

VENUS

MANHATTAN

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"Are Your Motives Pure? Raymond Pettibon Surfers 1987-2012"

Time Out says

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Unlike the free spirits depicted in this 25-year survey of Raymond Pettibon's paintings and watercolors on paper, the artist and former L.A. punk-scene habitué doesn't actually surf. But in a more metaphorical sense, he has spent his career riding the dark waves of the historical and psychological realities that break upon the American Dream.

Starting out in the late 1970s as the bass player for Panic, the precursor group to Black Flag, Pettibon designed the latter's familiar logo and its album covers, a talent he also lent to other groups, including Sonic Youth for their 1990 record, *Goo*. He emerged as an art star during the waning years of the Reagan era, with works that expressed a certain malaise-heavy, noir-seasoned sense of alienation.

To that end, his recipe has entailed a mixture of texts and comix-zine-style drawings, most notably in a series of hard-boiled tales of national infamy. Populated by the likes of J. Edgar Hoover and Charlie Manson, these efforts evoke a deterministic vision of an America corrupted by venality, avarice and power. But as the works here attest, Pettibon intermittently left this fatalistic universe to search for his own version of arcadia.

Measuring up to ten feet across, the largest pieces effectively transform curtain walls of green, gray and blue water into swirling abstract veils, interrupted here and there by tiny figures engulfed in nature's majesty. But in typical Pettibon fashion, the sublime is riddled with existential dread, as overlaid passages of writing—like the eponymous question—throw into doubt the possibility of attaining grace. That hasn't stopped Pettibon from trying, and the results are magnificent.

—*Howard Halle*