

## Raymond Saunders *Post No Bills*

Curated by Ebony L. Haynes

February 22–April 6, 2024

David Zwirner  
519 and 525 West 19th Street, New York

Andrew Kreps Gallery  
22 Cortlandt Alley, New York



Raymond Saunders, *Pittsburgh '07-11, 2007* © Raymond Saunders  
Courtesy the artist, Andrew Kreps, and David Zwirner

David Zwirner and Andrew Kreps Gallery are pleased to announce *Post No Bills*, an exhibition of work by American artist Raymond Saunders at David Zwirner's 519 and 525 West 19th Street galleries in Chelsea and Andrew Kreps Gallery at 22 Cortlandt Alley in Tribeca. Curated by Ebony L. Haynes, this two-part presentation will highlight Saunders's ability to infuse his work with social relevance and commentary while maintaining a sense of visual dynamism and spontaneity—challenging viewers to confront the complexities of the human experience.

In his works, Saunders brings together his extensive formal training with his own observations and lived experience. His assemblage-style paintings frequently begin with a monochromatic black ground elaborated with white chalk—both a pointed reversal of the traditional figure-ground relationship and a nod to Saunders's decades spent as a teacher. He subsequently adds a range of other markings, materials, and talismans. Expressionistic swaths of paint, minimalist motifs, line drawings, and passages of vibrant color tangle with found objects, signs, and doors collected from his urban environment, creating unexpected visual rhymes and resonances that reward careful and sustained looking. At once deliberately constructed and improvisatory, didactic and deeply felt, these richly built surfaces conjure a range of themes, allowing for a vast and nuanced multiplicity of meanings.

The exhibition takes its title from a 1968 painting by Saunders—which will be on view at David Zwirner—that features a small rectangular patch of expressionistic brushstrokes collaged onto a vast red monochromatic background. This refrain, which recurs in later works, including some of those in the exhibition, can be seen to encapsulate the artist's incisive views on such wide-ranging themes as community, public space, art making, and visibility. In appropriating signage deliberately designed to keep communal surfaces bare and make way for paid advertisements and re-presenting it in the context of a work of art destined to be hung in a white cube, Saunders questions the inbuilt structures that dictate inclusion and exclusion, both in the public sphere and the art institution.

On view will be a range of paintings that embody this inquiry, showcasing Saunders's nuanced visual vocabulary that seamlessly traverses both high and low points of reference. Through this radical treatment of pictorial space, Saunders contemplates issues of power, control, and the limits of expression in contemporary society—whose voice can be heard and who can post where. Haynes states, "The opportunity to present the work of Raymond Saunders across two spaces has been extremely rewarding. Saunders's singular practice spans decades and yet so much of the work has never been documented or exhibited widely. *Post No Bills* highlights Saunders's intentional and effective formal style that blends painting, drawing and collage, and focuses on his consistent observations and questioning around belonging and visibility, and the quieted dissent of a formidable painter."

Saunders's singular aesthetic finds echoes in the work of artists ranging from Cy Twombly and Robert Rauschenberg to Joseph Beuys and Jean-Michel Basquiat—all roughly working in parallel—but remains unmistakably his own. As curator Connie H. Choi of The Studio Museum in Harlem describes, "Sights and sounds pass by as one moves along a city street, encountering the world, making decisions, and changing one's mind as one goes. Such is the beauty of Saunders's paintings. They are about life and all of its battles and victories, dirtiness and splendor."<sup>1</sup>

As Saunders writes in *Black Is a Color* (1967): "I am responsible for being as fully myself, as man and artist, as I possibly can be, while allowing myself to hope that in the effort, some light, some love, some beauty may be shed upon the world, and perhaps some inequities put right."<sup>2</sup>

Born in 1934 in Pittsburgh, Raymond Saunders first studied art in the city's public schools, participating in a program for artistically gifted students. His mentor, Joseph C. Fitzpatrick, the director of art for Pittsburgh public schools, also taught artists including Andy Warhol, Philip Pearlstein, and Mel Bochner. Through Fitzpatrick's support and encouragement, Saunders earned a scholarship to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, also taking courses at the Barnes Foundation organized through the University of Pennsylvania, before returning to Pittsburgh and earning his BFA from the Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1960. He subsequently earned an MFA from the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland in 1961. In 1968, he accepted a teaching position at California State University, Hayward, eventually joining the faculty of his alma mater (now California College of the Arts), where he remains professor emeritus.

In 1967, Saunders achieved wide recognition when he published the pamphlet *Black Is a Color* as a rebuttal to an article by the writer Ishmael Reed about the Black Arts Movement. In this text, Saunders argues powerfully that Reed fails to capture the vastness of Black expression and in doing so siloes Black artists and their work as delimited by the category of race alone. He concludes with the imperative that we necessarily separate identity from artistic output, that "we get clear of these degrading limitations, and recognize the wider reality of art, where color is the means, not the end."

The first solo exhibitions of Saunders's works were held at the Terry Dintenfass Gallery in New York (1966; 1969; 1970; 1972). In 1971, the artist was the subject of his first West Coast exhibition and first major museum presentation, at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which was also shown at Terry Dintenfass Gallery, New York. Saunders exhibited widely across the United States and in Europe, with

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<sup>1</sup> Connie H. Choi, "Raymond Saunders," in Kellie Jones, ed., *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960–1980*. Exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, University of California, Los Angeles, 2011), p. 317.

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Saunders, *Black Is a Color* (self-published pamphlet, 1967), n.p.

solo exhibitions at the Providence Museum of Art, Rhode Island (1972); Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia (1974; 1990); University Art Museum, University of California, Berkeley (1976); Stephen Wirtz Gallery, San Francisco (1979, traveled to Baum/Silverman Gallery, Los Angeles), and Terry Dintenfass Gallery, New York (1980; 1982; 1985; 1987; 1989; 1991; 1993; 1996; 1999); Seattle Art Museum (1981); Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery (1984); Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts (1987; 1989); Galerie Resche, Paris (1990; 1993); Tampa Museum of Art, Florida (1992); Oakland Museum (1994); Phoenix Art Museum (1994); Giorgio de Chirico Art Centre, Voros, Greece (1995); M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, San Francisco (1995); the American Embassy in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (1996); Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (1996); Miami University Art Museum, Oxford, Ohio (1996); and the Hunter College Gallery / Times Square, City University of New York (1998). The artist also participated in the 1972 Whitney Biennial.

Over the last two decades, Saunders has continued to be the subject of solo exhibitions globally, in addition to appearing in several notable group exhibitions. In 2011, Saunders was included in *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960–1980*, curated by Kellie Jones at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, which traveled to MoMA PS1, New York, and Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts. In 2017, the artist was included in *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* at Tate Modern, London, which traveled to Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas, the Brooklyn Museum, New York, and The Broad, Los Angeles. In 2022, his work appeared in the exhibition *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

In 2021, Andrew Kreps Gallery and Casemore Gallery organized the two-part solo exhibition *40 Years: Paris/Oakland* in San Francisco, which spanned four decades of the artist's career. The following year, Andrew Kreps Gallery presented the first exhibition of Saunders's work in New York since 1998.

Saunders has been the recipient of honors such as a National Institute of Arts and Letters Award (1963), a Ford Foundation Award (1964), a Rome Prize Fellowship (1964), a Guggenheim Fellowship (1976), and two National Endowment for the Arts Awards (1977, 1984).

Work by the artist is held in numerous public collections, including the Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; M. H. de Young and Legion of Honor, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Museum Brandhorst, Munich; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Phoenix Art Museum; Portland Art Museum, Oregon; Saint Louis Art Museum; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Seattle Art Museum; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others. He lives and works in Oakland.

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