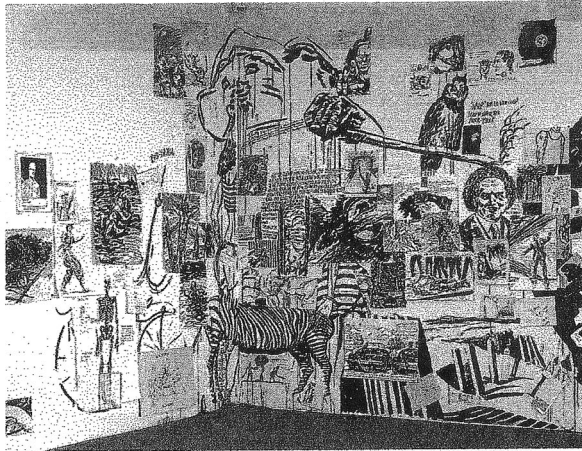


REGEN PROJECTS *

Hainley, Bruce, "Raymond Pettibon," *Artforum*, November 2000, p. 158, ill.



Raymond Pettibon, 2000. Installation view.

LOS ANGELES

RAYMOND PETTIBON REGEN PROJECTS

Encircled by an inky Stonehenge of noses hangs one of the most seemingly innocuous drawings in Raymond Pettibon's amazing new show: a title page torn from a book, stamped "Withdrawn from the Los Angeles County Public Library" in red ink. The book, *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust*, is a sadly long-out-of-print volume by Howard Moss. Near its close Moss wrote, "Explaining everything, Proust creates a universe that does not exclude the inexplicable." I'm tempted to rewrite Moss's sentence: Including everything, Pettibon creates a universe that does not exclude the unincludeable.

A buoy afloat the enthralling graphic cataract of materials flooding the gallery, the little appropriated page provides as helpful a key as any to surfing the tidal wave of work. (The mixed metaphor and destabilized progression of that sentence is a shabby attempt to imitate the quick visual/verbal and intellectual shifts, the AC/DC current of the installation.) Rather than be "directed," as is usually the case, Pettibon was left alone to coordinate everything in the gallery, resulting in a site-specific opus. Consisting of murals; drawings (most by Pettibon but some by his nephew and niece) pushpinned on top of and next to, interrupting and complet-

ing, those murals; scribbled notes on the walls, written to himself and to his gallerist ("Shaun! Next week I've got it covered—really"); and pages ripped from the bibliomaniac's own paperback collection, some with subtle alterations and blocked-out text as well as added drawings and notations, the show is as messy and lively as life. It feels like not just the workings of a really interesting mind, but a roam through the skull containing the brain of that mind thinking, the myriad synapses flashing, stopping, switching, even jumping the tracks: the locomotion of thought.

Near the Proust page is a drawing of a face in profile and shadow silhouette depicting how someone looks and how he feels others see him—the difference being a protruding cartoonish schnozz. This image and the *Magic Lantern* leaf lend the ring of prominent noses religio-racial undertones, the way Proust's own aristocratic swirl is refracted by World War I and the Dreyfus affair. This section of the installation transmutes and extends into one about "George Double-you" and Clinton and his active, woman-luvin' member—Daumier-esque political cartooning allowing Gore's choice of Lieberman as his running mate, America's schizoid belief in religious freedom and fear of any non-Protestant's proximity to presidential power, and the show's installation coinciding with the Democratic convention in LA to be the "facts" suggesting the noses. Of course they are just as well keyholes framing a portal, perhaps a

portal to the unconscious (lost memories, lost time). There isn't only one key to opening it, just as there isn't one key to understanding this show or one key to life. As for the unconscious—well, she noses might also riff on Freud's basing his earliest psychoanalytic theories on the curative powers of cocaine.

If Pettibon weren't as great a writer and reader as he is an artist, all would fail. Instead it's as if he has realized Rimbaud's dream of vowels having color. *In Search of Lost Time* looked to the *Arabian Nights*. Pettibon is a Scheherazade of the image, one drawn tale leading to another, never finishing, but added onto addictively like Proust's endless corrections pinned in long papillottes. A dance of layering veils, paper pinned on top of paper like the pattern made for a dress, forms a temporal and visceral rush—thematics and styles from past and present as well as media canceling each other out then corresponding. Leitmotifs—wigs, money, skulls, sexual longing, "surfing" punning to "suffering"—recur like Vinteuil's little theme. A riot of parrots and parakeets flutters in another corner. Pettibon's avarian digression (via Flaubert's *A Simple Heart*?) could be read as a shrine to the holy ghost of representation, of making, of the connection between the doodle and the drawing and the narratives lost and found between them.

Note: If all this sounds overwhelmingly Francophilic, remember that it was the French who named the aesthetic so crucial to Pettibon and LA—noir.

—Bruce Hainley