

Rewind



Carlos and Jason Sanchez
◀◀ CHRISTOPHER CUTTS GALLERY, TORONTO



CARLOS AND JASON SANCHEZ *Principles* 2002 C-print
1.02 x 1.09 m

The large-scale photographs in the Sanchez brothers' first Toronto solo show function as short films. Made up of only one frame, each work projects onto the two-dimensional plane vivid narratives using the photographic media of light, *mise en scène* and character. These films do not pander to their audience in the manner of Hollywood cinema. They do not hold viewers' hands and lead them towards a predetermined understanding. "We encourage people who look at our photographs to construct their own stories," the artists say. While Hollywood continues to offer longer and longer epics, stuffed full of beginnings and endings, the Sanchez brothers condense plot into its most salient moment and present it with cinematic clarity.

This is not a new idea. Gregory Crewdson has been thieving techniques, tools and aesthetics from Hollywood for years, and his big-budget, dramatically lit, carefully staged photographic productions are an obvious point of departure for the younger Sanchez brothers. A number of other contemporary artist photographers, including Cindy Sherman and Charlie White, have been working in this same territory, located somewhere between genre or history painting and film directing. These artists stage for the camera captivating, pregnant moments that provide various entry

points from which viewers can decode and flesh out complete narratives lying in wait just below the surface of the photograph.

While the methods are not new, the Sanchez brothers plant the seeds of daring stories never before told. The works in this show explore the psychological states of children. They reject the notion of the pure innocence of childhood and instead present the dark, disturbing, violent and often inappropriate desires of their youthful protagonists. With the melancholy and frustration of a Radiohead song, the Sanchez brothers toss out morality entirely and use images of drowning girls, overflowing kitchens, gruesome piñatas and bloody baptisms to depict a series of adolescent boys and girls dealing with the anxieties, contradictions, depressions and confusions that pollute childhood.

Though violence appears in some images, the most disturbing works are more subtle. Their complexity arises from the boundaries of social mores that they tread across with impunity. *Principles* depicts a rogue named Mr. Hal Vincent and a teenage girl. A name plaque on the man's desk identifies him as a school principal, likely a private school given his mahogany desk, wood-paneled walls and traditional office accoutrements. The girl, her school uniform in the initial stages of *déshabillé*, stands behind his chair, massaging his head and shoulders as he smokes a cigar. A half-finished bottle of whisky stands nearby on the desk. The inappropriateness of the situation is reinvented when we realize that the fantasy is not Mr. Vincent's; we are seeing the girl's desire. The Sanchez brothers make it manifest. They show what their young protagonists imagine and focus on conflicted and disconcerting adolescent desires.

There is courage in their project. The artists' willingness to be critical of youth, to refocus blame for the ills of society onto children and away from adults (who are nevertheless generally painted as corrupting forces), puts their work into a genre all its own. It also makes viewers wonder what disturbing events might have happened in these young artists' lives to enable them to view the world from such a disquieting angle. RANDY GLADMAN