

Anthony Goicolea

The wunderkind of Photoshop returns to the pen and the brush.
BY STEVEN STERN

Anthony Goicolea is a sharp, serious, and unusually successful 33-year-old artist, practically a generation older—in art-world terms, at least—than the newly minted MFA types lately attracting notice. He chooses his words with precision and assurance, wanting to talk about allegory and narrative ambiguity. And yet meeting him in person is slightly disorienting, owing to the inescapable fact of his appearance: sitting in his narrow first-floor Williamsburg studio, with ruffled hair and a close-fitting striped sweater, he could pass for a 15-year-old boy. Which is, not incidentally, what he has spent much of the past five years doing.

Got up in blond wigs and prep-school blazers, digitally cloned via Photoshop into gangs of adolescent surrogates, Goicolea (goy-ko-LAY-uh) has been the star—and the entire cast—of a series of photographs and

Goicolea prepares for his show at Postmasters by layering images on translucent Mylar sheets.







In *Tree Dwellers* (2004), top, and *Cave* (2005), mysterious bands of nomads and refugees replace Goicolea's earlier antic self-portraits.

videos that hysterically tweak the classic WASP boyhood. His unsupervised youths engage in various forms of mischief: food fights, bed-wetting, kissing, cannibalism. Slick and seamless, these twisted teen psychodramas hover between delirious kitsch and something creepier; imagine an Abercrombie & Fitch catalogue produced by David Lynch. With the release of a coffee-table book, *Anthony Goicolea*, in late 2003, his cheerfully perverse images left the confines of galleries and began making their way into the world at large.

"It's sort of weird," he says, referring to the book, "because it's all from the past. People are being exposed to my work at a larger level, and they're interested, but that's not really what I do anymore." What exactly he does do these days is still being worked out, but it's safe to say that Goicolea is moving on. His debut show at Postmasters Gallery will include an older video piece—multiple red-hooded boys spinning out a fantasy of paranoia and kidnapping—but beyond that the artist's

own image is nowhere to be found.

In fact, Goicolea left the picture several years ago. For a while the backgrounds took over and his Photoshopped scenes were entirely unpopulated. He constructed elaborately unnatural nature photographs with just the barest traces of human habitation—"evidence of some sort of narrative, but in the past tense." In the past year, Goicolea says, "I've been incorporating people back in: figures are in the landscape, but they're swallowed up by it, secondary to their environment." Gradually these distant figures (portrayed by the artist's friends) have developed an identity. They are bands of nomads and refugees fleeing some unspecified disaster, building temporary shelters in the wilderness.

With their impossible tree houses and makeshift shacks, the new images

Drawings, Drips, etc.

suggest a *Lost Boys* fantasy of running away from home. In Goicolea's world, becoming a refugee might possibly be a lot of fun. But this sense of play is undercut by a real-life darkness. He acknowledges that the theme of displacement resonates with his own family history. Growing up in suburban Atlanta as the child of Cuban immigrants, he heard endless stories of a life very different from his own. "Maybe trying to make sense of two sets of ideas and moralities made me more imaginative," he says. "I sort of fused them all together."

The mysterious migratory bands in the photographs have also found their way into a series of drawings, where they take on a more otherworldly form. Goicolea has been drawing and painting since childhood but put both pursuits aside during his detour into digital photography. Now he works on translucent Mylar sheets, layering images on top of one another and creating ghostlike shifts of line. Washes of color painted on the undersurface give the works an opalescent, dreamy glow. They are surprisingly delicate, fluid, and improvisatory. "I began drawing again about three or four years ago," he says. "Somehow it felt rebellious to me. When I started, I would do a drawing a night. I wasn't sure what I was doing when I sat down—and whatever I produced never came close to matching what I was initially thinking. That was a nice thing."

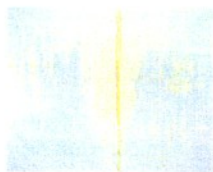
Surprising himself is precisely the goal. "I stopped doing the self-portraits," he says, "because it got to the point that I would have an idea and it was so clear I could execute exactly what was in my head. So why bother? It just becomes a labor-intensive task." Goicolea seems excited by his own migration away from the hot-button imagery that made his reputation and into murkier, more ambiguous territory. "When things start to make sense," he says, "that's when they fall apart." ❧

POSTMASTERS GALLERY, 459 W. 19TH ST. 212-727-3323.
APRIL 9–MAY 7.



ROBYN O'NEIL
AT CLEMENTINE

It's *Man vs. Nature* in O'Neil's world—with Man represented by a bunch of chubby guys in sweat suits and Nature by barren winter landscapes. Also, there are spaceships and ape people. Precise, spare, and unshakably odd, her huge graphite drawings vaguely resemble *New Yorker* cartoons done on an epic scale and without the comfort of captions. O'Neil's deadpan vision earned her a well-received appearance in the last Whitney Biennial. Returning to town for her second New York solo show, the Houston-based artist will be presenting several multipaneled works, including a new drawing based on van Eyck's Ghent Altarpiece. 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-5937. April 21–May 21.



PAT STEIR AT CHEIM & READ

One monumental painting—a massive dazle of blue bracketed by cascading skeins of silver and red—provides the centerpiece, supplemented by a handful of smaller, more muted canvases. All are in Steir's mode of the past decade: abstractions that tilt suggestively toward representational land- and waterscapes, exploring the terrain between Pollock drips and classical Chinese brushwork. It's been more than 40 years since the artist's debut, and, as painting has supposedly died and been resurrected countless times, Steir has kept on her single-minded path, seeking out the limits and the possibilities of her medium. 247 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through May 7.

CARTER MULL
AT RIVINGTON ARMS

The proprietors of the Lower East Side's hippest gallery snapped up their latest find before he even finished grad school. They made a good choice. Mull, a CalArts student, is a photographer of elaborately constructed abstractions—dreamy tableaux of detritus and glitz. What, precisely, they are constructed from is sometimes difficult to determine—there are strands of tinsel and hair, scraps of homemade paper, salt crystals, and a few scattered pieces of costume jewelry. Strange and organic spectacles, they sparkle and swirl and look like images of nature under a microscope or scenes brought back from the edges of consciousness. 102 Rivington St. 646-654-3213. April 7–May 13.



AMY GARTRELL
AT DANIEL REICH

Gartrell isn't really a morbid, swoony teenager, but she plays one in the gallery with remarkable skill. Dried flowers, bits of lace, self-help platitudes, and dead punk-rock antiheroes show up often in her work, which ranges from fluorescent drawings to cloth banners to stained-glass mobiles. A keen eye for graphic design and a tone of genuine sweetness make her tongue-in-cheek Goth musings worth seeing. Ultimately, though, she functions most effectively as a subcultural reporter. The varied projects are all about pinpointing a particular sensibility: overwrought, obsessive, and, despite everything, yearningly romantic. 537-A W. 23rd St. 212-924-4949. April 15–May 20. —Steven Stern

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