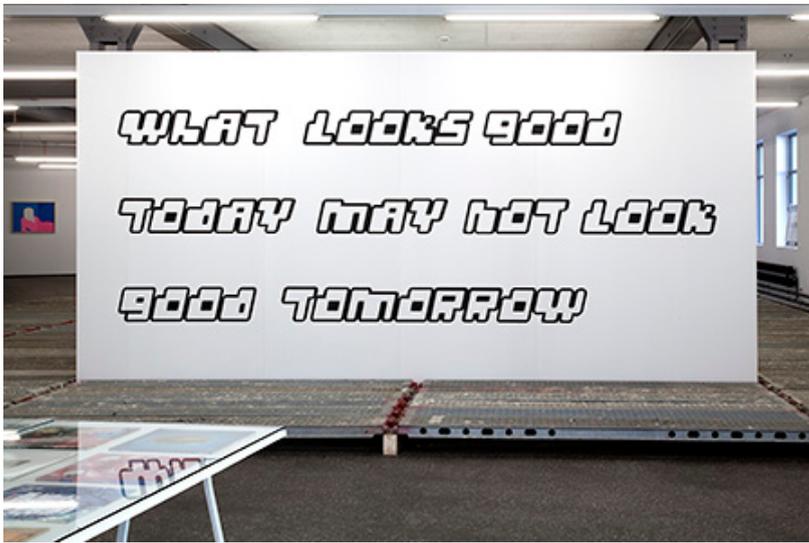
About this review

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By Aoife Rosenmeyer



'69/96', installation view, Alte Fabrik, Rapperswil

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'69/96', installation view with *what looks good today may not look good tomorrow* (1999) by Michel Majerus, Alte Fabrik, Rapperswil

Thereafter – overlooking two other Majerus series on canvas – the exhibition is dominated by Nickas's selections, which are numerous. On the walls, on flat-screen monitors on the floor and propped up on windowsills are some 30 works by artists including Marcel Broodthaers, Oliver Mosset, Meret Oppenheim, Bernhard Richter, Jack Smith, Sturtevant and Andy Warhol, from '69 (or thereabout). In addition, one group of vitrines combines artists' publications with documentation of contemporaneous events in the art world and beyond – including a totally hip reference to the original Swedish show 'Poetry must be made by all' – while another is filled with vinyl albums from the time. There are some surprises: a disquieting Larry Clark *Self-Portrait With Teenagers* (1969), and a wonderful image of Philip Guston painting on the torso of poet William Gass.

Most of these works, whatever their vintage, look very good today. Indeed the wall work's statement, like the exhibition's title, is a straw man for the curators to disregard. Beyond that, '69/96' proves that Nickas has a voracious and catholic appetite for art (even if this is a fictional collection) and that his colleagues are more selective; unfortunately all this alone does not a complete exhibition make. Majerus's work is just as lodged in the present day as Birnbaum said it was more than 15 years ago, despite the swift turnover of much of his subject matter. Its brilliance highlights the shortcomings of the rest of the exhibition. Majerus was an early adopter of the aggregation principle and a practiced delegator, but, ultimately, a generator of skilled syntheses. His paintings and their installations were complete, comprehensive environments that blended countless elements, while the fragmented metal floor installation in Rapperswil makes no sense in this particular context. The casual installation illustrates only that the final act of curation has not yet taken place. This is an undigested, unblended exhibition, and curating is not just in the gathering, but also in the

transmission.

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Frieze

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