

ART

NARCISSUS ENTERS THE APOCALYPSE

Anthony Goicolea earned a legion of fans and collectors for his homoerotic photo montages of adolescent boys at play. When he switched to photographing grim landscapes and family narratives, not everyone went along

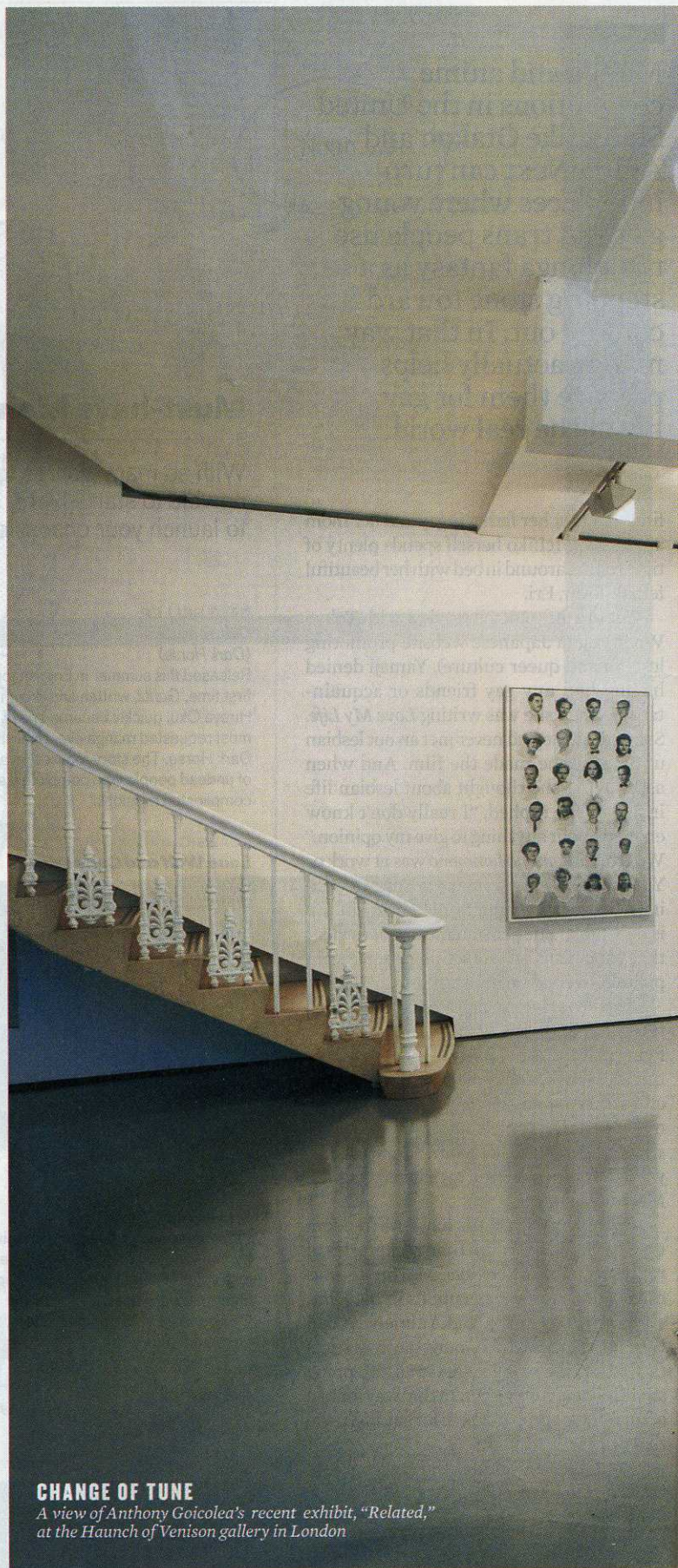
BY KYLE BENTLEY

IF EVERY FICTION BEGINS IN TRUTH, artist-photographer Anthony Goicolea's reality is his appearance. Goicolea, 37, first made his mark posing for his own photographs as young boys (and occasionally girls) behaving badly in various settings. The kids in his work would masturbate in a classroom, for instance, or one would spit in another's mouth or urinate on one another in a bathtub. The photographs looked as polished as an advertising campaign—Goicolea actually once made a 30-minute film for Thom Browne's spring 2007 collection—but ambiguous enough to pass for art. They hit all the high notes—they were easy to look at, readily digestible, and appealed to our indulgence for budding sexuality and gender. Elton John bought 20 pieces.

But sometime around 2002 all that stopped. In one last flourish of self-absorption, the Cuban-American artist shot the "water series," in which he masqueraded as boys who appear to be at once drowning and in rapture. They must not have survived the water, because Goicolea immediately began taking landscape photographs instead. At first his new pieces were populated only by animals, though young men—not Goicolea—eventually crept back in, albeit dwarfed by their natural surroundings. Those images gave way by 2007, for the most part, to black-and-white industrial hallucinations dominated by smokestacks and power lines. Narcissus' pool had become slick with oil.

New Yorker critic Vince Aletti, a fan of the artist's multiple-Goicolea tableaux, says he wasn't sure how to relate to the apocalyptic photos. "I don't remember them that well," he says. "They don't cut very vividly to mind—and I missed the figures."

It's an opinion duly noted by the artist. "I've definitely had some collectors lose interest along the way because of the direction the work has gone," Goicolea says by phone from London, while working on his →



CHANGE OF TUNE

A view of Anthony Goicolea's recent exhibit, "Related," at the Haunch of Venison gallery in London.





THE PAST IS FUTURE

(From top) Goicolea uses old photographs of his family in his *Father I* Diptych, 2008; *Day for Night*, 2008

recent show at the Haunch of Venison gallery. "And then I've picked up others. I think that's normal and to be expected anytime you change your work."

In his latest creations, on display at Los Angeles's Sandroni Rey starting October 18, his old work comes close to making a reappearance. For these, Goicolea has worked old photographs of his family in Cuba through a variety of mediums, such as rendering them in drawings and paintings or Photoshopping different images together, to create an image of his own history, a process the artist calls "a nice cyclical return to something that's a bit more personal."

The result of all his artistic manifestations is ultimately more interesting than any one piece in the artist's portfolio. In his strict adherence to story line, Goicolea, whose early work was compared with that of photographer Cindy Sherman, has produced a body of work that is both distinct and inherently connected. Each photograph leads into the next, creating an identity as seamless as each computer-perfected composition.

Some of his admirers can see the consistency from hypersexualized private school boys smoking cigarettes to stark black-and-white images of gondolas against a cloudy sky. "I feel fortunate that there's a core group of people who have followed it," Goicolea says of his evolution as an artist. Elton John, he adds, is one of them. ♣