For immediate release:

RAYMOND PETTIBON

Hard in the Paint

November 6 – December 21, 2010



No Title (She must know...), 2010. Pen, ink, and gouache on paper. 30 1/4 x 22 1/4 inches (76.8 x 56.5 cm).

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of new works by Raymond Pettibon, on display at the gallery's 533 West 19th Street space.

Raymond Pettibon's work embraces a wide spectrum of American "high" and "low" culture, from the deviations of marginal youth to art history, literature, sports, religion, politics, and sexuality. Taking their points of departure in the Southern California punk-rock culture of the late 1970s and 1980s and the "do-it-yourself" aesthetic of album-covers, comics, concert flyers, and fanzines that characterized the movement, his drawings have come to occupy their own genre of potent and dynamic artistic commentary.

This exhibition takes its title from basketball terminology: used to describe a player moving within the rectangular and usually painted area below the net, "hard in the paint" indicates the difficulty in scoring from this angle amidst defensive pressure. In slang, it is also used to denote a confident, tough, or aggressive disposition, and as such, it is reflective of the directness of Pettibon's work. Hard in the Paint presents a wide range of drawings unified by their bold, vivid lines and striking compositions.

Fragments from American society have been singled out and distilled to key images, which often incorporate texts of varying length from one word to several paragraphs. The selection of texts, which over the course of Pettibon's career have come to span a broad array of influences from popular media to Marcel Proust, William Faulkner, Henry James, Gustave Flaubert, and the Bible, relate both rhythmically and narratively to the visual content of his drawings, although their relationship may not always be immediately apparent.

In keeping with Pettibon's prolific practice, the works in this exhibition alternately address violence, humor, sex, evolution, and sports. In some drawings, the subject matter is immediately recognizable: No Title (For getting a...) depicts the moment a baseball player swings his bat; No Title (No time to...) shows a gunshot fired at a police officer. Other works combine a variety of references, some politically motivated. In No Title (Don't ask! Don't...), young men take off their clothes in a graveyard under the observation of a uniformed officer. As if commenting on recent American foreign policy, the Stars and Stripes motif is visible in the top left corner, and a text towards the bottom reads: "It would be like getting your own star engraved on some faraway sandy desert." No Title (She must know...) portrays a young woman in a similar pose to Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa. In place of the winding paths and trees that make up the background of the iconic Renaissance painting, she is surrounded by ironic and contradictory art historical lingo, which is summarized by a sentence towards the top: "She must know that we are reading a fiction with her."

While there is always a narrative behind Pettibon's work, punch-lines and single, intended meanings seldom surface. The artist's use of language is more accurately a reaction and antidote to mainstream journalistic jargon—a unique form of contemporary image-infused poetry that drills deep into the American psyche. As more text has been incorporated into his drawings over the years, they have in turn become increasingly painterly and colorful. Drawing with an urgency rarely matched by his contemporaries, Pettibon continues a tradition of cultural commentary exemplified by artists such as Francisco Goya and Honoré Daumier in the late 18th and 19th centuries. His talented draftsmanship, combined convincingly with the cartoon-like, economical style of his representations, speaks swiftly and freely about contemporary culture.

Since he emerged on the art scene in the 1980s, Pettibon's work has been exhibited widely in the United States and internationally, including solo shows at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago in 1998 (the exhibition traveled to the Drawing Center, New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles); the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in 2005; and the Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, California, in 2009 (with Yoshua Okon). Pettibon participated in Documenta XI in Kassel in 2002 and in the Venice Biennale in 2007, and his works are included in important private and public collections worldwide. He lives and works in Venice Beach, California.