

HYBRIDS & INBREDS

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The photography of Anthony Goicolea

story : Meenal Mistry

ANTHONY GOICOLEA NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION. Anyone even passably familiar with his body of work has seen the artist's face umpteen times in the extensive self-portraits of his early photographs, many of which show him in multiple cloned form. Nevertheless, Goicolea, dressed in slim dark jeans, pewter-colored Nike trainers and a thin forest green sweater, politely extends a hand to welcome a journalist to his studio-cum-apartment. "Hi. I'm Anthony," he says.

Of course, it is of some interest to see the artist in the flesh without the technical wonders of Photoshop which usually transform him into a transgressive adolescent. But it's actually not too much of a stretch. Though Goicolea turns thirty-five this year, his full-featured baby-face is still free from both blemish and wrinkle. With his slight build (he's 5'9") and the shock of dark hair that falls over his forehead, the effect can only be described as boyish.

However, Mr. Goicolea's visage is nowhere to be found in his most recent work. For him, the device seems to have run its course. He is working on a series of drawings to be shown at his West coast gallery, Sandroni Rey. He has spent the past year crafting dreamlike

photographic landscapes which have shifted focus to the beauty of nature rather than awkward, homoerotic boyhood antics. But lest you expect soothing pastoral scenes, these also capture the uneasy juxtaposition that is found in his earlier work—a mix of the beautiful and the repulsive, the menacing and the familiar. Even in the drawings and photographic landscapes, the large groups of identically dressed boys still play a role, although now they are anonymous, seen at a distance within the landscape or with their faces obscured by ski masks. "They're usually friends who I enlist and torture," Goicolea says with an apologetic smile.

Goicolea was born the middle child to Cuban immigrants in Marietta, Georgia, a sleepy suburb of Atlanta. He credits childhood boredom as the match that lit the spark of his imagination. It was also at this time that he formed a fascination with boarding school. "I grew up in a strict household, but it was sort of erratically and irrationally strict," he explains. "Something that was okay one day was not okay the next." And so young Anthony dreamt of being sent packing to an institution with unwavering rules and uniforms that abolished any



Anthony Goicolea, *Cherry Island*, 2002, c-print, 27 x 71"
Collection of Laura Lee Brown and Steve Wilson
Image courtesy of Postmasters Gallery New York

hierarchy in terms of dress. "I had these built-in fantasies of what it would be like to have a really regimented lifestyle and how it would be sort of liberating in a way," he continues.

Though much of what is written about Goicolea's work mentions *The Lord of The Flies*, the 1964 book by William Golding about school-boys turning savage actually isn't one of his personal obsessions. "I think I might have mentioned it once and people just latched onto it," he says. These days his inspiration is most likely to come from the scenic beauty around his house in the upstate New York town of Carmel. A quick glance around his Williamsburg studio also reveals a voracious appetite for art history, which he in fact studied before getting his fine arts degrees. The white shelves across from his computer set-up of two Mac G4s are jammed with all manner of books: hefty tomes on the Italian Renaissance, Bert Stern's *Marilyn Monroe: The Complete Last Sitting*, one with the paintings of contemporary artist Elizabeth Peyton, and even more pop volumes like David LaChapelle's *Hotel LaChapelle*. He grabs a book from his worktable. "I just got this book of Schiele landscapes," he says, flipping through. "They're kind

of translations of his figurative work. I'm using some of the ideas of how to section off the land and trees and stuff."

He also has an undeniable spiritual kinship with artist Henry Darger, whose extensive drawings depicting swarms of prepubescent girls were discovered by his landlord after he passed away. "I was just really taken by it," says Goicolea, who first saw Darger's work eight years ago at the American Folk Art Museum. "The repetition of the figures, and dealing with adolescence and uniformity, as well as innocence and violence, all mixed in to this narrative—I realized that we have a lot of overlapping themes in our work." He pauses and cracks a smile, "Hopefully I'm not as crazy as him." Not even close. And with a growing slew of dedicated collectors (Elton John owns twenty of his early photographs) and fans, as well as his recent win of the prestigious BMW-Paris Photo Award, the artist's star is certainly rising. ♣

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