Superstar artist Maurizio Cattelan is not quitting art, as he recently declared. He's just changing his job description. With the help of a constellation of forces including his curator friend and longtime collaborator Massimiliano Gioni, the Bard Curatorial Center, and the Anna Kustera gallery, Cattelan is set to launch Family Business, a non-profit art space that opens tomorrow night. The very idea is enough to pique the interest of any contemporary art lover — Gioni and Cattelan previously made waves with their miniature Wrong Gallery experiment, an itty-bitty art space that has cast a long shadow.

The debut show at Family Business is "The Virgins," a group exhibition curated by veteran painter Marilyn Minter that highlights some unknown names — artists who have never before appeared in a New York City gallery show (hence the "virgins" moniker). These young guns include Andrew Brischler, David Mramor, and Rebecca Ward, as well as the art world's answer to YouTube stardom, Hennessy Youngman. The crew also incorporates a few "born-again" virgins like Laurel Nakadate and Mika Rottenberg.
As for the aesthetics of the show, “The Virgins” appears to go after a trend that Minter has noticed in young artists (check out the invitation preview video for a taste): the “New Casualist” embrace of sloppy, slacker abstraction, a term explored by writer and painter Sharon Butler in the Brooklyn Rail last year. Under the marquee of Family Business’s big backers, this offhanded new abstraction might be due for a splash of the art-world spotlight.

ARTINFO got in touch with Minter in the midst of installing “The Virgins,” asking how the show came together, and what the Family Business experience has been like so far.

What’s it been like working with Gioni and Cattelan? How did they explain the project, and what did they expect of you in curating a show?

Gioni and Cattelan have been great. They gave me full control until I run out of ideas or time. Cattelan explained the project as an altruistic gesture, giving artists a free place to express themselves. He pays rent and electricity and supplies interns to attend the space. It’s a pretty cool way to give back.

I was sitting next to Maurizio at a dinner, and since he was “retiring,” I suggested he might want to start teaching. A month later he asked me to curate a show. I think they expect artists to use the space as a laboratory, to go with the flow — it’s a place right next to Gagosian gallery to experiment.

Why did you choose to feature artists who had never shown in New York before?

I love to teach. After many years of not seeing very much painting in the graduate school programs, all of a sudden I started to notice a trend this year. I’ve been saying that if Mary Heilmann had a threesome with Martin Kippenberger and Blinky Palermo, this art would be the result. And I noticed this at two different schools — it’s something out of a collective unconscious. The idea fell into my lap.

It’s a virgin space with kids who have never shown before, and I am sort of a “virgin curator.” We asked the band The Virgins to play in the space at the opening, and they said yes. It just made sense to call it “The Virgins.” Plus, I had never written a press release before.

You also include some “born-again” virgins. Why show the first works of already established artists like Laurel Nakadate and Mika Rottenberg?

Since the space is so small, one can see the whole show without entering the building. I wanted to have something on a screen that could run 24/7. I love all these artists’ work. Some of them are former students of mine. I asked them if they would become "born-again virgins" for the length of the exhibition and show the first video works they ever made. It’s an excuse to show work night and day.

Hennessey Youngman is a late addition to the roster. How did you hear about his work?

Hah! How do you not know his videos? They are hysterical! I realized that I have never seen his work in a New York gallery. I got in touch with him and he made a new video, so this will be his New York debut, as a virgin! He has a great idea for the space, too. It will be a nice surprise in April!

Family Business is located in a pop-up space sectioned off from Anna Kustera gallery, at 520 West 21st Street. "The Virgins" opens this Thursday, February 16.