



Left: A view of the performance of Aaron Young's *Greeting Card*. (Photo: Brian Sholis) Right: Artist Aaron Young. (Photo: David Velasco)

All paths cross in the art world, I always say, but I exaggerate. Yet that was the (very) privileged case last Monday night, when five hundred invited guests from select walks of life converged on the Seventh Regiment Armory, on Park Avenue, to witness the roaring failure of Aaron Young's monumental painting-by-biker, *Greeting Card*. The title refers to a poured Jackson Pollock painting that Young intended to reproduce. There was plenty of aggressive action involved, but it didn't hold a candle to the vigorous displays of air kissing that surrounded it.

On arrival, I spotted Sigourney Weaver, Mary Boone, Rufus Wainwright, and Francesco Clemente, all in one glance. Marilyn Minter, Cynthia Rowley and husband Bill Powers, Dan Colen, and John Legend were all in the lobby, swept up in a bouquet of collective self-love. At its center was Yvonne Force Villareal (cofounder with Doreen Remen of the Art Production Fund, which organized this singular event), dressed in a bare-shouldered black number from her archive of vintage Gucci. Blocking the entrance to the cavernous Drill Hall, where Young's painting would be made, a passel of paparazzi surrounded one of the project's principal backers, menswear mover and shaker (and former Gucci designer) Tom Ford. Beside him, fenced within yet another corral of photographers, was the genial Usher, the pop star Usher likes art, I heard. He might buy some. Actually, I thought, he might be some.

Cleared of the usual trade-show booths and carpeting, the Drill Hall—nearly a full square block with wrought-iron-trussed eighty-foot ceilings in which, before the era of art-world skirmishes, tanks, jeeps, and troops would muster for our country's actual skirmishes—was glorious, looking like a nearly abandoned and slightly decrepit Grand Central Station, absent the stars painted on the vaulted ceiling. Most spectators filed onto iron-fenced mezzanines on the north and south sides of the hall, where they resembled caged POWs. The rest of us were shown to ghostly "bleachers" on the eastern end, actually concrete steps outfitted with rugged wrought-iron theater chairs, many missing their seats.

On the floor below, covering an area about twice the size of a basketball court, was what an uninitiated viewer could easily have mistaken for an enormous black Carl Andre sculpture. In fact, that rectangle was made up of 288 plywood panels that assistants and student interns had spent three days slathering with several layers of fluorescent paint topped off with black acrylic.

After the audience was settled, a dozen stunt motorcycle riders entered from ten doors and, after a slow procession around the "canvases," drove onto assigned quarters and began to spin their wheels. Within seconds, the smell of burning rubber filled our nostrils, and a veritable fog bank of smoke rose up to obscure the scene from view. A minute later, the smoke began to lift and the paint beneath the black began to reveal itself in reflective orange, pink, and yellow—the palette, more or less, of the Pollock that inspired Young—and when it was done, lo and behold, there was the biggest Bruce Marden look-alike in the world.

The whole show seemed much ado about nothing, albeit a "nothing" with a rather unusual social flair. Just how social became pronounced after the performance, when the crowd descended like patrician nobles paying a state visit to the village below to view the painting close-up. "I think it's spectacular," said Jeffrey Deitch, no slouch when it comes to spectacle. Around us, Rockefellers, Rothschilds, and Mortimers stood cheek by jowl with artists Cindy Sherman, Lisa Yuskavage, Sylvie Fleury, Jack Pierson, and Adam McEwen, as well as collectors Shelley and Philip Aarons, Nina and Michael Lynne, Barbara and Howard Morse, and Jane Holzer.

It was fascinating to see a buffet taco dinner weave together the likes of Matthew Higgs and Chloe Sevigny in the armory's Tiffany Room, where guests were forced to sit with complete strangers at two long tables covered in black cloth. The corporate lawyer beside me admitted he knew nothing about art but, as a loyal client of Tom Ford's men's store, felt he ought to come to this event because, he said, "I think I kind of paid for it."

Ford himself said he was happy to do "anything for Yvonne." I asked whether he had provided such beneficent support—the whole affair was catered by Spec Entertainment, the fantastically expensive party planners—because he was a motorcycle enthusiast at heart. "No, I ride horses," he said. "They're much more dangerous." And would he buy one of the paintings that Young will configure from the tire-burned panels? "They better give me one," he said. "Of course he'll get one," Force Villareal said. "For Tom, anything."

During dinner, Young strolled along the tables showing Polaroids of the performance, which looked more compelling in pictures than it did live. A few of the motorcycle riders in the buffet line, meanwhile, claimed to have improvised their entire performance while breathing in the fumes. "It was intense," one said. "And I'd do it again in a minute." As Sean Landers later said, quoting a T-shirt he had seen that day in