

DAVID COHEN, Editor

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ANTHONY GOICOLEA: Almost Safe

Postmasters Gallery  
459 W 19 Street  
New York City  
212 727 3323

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By GREG LINDQUIST



*North Bank* 2007

black and white photograph mounted on aluminum and laminated with non-glare Plexiglas  
72 x 94 inches  
edition of 9

Anthony Goicolea's photographs are fantastical constructions of derelict landscapes. His large-scale black and white photographs—they measure up to eight feet wide—fill the front room at Postmaster, depicting traces of man's interaction with the natural environment in a surreal manner. Goicolea's photographs are at once meditative and filled with malaise, atmospheric and materially present.

Although they can recall the stillness of Ansel Adams photographs of the American landscape, they are less documents than constructions, as they have been worked in Photoshop. Goicolea culls elements of urban decay, unusual occurrences and dramatic atmosphere, primarily from European locations. From foreground to background, soft edges of objects overlap sharper edges. By the way they digitally reassembling space, an irregular depth of field is created. Goicolea's process recalls digital matte painting-- a technique in contemporary cinema used to create virtual environments-- yet mounted on aluminum and laminated with matte Plexiglass, these photographs as objects are convincingly material.

These landscapes are largely absent of the human figure, for which he is most known as a photographer. In previous work, meticulous digital montage self-portraits self-consciously addressed issues of male adolescence, sexuality and Catholicism. The new work follows a steady progression away from self-portraiture into environment while additionally working with drawing and painting.

Yet the human figure does appear in less overt ways in the series of ten diptych portraits in the rear gallery. A photographic negative, hand-painted on mylar, is digitally reversed to produce a positive image. These ten daguerreotype-like portraits of elderly men and women, Goicolea imagines, are the inhabitants of the worlds in the front room. In *Deconstruction* (all works 2007), figures implausibly hang from hammocks inside of a dilapidated façade-less building, nestled behind a foreground of rubble. In *Low Tide*, presumably it is the character of Dina (a character who appears in the diptych portrait series) sitting at a park bench at the foot of an ocean rock formation, across which tramlines dangle.

Like Goicolea's previous work, these photographs have a tendency towards meticulous detail-- in *North Bank*, for instance, hidden on the horizon between the buildings are minute suburban and industrial buildings neatly placed in a grid pattern. A lone chair in the foreground of *Sky Lift* prods one to look closer and discover, amid the haze, silhouettes of figures walking single file across the background. These displaced details evoke the surreality in the work. But he subtly avoids absurdity and overstatement.



Smoke Stack 2007

black and white photograph mounted on aluminum and laminated with non-glare Plexiglas  
55 x 60 inches  
edition of 9

Goicolea's treatment of sky unifies an ominous tone in the work. Open, airy, and often polluted, it emotes a brooding and foreboding mood. These expressive skies bear a strong resemblance to a similar mood in the paintings of David Caspar Friedrich, Albert Bierstadt and Thomas Cole. Most impressive are the vertically wavering cloud forms in *North Bank*, a nearly eight foot wide photograph, whose blurry and blended quality suggests further feathering and enhancement in Photoshop. The wispy clouds contrast with the dour, anonymous industrial architecture, in front of which an iced irrigation pond extends. *Smoke Stack* describes a heavily polluted sky where swirling, heavy plumes of smoke hang over a packed architectural panorama.

The most surprising thing about Goicolea's current body of landscape photographs is their black and white format. Technically, this may allow a more seamless assembly of these disparate elements, as no painstaking color correction is necessary. However, the lack of chroma gives an old-fashioned feeling to these scenes. And while Goicolea's contemporary subjects foretell a bleak future, his photographs anachronistically recollect a past quickly being forgotten.