

Cinematic psychology and Memento Mori at Catharine Clark Gallery

May 20, 5:04 PM · Marisa Nakasone - SF Art Examiner



[Carlos and Jason Sanchez's large-scale](#), color saturated photographs evoke the enigmatic cinematic narratives of Jeff Wall while tying their series together with unsettling atmospheric elements. In *8 Years Old* (2003), a young boy stares sullenly as he sits in what appears to be a typical middle-class child's bedroom--complete with a hotwheels track, a globe, an aquarium, and various space-themed furnishings. The lurid coloration of this photograph however, imbues the image with a sense of dread or camp. Why is the door left open? Why does the boy sit sullenly/expectantly with his knees drawn close to his chest?

(Pictured above: Carlos and Jason Sanchez, *8 Years Old*, 2003)



Catharine Clark Gallery cites the stylized work of Stanley Kubrick and Paul Thomas Anderson to describe the way the Sanchez brothers recruit formal elements to create psychological drama. *The Baptism* (2003) incorporates a striking chiaroscuro pattern and overhead lighting to create dark shadows--casting the adults and the religious statuette in the background in a menacing light. Further still, upon closer examination one realizes that this is no typical baptism ceremony as the holy water turns into blood when it touches the infant's head. One is unsure which party depicted in this image (the parents, the symbols of religious institution, the infant) harbors ill will, but it is certain that something sinister is about to ensue after the moment captured in this

photograph. Cinematic/narrative cliches and patterns factor into our understanding of these images--how do we use our visual inventory of popular images to fill in the blanks?

The Baptism (2003).

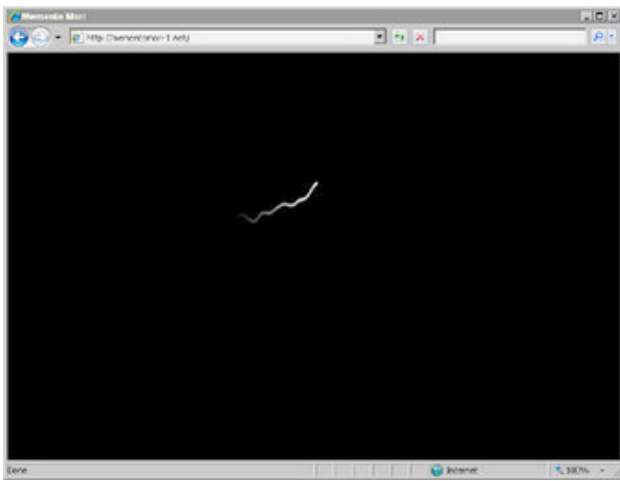


The Missuse of Youth, one of the more overtly political pieces in this show, combine our collective visions of war, Iraq, war journalism, and homosocial/homoeroticism to create a poignant and tragic statement about the distance between the individual lives of soldiers and the abstraction/dehumanization of these lives by government policy, mass media, Hollywood, et. al. While one may instinctively read this image as the cliched "last words" scene before a fellow soldier dies from a fatal wound (violins swelling, a moment of epiphany); at second glance, their embrace is a bit more enigmatic--is it an embrace of sorrow? of attraction? or are they involved in a scuffle? I am reminded of a poem by Wilfred Owen entitled *Dulce et decorum est, pro patria mori*.



The Sanchez brothers' mastery of atmosphere and lighting; and impeccable attention to detail are particularly evident in *After the Fire* (2005). Despite the absence of human subjects in this piece, the inclusion of various home furnishings (framed pictures on the wall, chairs, chests, coffee table) act as indices of human presence. One can see from the peeling, blackened wall-paper that the fire engulfed the room but may have been put out before consuming the entire structure. One wonders then, what happened to the occupants; who were they?

After the Fire (2005).



Ken Goldberg, *Mementomori*

The multimedia installation *Mementomori*, by Ken Goldberg (artist, engineering professor, and organizer of the UC Berkeley Center for Technology and Culture) channels the seismic movement of the Hayward Fault to inform the pattern of an animation on the web:

He engages the earth as a living medium by working with the minute movements of the Hayward Fault as they are detected by a seismograph. In other words, Goldberg created a program that converts the motion of the fault into digital signals that are transmitted continuously and in live time via the internet to a minimalist display—viewable either on a computer monitor or as a projection. In response to the frenzy of the internet, this meditative work addresses issues of chance, human fragility, and geological endurance.

[Catharine Clark Gallery](#)

The theme of *Memento mori*, or a reminder of one's mortality, runs consistently through all the works in the show. Photography and now the internet are both mediums through which we attempt to immortalize oneself--and yet, in the scenes of impending doom depicted by the Sanchez brothers and the sense of incipient natural disaster in Goldberg's piece, we are reminded of human frailty. Indeed, as Susan Sontag notes in her treatise, *On Photography*, "all photographs are *memento mori*, to take a photograph is to participate in another person (or another thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability."

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Author



Marisa Nakasone is an Examiner from San Francisco. You can see Marisa's articles at: "<http://www.Examiner.com/x-533-SF-Art-Examiner>"