

Christopher MOONEY, «Hellraiser», in *ArtReview*, January & February 2010, issue 38, pp 50-51.

HELLRAISER

Aaron Young imports his distinctly American brand of hard-living artist enthralled by biker culture, delinquency, violence and sex to the quieter precincts of a Brussels gallery



WITH THE HELP OF pit bulls, skateboarders, tattoo artists and helicopter pilots, Aaron Young makes shrewd use of the margins of American pop culture. Whether recreating a colossal Jackson Pollock painting in New York's Seventh Regiment Armory with motorcycles or kicking a video camera to death across Red Square in Moscow, the thirty-seven-year-old New Yorker by way of San Francisco and the Yale MFA programme is embracing an alternative form of American outsider art, aggressively crafting a macho artist persona that attempts to square up to those of the Abstract Expressionists. ArtReview shared a beer with the artist among the painted tyre tracks, burned-rubber glass paintings and graffiti-covered plinths at the opening of his show Semper Idem, in Almine Rech's newly renovated gallery space in Brussels.

AR This [*Untitled (Arm)*, 2009] doesn't look like any work of yours we've seen before.



AY It's my most explicit, I guess. We took a cast of my arm and the photographed it, brought it into a 3D program and enlarged it to the exact dimensions of the arm of Michelangelo's *David*. I like it because, you know, David was the first underdog. Then there's its hyperchrome finish, and its positioning, coming through the wall, but at crotch level. So, yes, it's my arm, but completely flexed and engorged, with all my blood flowing through it.

AR Is this an idea you've been playing with for a while? Will other pieces follow, or is it a one-off?

AY We'll see. I haven't made up my mind. As with a lot of my work, I play with the ideas, box them up and then install them. I've never been here before, and I didn't know this space was so gigantic. So, like, this piece [*I'm bound to go to heaven because I have already served my time in hell*, 2009] I made after I got here.

AR And how long have you been here?

AY Two days. It's a Hells Angels tattoo and a death's-head ring. And the quote – 'I'm bound to go to heaven because I've already served my time in hell' – is from an original Oakland Hells Angel. I just walked into a bookstore and opened up a Hells Angels book and grabbed this stuff.

AR But you're not really part of biker culture, are you? You've got the coat, I see, but it's not really part of your world, is it?

AY No, no, no. It's just something that is so American, something I'm so obsessed with. It doesn't necessarily have to be biker. It just has to be that same kind of aggression, that same kind of live-by-your-own-terms sensibility.

AR Which you're now exporting to Brussels?

AY Why not, right? We're crossing borders all the time, and exporting and hypnotising, and propagandising, and what you will.

AR Have you always had a fascination with bad-boy rebellion culture? Is it distanced a bit, or are you right in there living it?

AY I think I've calmed down, but it's something that's kind of bred in you, that you almost have to live up to, you know? There's a lot of kill-your-idols kind of stuff, quotes and text in here, and I think that's more about living up to something, and conquering it. I mean, you know, my father was crazy and all over the place. So you have this

kind of legend that you don't emulate but, just like anything in art, try to expand. You try to push it on to a different direction. I guess I'm right in the middle of it right now. We'll see where it goes.

AR Has it got you into trouble? I mean, having to live up to this persona or this creation?

AY Ah, now you're looking for dirt. I'm sure if you know anything about me, you've probably heard everything there is to tell.

AR OK. Let's talk about the untitled plinths that are in the show.

AY They're riffs on early minimalism, but they're also like the zero exit of that kind of purity. It's like the 'LSD' [plinth], which is supposed to take you out, but actually captures you. Or the 'Go home' or 'Kill your idols', which are just empty shouts [scrawled into the surface of the plinths]. Especially empty with these tyre tracks everywhere. The