

VENUS

MANHATTAN

Linnert, Nicolas, "CRITICS' PICKS" *ARTFORUM*, May 2014

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Raymond Pettibon

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

980 Madison Avenue, 3rd Floor

April 3–May 17

Raymond Pettibon's oeuvre of drawings presents its ambivalent attitude to avant-garde resistance by illustrating acts of sexual or violent depravity via mainstream American iconography, produced at an industrial scale and rate of production. The artist's surfer paintings, with their lurid, ebullient wave renderings and transcendental textual citations, mark a surprising anomaly, spanning nearly thirty decades of work. Here, Pettibon's critique is either demonstrably more subtle, positioning wave-riding post-1960s counterculture as complicit figures within a consuming force—or increasingly uncertain, by way of a charmed attraction to the iconography he illustrates.

Barrages of needlelike strokes form the billowing azure groundswell in *No Title (The mantling of)*, 2011. A microscopic golden-haired figure sails effortlessly ahead of the wave's pummeling break. Pettibon's sharp, repetitive application of media makes the swell a vociferous subject and renders the individual within it smugly—but insignificantly—participatory. Across other works, Pettibon's scrawled texts narrate a metaphysically tinged libido. In *No Title (The weight of)*, 1994, a text spans above a man taking off down a near-vertical wall of opaque ocean tide, reading: THE PERFECTION OF BODILY WELL-BEING IS THAT THE COLLECTIVE BODILY ACTIVITIES SEEM ONE. A surfer cruises the face of a wave in *No Title (We have seen)*, 1987, as text above him states: GIDGET COULD AFFECT HIM AT TIMES LIKE A PIECE OF WOOD TIED TO HIS ANKLES.

The illustrated figures are paired with a relentless search for transcendental and sexual highs that espouses a near-religious vernacular—a cynical scenario that levels post-hippie counterculture as conventional participants in consumer society. Perhaps the self-satisfied air is elegantly summed up in *No Title (What more could)*, 1997. Text floating above a surfer riding a sea-foam barrel reads: WHAT MORE COULD I HAVE WISHED? The swirling, awe-inspiring delineations of the ocean's force make for truly sublime visuals, hinting towards an identificatory gleam of admiration in the artist's eyes as well.



Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (Sometimes approaching the)*, 2001, ink and watercolor on paper, 52 1/4 x 53 1/2".

— Nicolas Linnert