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[Bones' Beat: Aaron Young at Bortolami Gallery](#)

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This week [Bones](#), intrepid art-world raconteur, chokes on the fumes of Aaron Young's debut at [Bortolami Gallery](#). Feeling cheated is a profound and eternal force...



36-year-old Aaron Young is currently what passes for cocktail-hour conversation kindling in the New York art community. His rise to ubiquity has been swift and can be measured in distinct, increasingly bankable increments. Young's career has been a systematic assault on the heart of art world small talk, so clinical that his example could double as a grad-school textbook entry. In fact, let's write it.

Regular early group show appearances in exotic locations (Lisbon, Havana, Moscow, Athens) lodge the name in the collective consciousness, and the artist consequently appears both cosmopolitan and enigmatic. The work--poorly reproduced in ads or on view in other countries--is hard to know, and a hedged buzz builds out of this insecurity. That buzz segues smoothly to the artist's default inclusion in jumbo museum surveys

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(2005's globe trotting *Uncertain States of America*, *Greater New York* at P.S.1, the 2006 Whitney Biennial). Then come cameos in clubby, spotless group shows at top galleries close to home (*Yes Bruce Nauman* at Zwirner & Wirth, *Substraction* at Deitch Projects, *Beneath The Underdog* at Gagosian uptown, *The Unforgiven* at Stellan Holm). Last to arrive is access to the ear and wallet of a multimillionaire art-world figure (Yvonne Force Villareal of the Art Production Fund). An epic, deafening, dick-out solo gesture can now follow.



Photo by the incomparable [Brian Sholis](#)

Young's gesture, last November, was [Greeting Card](#), a performance at the Seventh Regiment Armory on Park Avenue. Young-ites coated a grid of 288 plywood panels in layers of fluorescent acrylic, then overlaid a top coat of black. 12 stunt riders on crotch rockets whizzed and skidded around the surface for a few minutes, stopped on cue, and let the smoke rise. The result, to no one's surprise, was the biggest and dumbest abstract painting ever made. Shortly thereafter the panels were divvyed up and sold.

At this point in the journey, waves of apoplectic critical response--notable among them a disarmingly forthright poison-pen editor's letter from Artforum's [Tim Griffin](#)--did nothing to stun the artist's professional momentum. Sales of the chopped up *Greeting Card* created a front-line phalanx of collectors keen to defend their impulsively acquired assets; the artist, thereby insulated, settled into notoriety. Last September he revisited the noxious bike demo at the giant Red October factory in Moscow, and then did so again in the Solfatara volcanic crater in Naples.

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Young's debut at Bortolami Gallery on 25th Street, [*Punch Line*](#), is up now. The cavernous space looks empty but for a pristine second space built inside. Borrowed wooden police barriers lean against the wall at the entrance. One has to walk around the perimeter of the deserted space to enter the second room, the entrance to which is guarded by a heavy curtain. Inside hang three large white-on-white canvases, along with a coin slot saying 'quarters only.' Fork over your money and the lights will kill, revealing luminous mushroom clouds silk-screened on each of the canvases. Kaboom. 30 seconds later, the lights turn back on.



The press release wastes its breath as vaguely as possible with Young's interest in 'urban culture and Fluxus intervention in everyday space,' and attempts to give ballast to his swagger with cursory nods to skateboarding, graffiti, and theft. The grapeshot of references both irrelevant and, by now, quotidian, belies an obvious fact: This is some of the most willfully lazy work you will ever see.

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Young's signature technique is the dogged removal of effort from his practice. There are three paintings total, the bare minimum, one per wall. They are executed in the quickest and simplest technique possible for getting pigment on canvas. They are fully legible at a glance. Their titles are the first half of bad jokes (*You Have a White Guy, A Black Guy, and a Mexican Sit Around a Table...*) that the artist doesn't deign to finish. Young chooses to make somethings that look like nothings. He flaunts laziness.



This would be fine if this laziness counted for something: If he was palpably making use of his self-determined status in a leisure class, say. This fierce stance--that of the flaneur, the dandy, a still-fertile dropout role in society-- has served the artist [Mark Leckey](#) so well that he won the Turner Prize last week. But Young, for his part, has nothing to show for his idleness. Collector and curator friends can spin it however they want, but there's no escaping some fundamental emotional mathematics: There's nothing attractive, and nothing positive, about having this much freedom and this few ideas. Feeling cheated is a profound, eternal force. I defy you to feel anything else after closing the door on this show.-*Bones*

Punch Line is up until the 20th at [Bortolami Gallery](#), 510 West 25th Street. The works and press release are documented on the gallery's website, should you not want to make the trip.