

# POSTMASTERS

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## ARTFORUM

DECEMBER 2009

### Anthony Goicolea

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The adolescent male fantasies and youth-obsessed sensuality that imbue much of Anthony Goicolea's art have often made his work seem to add up to little more than eye candy. The 2001–2002 "Detention" series, for example, comprises digitally manipulated photographs in which schoolboy clones of the artist pose in various fanciful settings. This show encouraged a new look at his work, revealing a more serious side to his biography-driven practice.

Titled "Once Removed," the exhibition was—like two gallery presentations earlier this year in London and Los Angeles, and a show in spring at Denver's Museum of Contemporary Art—a product of Goicolea's first trip to Havana, where his parents and grandparents once lived. The body of work created after this 2008 visit includes drawings of old family photographs and pictures taken during his stay, as well as a family tree and other more personal investigations. At Postmasters, Goicolea expanded upon the metaphoric and heavily nostalgic process of reconstruction and reclamation at play in those pieces.

For the three-panel painting *Night Sitting* (all works 2009), Goicolea worked from photographs to memorialize four generations of his family at various ages. His relatives are cast as glamorous figures, an effect

compounded by the presence in the picture of several high-powered lamps of the kind used on film sets, which illuminate the scene and add a level of theatricality to the piece. The knowingness in the construction of the fantasy these lights imply is of a kind almost entirely absent from the artist's earlier output. In other pieces, however, he risks being too obvious (as with the missing-person portraits of his relatives tacked to telephone poles and trees in 2008's "Related" series) in creating allegories for a sense of dislocation and damage. For instance, in the center of the gallery was *Transplant (Terrace Garden)* an island of small trees, several of which were borrowed from Goicolea's father's home in southern Florida. Most were held upright with splints, conveying wear and tear from their journey; one was repaired more forcefully with duct tape.

Cement blocks appeared throughout the show, notably under a number of carnivalesque portrait busts of family members. They feature, too, in *Foundation*, a large photograph of an abandoned construction site under a glorious grove of banyan trees, which pointed up the smart dialectic between landscape and personal history that energized much of the show. *Sitio* portrays a similar view, this time with the scene of an excavation—or a burial?—surrounded by palm trees and under an impossibly ominous sky.

The blocks were present in one further notable work, a piece that suggests a newfound comfort with ambiguity, as well as Goicolea's self-constructed resolve in the face of a disrupted family history. Installed in the back room, *Displacement* was projected from within a scale model of the artist's family home in Cuba. This moody three-



View of "Anthony Goicolea," 2009. From left: *Land Marked*, 2009; *Transplant (Terrace Garden)*, 2009; *Night Sitting*, 2009.

minute-long video, shot at night with an infrared camera, shows the artist carefully pitching cement blocks out of a tiny boat, one by one, as if they were possessions too heavy for a long journey. The symbolism was clear, but the high-pitched sound track of sirens that continually filled the room and spilled out into the rest of the space nagged at other interpretations and issues. One hopes the artist will shed some of his too-blatant references and imagery and refine the themes of his recent works before his first—and surely nearing—midcareer retrospective.

—Lauren O'Neill-Butler