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Anthony Goicolea
Sea Wall (detail)
2008



Anthony Goicolea
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Anthony Goicolea
Baths
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LONDON LETTER
by Ben Street



The Brooklyn-based digital photographer Anthony Goicolea, who is celebrated for his theatrical photographic tableaux in which he poses for every part, has slipped into a darker and more melancholy mode with his latest show, his first at the London headquarters of the tony Haunch of Venison gallery. No longer is the artist's own visage the subject of multiple portraits based on his own psychology. Instead, we have black-and-white images of Goicolea's Cuban ancestors, known and unknown, displayed in bottles, pasted to canvas or photographed posted on trees and telephone poles.

For this new series, which fills all three floors of the gallery, Goicolea mimics with drawing the usual process of photographic development. He begins with the negative, making a drawing on glass or layers of Mylar, then converts it to a positive image, and finally displays the result, sometimes photographing the drawing posted on telephone poles in New York, where he now lives, or on trees in the South, where he was raised.

Like Gibbs, Goicolea allows the practice of transcription to draw a series of veils over our relation to the image. The original pictures of his Cuban relatives -- apparently studio shots dating from the '50s -- are themselves stiffly posed representations, blank and emotionless.

In other works, the artist alters photographs of Cuba taken during his first visit there in May this year. To photos of vacant architectural spaces like outdoor pools and underpasses, he makes carefully painted additions, images of spines and hip bones in white acrylic paint, or a rendering of an elaborate pool on a photo of a concrete building site. Goicolea lets the act of mark-making perform the same function as his searching mind, delving into collective memory, retrieving and erasing at the same time.