

Kutztown University

Research Commons at Kutztown University

Communication Design: Design Pioneers

Art and Design Department

Summer 6-9-2022

Raymond Pettibone

Michael Caputo

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, mcap184@live.kutztown.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/designpioneers>



Part of the [Book and Paper Commons](#), [Graphic Design Commons](#), and the [Illustration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Caputo, Michael, "Raymond Pettibone" (2022). *Communication Design: Design Pioneers*. 28.
<https://research.library.kutztown.edu/designpioneers/28>

This Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Art and Design Department at Research Commons at Kutztown University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Communication Design: Design Pioneers by an authorized administrator of Research Commons at Kutztown University. For more information, please contact czerny@kutztown.edu.

Michael Caputo
Raymond Pettibon
Final Draft

Raymond Pettibon is an American illustrator who came to popularity in the late 70's and early 80's California punk scene. Born Raymond Ginn in Tucson in 1957, he is the fourth of five children to Oie and R.C.K. Ginn. His family moved to Hermosa Beach California soon after his birth. Raymond's father was an English teacher who published several spy novels and gave Raymond his nickname Pettibon, which comes from "petit bon", or "good little one". His mother was a housewife. Raymond's mother was a big supporter of his artwork since he was a child, keeping most of his drawings from the young age of 3, many of which Raymond has to this day. This is in stark contrast to his father, whom Raymond eludes to as not much of a champion of his artistic endeavors (thechurchofrock, 2020). Pettibon was married to his wife Aida Ruilova, who is a film artist, and divorced in 2018. The couple have a son named Bo.

Early Life and Punk Rock

Raymond studied economics at UCLA and graduated with an Economics degree in 1977. Soon after he started a job as a math teacher, which would be a short-lived career. Shortly after graduation his illustrations began to be used for his brother's seminal punk band Black Flag's artwork. One night, the band was tossing around name ideas and nearly settled on Panic, when Raymond, who was quietly sitting in the background, scribbled 4 black bars on a piece of paper and handed it to then singer Keith Morris. Morris wasn't sure what he was looking at, so Pettibon explained the logo was an abstraction of a black flag waving in the wind. This struck a chord with the band, who then settled on Black Flag as their name. (The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2013b)



Figure 1: Black Flag's 4 Bar Logo

Pettibon produced a large number of illustrations for Black Flag as well as other bands that were on his brother's record label SST. Most of his artwork that was used was not illustrated or designed specifically the purpose of punk rock flyers. Pettibon would output so much artwork that he'd simply offer it up to his brother for use, and usually for free. Greg and bandmate Chuck Dukowski would then add the details for show posters and album covers. This was the workflow and precedence for using Pettibon's art with a couple noted exceptions. One being a request for an image offered up by then lead singer Henry Rollins.

Henry Rollins recalls a time he had a "great idea" for a T-shirt. A simple illustration of hand flipping the middle finger. Rollins figured "What could be more punk rock than a T-shirt with a middle finger." (Stoor, Robert; Cooper, Denis; Loock, Ulrich, 2001) He mentioned it to Pettibon at their home, which at the time was Pettibon and Greg's mother's apartment. Pettibon then illustrated what Henry calls "the most effeminate middle finger" he's ever seen. A limp and non-violent depiction of an image Henry had in his head as aggressive and in your face. Pettibon somehow translated Henry's idea into the opposite of what he wanted, most likely by design, or at least that's how Rollins understands it. Afterwards, Pettibon started including a large number

of naked men in his artwork for Black Flag. Rollins surmises that this was Pettibon's subtle way of expressing his dislike of the band's specific artwork requests and a quiet way rebel against future requests.



Figure 2: My Rules. Henry Rollins thought the bent wrist and curled fingers made this one of the most effeminate middle fingers. Far from the aggressive FUCK YOU! Attitude he was looking for when he requested it

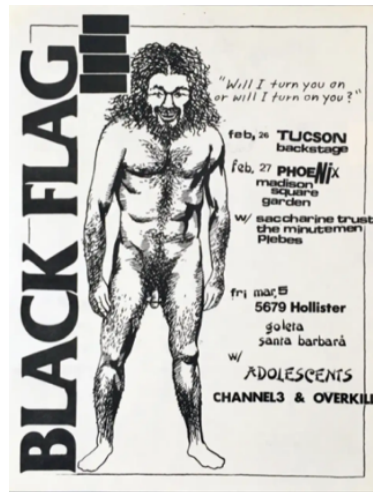


Figure 3: Naked Man Flyer 1. After interpreting the requested middle finger, Pettibon began illustrating a number of hairy, naked men that were used for Black Flag show flyers. Rollins believes this was Pettibon's, clever and subtle way, to stop the art requests.



Figure 4: Naked Man Flyer 2.

Another case of this is the artwork for Black Flag's *Loose Nut* album cover. Greg, Henry and Pettibon all shared a living space together and Black Flag had just finished recording. Someone from the Black Flag camp had taken a self-portrait Pettibon had drawn as well as some other pieces that were laying around for the album artwork without asking. Greg and Chuck then cut the pieces up and made their own collage for the cover, back panels and insert for the album. Pettibon had no idea this had happened until Greg gave him a finished copy of the album. Henry recalls Pettibon being mad and he then created 2 parody illustrations; one of Greg and the other of Chuck and had 1000 of each printed up. His plan was to circulate them around LA music scene. Greg had come home and found the stack of posters and trashed them. Luckily, Henry had

found them first and asked Pettibon if he could take a couple. The few he took are the only ones known to survive. This was the breaking point in the brother's relationship. Pettibon says he has no regrets about any of the work he did for the band, after all, he was doing it for family and friends. The brothers haven't spoken to each other since 1986. (thechurchofrock, 2020)

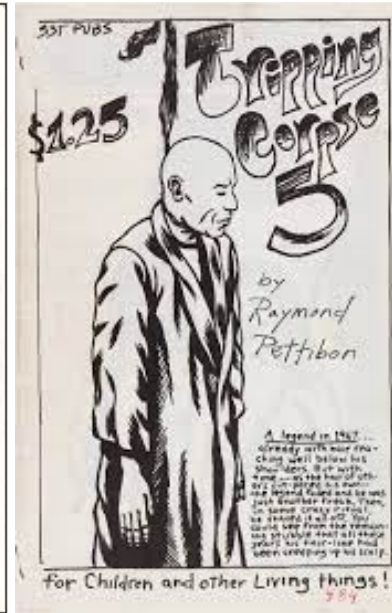


Figure 5: Loose Nut Record Cover.



Figure 6: Pettibon's revenge art.

During the period between the late 70's and early 80's Pettibon also produced 44 Zines, most of which were published by his brother Greg's SST record label. These were all staple bound and produced in limited edition runs. All were hand numbered and signed by Pettibon in red ink. The numbers you could find scrawled at the bottom on most original copies. *Captive Chains* (1978) was his first and is considered a book/or graphic novel depending on the viewer's perspective. It features comic-like illustrations paired with bizarre, ironic, and often seemingly disjointed text. *Captive Chains* particularly focuses on the dissemination of post-war American culture (Raymond Pettibon's "Captive Chains" - Graphic Arts, n.d.). Other zine titles include; *Pig Cupid*; *New Wavy Gravy*; *Exterminating the Eagles*; *Tripping Corpse*; *Selfishness*, etc.



Figures 7 - 11 Collection of Pettibon's Zines: L to R;

7. Pig Cupid (Why Do I Dream of Undertow When I Don't Even Know What it is) #398/500;

8. Tripping Corpse 5 "for Children and other Living Things! 484/500;

9. Medea is the Message Tripping Corpse-7 39/500;

10. Tripping Corpse 3 Required Reading for the Over-30 Generation 27/500;

11. New Wavy Gravy (As Opposed to Old Wavy Gravy)(I Don't Share My Cross w/No One).

Pettibon's artwork was used on flyers, t-shirts and album covers for other SST bands including; Husker Dü, the Minutemen, The Meat Puppets and Sonic Youth. The most famous of which is his album cover for Sonic Youth's 1990 major label debut *Goo*. Kim Gordon (Bass player for Sonic Youth) had met Pettibon at a party in LA in the 1980s, they became friends, and later, she played a character named "Goo" in Pettibon's 1989 film *Sir Drone*. Sonic Youth, a

New York City based band was on the eve of releasing their major label debut on Geffen Records and needed cover art. Originally titled *Blowjob?* it featured an illustration of a big faced, red lipped Joan Crawford. Geffen Records begged Sonic Youth (who had contractual Creative Control) to not go with that image. Pettibon then delivered up an illustration of Maureen Hindley and David Smith, based on a photograph he found in the magazine *True Detective* (Don't Give Me Your Soul, 2020). The dialogue used in Pettibon's version is the same that accompanied the original reference. This cover became even more iconic than the original idea and has spawned many variants using famous actors and characters in place of the original subjects.



Figure 12: Sonic Youth *Goo*.



Figure 13: original reference photo from *True Detective Magazine*



Figure 14: Batman and Robin variant.



Figure 15: Goofy Variant.



Figure 16: Sonic the Hedgehog Variant

Pettibon's Fine Art

Raymond Pettibon is not just a punk rock artist famous for his zines, flyers, album covers and iconic Black Flag “bars”. He is also an accomplished gallery artist whose marriage of image and type will leave the viewer feeling a bit odd, questioning the purpose or meaning of that marriage. Pettibon likes to make associations within his works and allow his audience to interpret those associations. There is a Dada-esque nature to the way he pairs his type and image, most of the time it's not a contrived association with a purpose, but simply a pairing that oddly makes sense to the artist. Most of the phrases he uses are rewritten examples taken from literature he has read. He dissects the literature and rewrites it in his own words. This is at times the jumping off point for some of his works. Other times, the illustration leads the way followed by the phrase. A well-read viewer of his work may be able to identify some of the phrases as coming from a James Joyce novel, but edited to suit the image.

Pettibon has explained that he sometimes composes thoughts by cutting out words and phrases and pasting them together in new ways. Then these new compositions of words are then scrolled onto his work. Jonathan Letham, an American Novelist and professor of creative writing, explains in his interview with Pettibon; that the artist would send him envelopes containing cut up pieces of his work, taped together in new ways to form a totally new idea. Although the idea was a new interpretation of Letham's work, they always seemed to make sense to Letham leading him to wonder if Pettibon had access to his thoughts. (Hammer Museum, 2013)

Collaboration seems to be a recent staple within Pettibon's work. His quiet and witty demeanor seems to work well with other artists. His work with Artist Marcel Dzama is an interesting example of this collaboration. Both artists use drawing as their main expression of art, as opposed to drawing in the form of a sketch toward the final piece. Dzama sees Pettibon as breaking ground in this territory, and to some degree attributes it to him that he was able to find success with his own creativity. During their collaboration, both artists would begin by attacking a blank page that would be pinned to the wall. Pettibon on one end and Dzama on the other. Switching sides in a cool drawing ballet, never spending too much time on one section. They would trade off illustrating the subjects they are particularly known for. For instance, Dzama would draw a wave within the composition instead of a bat, and Pettibon would draw a bat instead of a wave. This was intentionally done to keep the viewers who are familiar with either artist's work guessing (The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2013a). The two artists' styles work so very well together that it becomes hard to see who is working on which section. One way to differentiate the two is their use of drips. Dzama tends to incorporate those drips into the work, while Pettibon would simply leave them as is.



Figure 17: Marcel Dzama (L) Raymond Pettibon (R)



Figure 18: Marcel Dzama



Figure 19: Pettibon's drips



Figure 20: Pettibon (L) Dzama (R) Collaborating 2



Figure 21: Pettibon (L) Dzama (R) Collaborating 3

Pettibon's style is naturally messy, raw and sometimes down right ugly. Which allows him to capture an expression that is uniquely his own. His drawings include many iterations of the same subjects, which include; baseball players, Gumby, Charles Manson, an odd character who yells VAVOOM!, political figures, and comic book staples Batman and Superman. He finds it hard to resist using cartoons and comicbooks as reference for his pieces, but also thinks that

comparing his art to that of comic book is a thin one (Stoor, R; et all, 2001). After all, they do relate to panels of a comic book extremely well. Pettibon also likes to distance himself historically from his subjects. Pulling most reference from the 40's, 50's and 60's. Like most artists, Pettibon revisits subject matter. One of them is Charles Manson, who plays into his idea of the death of the hippie culture as Manson plays on people's fears and a maniacal ability to control a wayward youth. His image of Elvis, plump and crucified also evokes a visceral response as it holds him up as a cultural icon, similar to Christ in way of popularity, and reminds us all of his ultimate demise. Being aware of the fates of both of these men adds to the effect they have on the viewers' reaction.

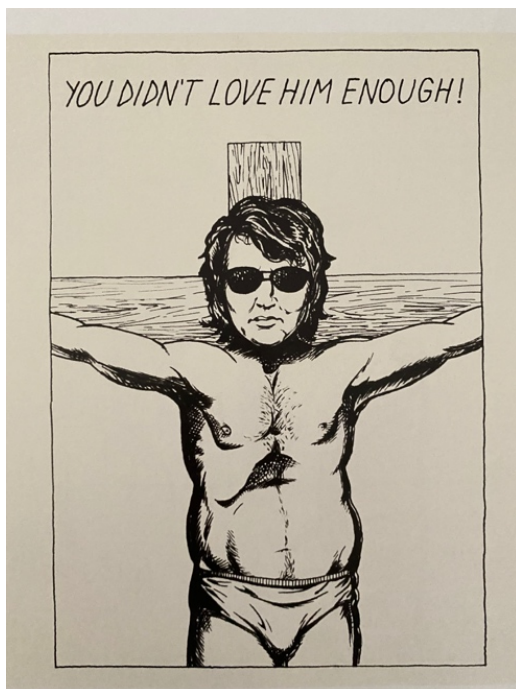


Figure 22: "You Didn't Love Him Enough"
This ink drawing of Elvis as a plump, overfed icon. "You Didn't Love Him Enough" is scrolled over his head insinuating the viewer may have had a role in his ultimate demise.

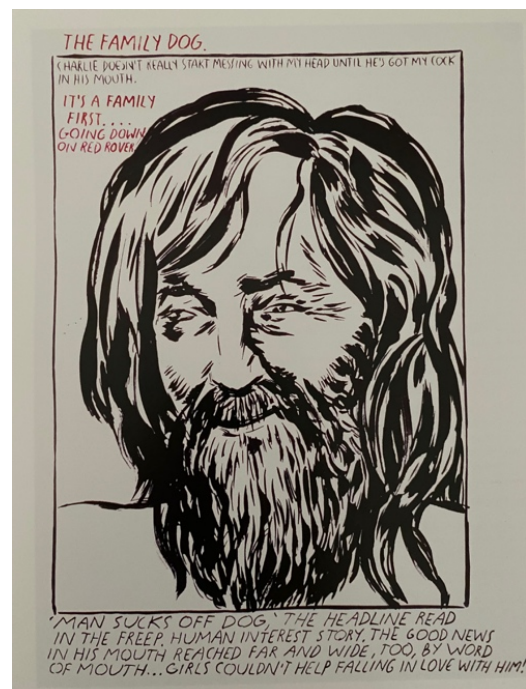


Figure 23: "The Family Dog"
This ink on paper piece shows a shaggy Charles Manson, sort of resembling a shaggy family dog. The text is crass and vulgar, and comes across as if it may be from the family dog's Point-of-view. It's an odd pairing of a seemingly smirking Manson almost proud of what the text describes.

Pettibon's marriage of these images with type isn't aimed at creating an emotional response from his viewers and this is not his intention when creating pieces. He considers these connections to be more formal decisions that are purposefully done. It's a process that could become formulaic if he allows, but that's something he tries to escape (Stoor, Robert; Cooper, Denis; Loock, Ulrich, 2001). Pettibon also understands his art generates an emotional response from the viewer. This usually comes from the juxtapositioning of image and words, but isn't the reason why he creates. Pettibon says that if he were looking for an emotional response from his audience, then the pieces he creates would be more autobiographical in nature. This is not the case. However, he does mention that his desired response "might be a laugh" (Stoor, Robert; Cooper, Denis; Loock, Ulrich, 2001).

Nostalgia – Baseball and Surfing

There is a certain nostalgia within Pettibon's work. You can see this best within his drawings of baseball players. He prefers drawing players, mainly pitchers and batters in the baggy uniforms of the 1940's. The nostalgia of those uniforms offers a unique aesthetic that captures the movement better than the tight style of uniforms worn in the 1970's and 80's. It's a visual quality that works for his drawings. The focus of his baseball drawing is mostly on pitchers and batters as they have the most unique style to their movement (XDeep Club, 2008). Each pitcher and batter usually has a unique stance or windup that plays well into Pettibon's work and conveys the nostalgia of golden era of baseball in a way that only Pettibon can. I've been a fan of Pettibon's work for a while now, but have only recently become aware of his baseball drawings from a friend of mine. We both share similar interests in music and baseball and it was surprising to find that his style works so well there.



Figure 24: "Untitled"
 Ink on Paper. This simple and stark drawing of what looks like Babe Ruth after a home run swing with the caption "What I Really Want to do is Manage" is a perfect example of Pettibon's witty marriage of text and image.



Figure 25: "Untitled"
 Ink on Paper. Here Pettibon is showing the process of batting a baseball in his signature sketchy style. The loose fitting, nostalgic uniforms show the rhythmic and repetitive motion within a batter's swing. This is a key component within Pettibon's artwork.



Figure 26: "Healing the Sick"
 Ink on Paper. Thick, exaggerated lines and an inquisitive caption leads the viewer into thinking about the purpose of the pairing.

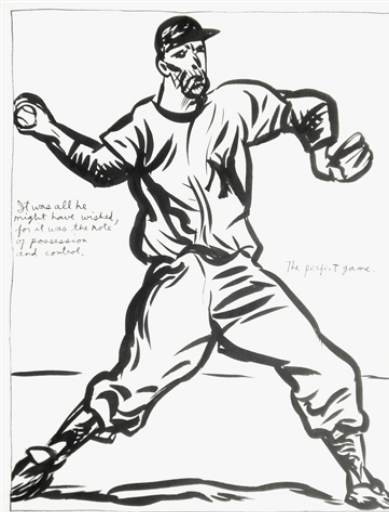


Figure 27: "The Perfect Game"
 The caption reads: "It was all he might have wished, for it was the note of possession and control...The Perfect Game" Ink on Paper.

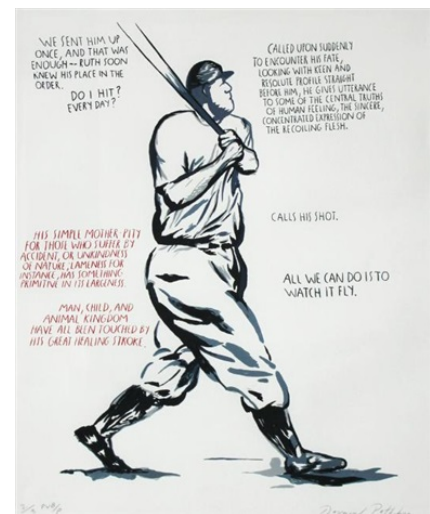
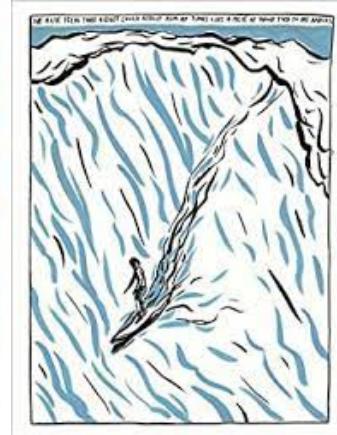


Figure 28: "Untitled"
 Simple and stark with more text than image. Pettibon uses red ink as well as blank here for an unknown reason.

I feel the same mixture of nostalgia and respect regarding his drawing of waves, because surfing is a hobby of mine. Although surfing isn't as far a cry from punk rock flyers as baseball is, this progression made more sense to me in relation to his punk years. Overall, I was stunned by the breadth of Pettibon's work. Up until recently, Pettibon was the creator of punk rock flyers; he was better than anyone within the genre. I was finding that his wild and raw style translated so well to other relatable subjects. My first thought when I saw his wave drawings was, "of course he draws waves and of course it makes complete sense." Not only in the sense that he grew up in Hermosa Beach and was an influential artist within the LA punk scene, but because his expressive line work gives his waves a life of their own. He usually depicts these larger than life dangerous waves that cause a bit of anxiety when looking at them. Many of them are drawn/painted as murals at his gallery shows exaggerating the epic nature of surfing big waves. His strokes are not unfamiliar to his past works within his extremely large body of work and immediately recognizable as done by the hand of Pettibon. These too, have that nostalgic quality that his baseball players have, but are far removed from the ugliness of his punk rock days. Although if both eras were shown together, side by side, they would make sense as a part of the whole. I think this is a testament to Pettibon reaching what he calls his "mature style" around 1978. His detailed, multicolored wall of waves are my favorite part of Pettibon's artistic legacy.



Figures 29 - 33: Collection of Pettibon's Waves, L to R: "Untitled"; "Surfer's 1985 - 2014 Cover"; "Untitled"; "Untitled" Ink on Paper. Large, doom filled waves are a staple of Pettibon's artwork. They are as imposing and dangerous as they are beautiful. Pettibon's heavy strokes add to their movement and his application of blues and greens show the depth these large waves can have. Paired with the miniscule sized surfers they capture the epic nature of big wave surfing well.

Script Writing and Collage Work

Pettibon also has recently started working with collage, which he has been experimenting with for about 15 years. He mentions that his collages usually take a long time to complete, but have a way of figuring themselves out over time. This seems to be a great way for Pettibon to revisit his vast collection of unfinished pieces and repurpose them in a new way (The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2013a). Pettibon's collection of unfinished art may outweigh his number of finished pieces, and spans his entire 42-year career. He finds it hard to know where to stop when creating collages and eludes to them becoming complete when he runs out of steam. I find this to be a hilariously artistic way to be finished with a project. One in which I have found myself guilty of more than I'd like to admit.

Pettibon has also produced a number of scripts, some that he has put into production, as well as a Batman script he's mentioned in a couple of interviews. *The Whole World is Watching* is one as well as his 1989 film *Sir Drone*. *Sir Drone* is an art film about the formation of a new band and features Mike Watt of the Minutemen, Mike Kelly and Kim Gordon of Sonic Youth as "Goo". The film took Pettibon 2 days to film and the production quality shows, but it captures the mindset of young punks forming a band so well. I found myself reminiscing about starting my first band and how ideological we were in our early adulthood, as it was whole-heartedly possible to "make it" in a band. This is something *Sir Drone* does well, from the deliberations on possible band names to the filling out of the band's roster.

Although Pettibon's work begins within the world of punk rock, it doesn't only live in that world. This came as a surprise to me. Pettibon was able to use the notoriety he gained in the early 1980s punk scene and spawn into a successful gallery career. His style is raw, expressionistic and at times violent to the viewer, but it also has a nostalgic and epic nature in its beauty. Pettibon, who hasn't spoken to his brother since 1986, appears to be an artist who deeply cares about his friends and family, and he shows this while reminiscing about his early career illustrating art for his friends' bands. His myriad of published zines from throughout the 1980's encapsulates the DIY nature of his work and allowed Pettibon to showcase his illustrations within the reproducible format popular at the time. His wild style and expressionistic linework embody the aesthetic of 1980s LA punk scene, while also capturing the nostalgia of baseball's golden era and the epic nature of big wave surfing. His demeanor is awkward, but his wit comes through sharply in his art as well as interviews. It's his subtle wit that tends to leave his viewers questioning the reasoning behind his word/image associations, an attribute that seems to be a supernatural sense for Pettibon. He is an artist who creates, almost all the time. Which leads him to have a vast amount of unfinished works. Unfinished until he digs them up and repurposes them in new pieces. This very well could play into the great metaphor for life and an artist's ability to start many projects, only to leave them ultimately, unfinished.

Bibliography

Art21. (2019, September 4). Marcel Dzama: Drawing with Raymond Pettibon | Art21 “Extended Play.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsA9nKovNbo>

Hart, R. (2020, June 26) Don’t Give Me Your Soul: The Oral History of Sonic Youth’s “Goo.” SPIN. <https://www.spin.com/2020/06/dont-give-me-your-soul-the-oral-history-of-sonic-youths-goo/>

Hammer Museum. (2013, December 12). Jonathan Lethem & Raymond Pettibon. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhGQ2gUaQWA>

Ng, J. (2019, January 24). Raymond Pettibon—Moving Art Across Generations. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YU_ObRWvBvk

Gordon, K. (2013, December 16) Raymond Pettibon. Interview Magazine. <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/raymond-pettibon-1>

Mellby, J. L. (2010, February 19) Raymond Pettibon’s “Captive Chains”—Graphic Arts. https://www.princeton.edu/~graphicarts/2010/02/raymond_pettibons_captive_chai.html

Brewer, T. (2017, March 7). Raymond Pettibon’s American Id: Lessons for the Trump ear from the punk art legend. Ssense. <https://www.ssense.com/en-us/editorial/culture/raymond-pettibons-american-id>

Stoor, R., Cooper, D., Look, U., & Pettibon, R. (2001). Raymond Pettibon. Phaidon.

The Museum of Contemporary Art. (2013, February 22). Artists Talk with Alia Shawkat and Lance Bangs—Raymond Pettibon—The Artist’s Studio—MOCAtv. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cg6TmR3v5rc>

The Museum of Contemporary Art. (2013, June 11). The Art of Punk—Black Flag—Art + Music—MOCAtv. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0u04EqNVjo>

The Church of Rock. (2020, March 9). Raymond Pettibon interview 3/8/2020 with Rev Derek Moody & Sister Tracy. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVxS72r4oJw>

Turner, G., & Pettibon, R. (1999). Raymond Pettibon. BOMB, 69, 40–47. JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40426142>

Art 21. (2008, April 1). “Art in the Twenty-First Century”. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxYwoYylOh4>

Printed Matter. (2016, January, 15). "Zines by Raymond Pettibon". <https://www.printedmatter.org/catalog/tables/459>