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Joshua White / Sandroni Rey

**TRANSCIENCE:** In Anthony Goicolea's "Related III," glass bottles feature portraits drawn in negative. The artist engages historical forces and the slippery process of remembering.

ART

## Anthony Goicolea exhibition at Sandroni Rey

**Around the Galleries: Jon Brumit, Zachary Royer Scholz and Carter Mull have local showings.**

By Sharon Mizota  
October 31, 2008

History and memory collide in **Anthony Goicolea's** elegant exhibition at Sandroni Rey. Although he's not the first (and surely won't be the last) artist to base a body of work on old family photographs, Goicolea goes beyond homage to engage larger historical forces and the slippery process of remembering.

The photos were taken in Cuba before his parents' immigration to the U.S. after the 1959 revolution. Goicolea, who was born in the U.S., makes fairly faithful drawings of these black-and-white portraits, enlarging them and adding a soft white halo, an act of ancestral beatification.

More ambitious is a diptych that expresses a longing for kinship and continuity even as it acknowledges their impossibility. The right-hand panel depicts a multi-generational

family around a formal dining room table, but the image is a fake: The figures have been copied from separate photos taken at different times. Goicolea photographed this concoction and reversed it in the opposite panel to look like a photographic negative. The fabricated family reunion is a touching attempt to close gaps in time and location, but presenting it in negative renders it alien and heightens the image's artifice. Still, the relationship between positive and negative links the piece back to photography, furthering the drawing's illusion of a single moment in time and reinforcing familial bonds across temporal and geographic distances.

Similar juxtapositions occur in Goicolea's striking black-and-white photo collages. Combining drawn elements with recent photos from his first trip to Cuba, they are hallucinatory fusions of the country's past -- as a puppet state flush with U.S. money and modern development -- and its present under a struggling, embargoed communist regime. A ghostly drawing of an empty swimming pool appears in the middle of the watery ruins of an ocean-side building; in another image, rising tides threaten to obliterate a grandiose modern tunnel. The images mourn the past, but they also record the decay of a modernist vision that shaped Cuba's urban landscape in the 1940s and '50s.

As it does for many exiles, the glamour of pre-revolutionary Cuba looms large in Goicolea's imagined family history. Two graphite and acrylic drawings on Mylar (whose surfaces have the dusty gray look of chalkboards) feature renderings of 1950s luxury hotels. The more recognizable of the two, Hotel Habana Riviera, which is still in operation, is surrounded by drawings of the moon as it appeared on each day of the month preceding Goicolea's birth on Aug. 30, 1971. The last moon appears with a list of birth statistics.

Though admittedly farfetched, this linkage of the personal, the historical and the cosmic locates a reassuring continuity in forces greater than political regimes and families: the solidity of

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architecture, the cycles of the moon. Still, the drawings' chalkboard quality makes these connections seem provisional, as if they could suddenly be wiped away.

Transience is also implied in the show's sole sculptural piece: an outline of the floor plan of Goicolea's parents' house in Havana, bisected by a low concrete wall. Along the top of the wall are clear glass bottles filled with portraits of relatives, drawn in negative. It's a straightforward illustration of a family divided, its members cast adrift like messages in bottles. Yet, unlike the rest of the exhibition, which is allusive and even dreamy, it feels a bit airless. Likewise the obligatory family tree, which, although playfully executed, fails to hold its own among the richer, more inventive drawings and photo collages. After all, the strength of Goicolea's project is not in the particulars of his ancestry but in his use of history, photography and natural systems to construct memories he never had.

This concept of remembering as a creative act is especially poignant for a generation of Cuban exiles in the States whose romanticized memories of pre-Castro Cuba often overlook what was at the time a semi-colonial relationship with the U.S. In a way, Goicolea's images are a similar kind of idealization. Although his intent is more personal than partisan, his work can't help but suggest that, although memory is always fabricated, it is also always political.

**Sandroni Rey**, 2762 S. La Cienega Blvd., L.A. (310) 280-0111, through Nov. 15. Closed Sundays and Mondays. [www.sandronirey.com](http://www.sandronirey.com).

#### **This ear of corn captures the eye**

Titled "Monsanto's Workshop (Kernel Square Wave)," **Jon Brumit's** installation at Fringe takes aim at the exploits of the agri-tech corporation -- infamous for patenting corn genes -- by turning the gallery's basement into a genetic engineering lab gone haywire. The highlight is a room-size ear of corn made of plastic grocery bags that seems to breathe, Frankenstein-like, as it's continually pumped full of air by an electric fan. It's a funny, saggy ensemble reminiscent of Claes Oldenburg's giant soft sculptures, but it's also an ingenious use of the bags, which mimic plump kernels while also alluding to waste and toxicity.

Elsewhere in the dimly lighted lair, a plastic corn cob fitted with knobs and a solar panel triggers a pulsing alarm whenever a viewer walks past, creating an urgent counterpoint to the stuttering buzz of a TV on the fritz in the back of the room. The faulty appliance rests on a small worktable amid signs of an unceremonious departure: scattered pieces of plastic corn, wires, a hot glue gun and a pair of clip lamps that repeatedly flash above a mysterious, moldy-looking piece of paper. The overall effect is that of a messy, slapdash experiment conducted by an amateur -- a sharp indictment of Monsanto's hubristic tinkering with Mother Nature. Although artworks that offer such scathing critiques often take themselves too seriously, Brumit's installation strikes just the right balance between horror and humor to get his point across.

**Fringe Exhibitions**, 504 Chung King Court, L.A. (213) 613-0160, through Nov. 8. Closed Sunday through Wednesday. [www.fringexhibitions.com](http://www.fringexhibitions.com).

#### **Minimalism and more from Scholz**

Like fellow Bay Area artist Mitzi Pederson, **Zachary Royer Scholz** uses everyday materials such as plywood, Plexiglas and tape to create lyrical, abstract sculptures that are charming in their simplicity and redolent of art history, particularly Minimalism. In his show at David Salow, a piece of mirrored Plexiglas bent into an arc and held in place with three perfectly spaced strands of masking tape feels like a low-rent Dan Graham, and a narrow rectangle of plywood, painted neon green on one side, casts a faint glow leaning against a wall, suggesting an unplugged Dan Flavin.

Yet, unlike Pederson, whose materials are usually off the shelf, Scholz also uses found objects that show the wear and tear of previous lives. Scuffed wooden drawers form a Donald Judd-like cube, while patches of worn sofa upholstery are pieced together to make an oversized mutant pillow. Fortunately, the emotional and historical implications of these aged materials never get in the way of the artist's formal intentions: Although their surfaces may be worn, the sculptures are far from abject.

However, Scholz is most ingenious when he ventures outside the clean lines of the Minimalist pantheon. A series of 12 poster-size digital prints depicts layered "drawings" made by stacking the patterned insides of security envelopes. The various grids and crosshatchings, framed within the rounded corners of the envelopes' address windows, create seemingly endless permutations of familiar shapes and colors. They also evoke geometric abstraction and the playful, streamlined aesthetic of 1950s graphic design. Like much of Scholz's work, they are quite marvelous in their ability to draw our attention to the aesthetic riches that surround us daily.

**David Salow**, 977 N. Hill St., L.A., (213) 620-0240, through Nov. 8. Closed Sunday and Monday. [www.davidsalow.com](http://www.davidsalow.com).

#### **Mull's painterly photo process**

A particularly striking image recurs throughout one of the bound books in **Carter Mull's** exhibition at Marc Foxx. It's a black-and-white portrait of a man holding a 35mm camera so that the circles of the lens and the flashbulb form an uneven pair of mechanical eyes. It seems to be a touchstone image for the Los Angeles artist, who uses the camera -- or rather, the photographic process -- more like a painter than a photojournalist.