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Snap to attention

The young girl sits on the pretty bedspread of her wrought-iron bed, studying a note in her right hand. But follow the line of her gaze. She's using the note as a pretext to look away from the man confronting her in this nice attic room.

Even without knowing the image by its title, *The Abduction* (2004), this large-scale photo by Carlos and Jason Sanchez at Christopher Cutts Gallery is quietly creepy and visually spectacular, like a gigantic movie still.

The title hammers home only one possible outcome: The girl is wary of

Twentysomething Sanchez brothers tickle our imaginations with staged photography
Hardworking Quebec-based duo is taking the art world by storm, *writes Peter Goddard*

the man yet unafraid in a way a child might be with someone she is close to. She knows he wants her to look at him, that he's going to try to convince her of something.

Unsettling, unspoken nightmares of childhood have preoccupied the Laval, Que.-based Sanchez brothers because these thoughts are still likely fresh in their imaginations. Jason is 23, Carlos 28.

"Although we had an extremely normal childhood," says Carlos. "And we like working with idea of the innocence of childhood. It's just that I don't like looking at art if it doesn't have an edge."

The sullen boy in the bedroom in *8 Years Old* (2003) — an earlier image included in the Cutts show — may not represent any one particular Sanchez. But the boy is certainly Ev-

ery Kid, feeling oppressed in the room filled with all his wonderful, underused toys. With his arms folded around his knees, he looks ready to bolt and jump out the window.

He has good reason. The room itself looks like it's gone nuclear and the brimming fish tank glows radioactively.

Yet with only four images, the current Cutts exhibition gives a good

idea of newfound subtlety in the Sanchez imaginations. "There's a refinement and a maturity in our work now," says Jason.

"We learned we don't want to give away too much to be successful. That's come from working this way for years. Less is more."

A reflection of this new economy

► Please see **Sanchez, G9**

Brothers a DIY outfit

► Sanchez From G1

can be found in the austere *A Motive for Change* (2004), where a lone figure waits by the side of a road plunging through dense bush. Slumped and immobile, the figure could be a pile of rags. But isn't he/it holding something? What? One would have second thoughts about letting this wanderer into the passenger seat.

The Sanchez brothers have the Canadian art world buzzing, having shown recently in Europe, New York and Miami. Their work is being collected by the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

More established photographers, such as American Gregory Crewdson and Vancouver's Jeff Wall, have been working much the same turf — elaborately staged, highly detailed tableaux immobiles — for years now.

Crewdson's example put the brothers "in tune with production design and lighting schemes," admits Jason. "But his work method is very cinematic. His images are too polished for me." Carlos calls Crewdson "too Hollywood."

The brothers don't exactly finish each other's sentences, but it's impossible to find any disagreement between them. Carlos is more inclined to deal with the politics and finances of the art world. Jason prefers hands-on work, like set decoration.

Says Jason: "We do everything ourselves. We do the set decoration, we choose the colours, the props, everything. You've got to feel your image. We have to be 100 per cent a part of it."

The Abduction, like most of their other images, took months of preparation. "We work very meticulously and slowly," Jason explains.

This doesn't take into account the six months or so an idea has been gestating in their heads. "Initially one of us will have a vague idea," says Carlos. "But at the end, we don't really remember whose idea it really is. We've added so many layers along the way."



Carlos and Jason Sanchez work on setting up *Abduction*.

"With *The Abduction*," says Jason, "I had the initial idea of doing something about kidnapping, the idea of kidnapping, the emotion of it. . . . We wanted to create an image where you didn't really know what was happening. We knew there'd be a tension between the (individuals in the picture). They'd be uncomfortable with each other."

The brothers' collaboration began in 2001 while Carlos was studying photography at Concordia University.

"At first, I was doing a lot of black-and-white photography like Robert Frank," says Carlos. "Then I was doing the same thing but in colour. Either way, I got fed up with looking for something to shoot, you know, looking for that 'decisive moment' (Henri Cartier-Bresson's term). I was more interested in *making* the decisive moment."

Needing a cast for his early set shots that usually had cool tough-guy themes — directors David Lynch and Stanley Kubrick are influences — Carlos involved Jason in the photo sessions. But Jason started feeling uncomfortable as an actor, "being in front of the camera," as he says. "It was then we started collaborating. We think along the same lines. We have the same vision."

Christian imagery is evident in earlier work. "Our grandparents were very religious, and we attended a Catholic church although not in a very regimented way," says Jason. "I think our interest in this has been satisfied for now."

Maybe so. But their breakthrough came with *Easter Party* (2003), where a typical suburban Canadian family cheers on a teenage boy as he whacks a piñata, only to have real-looking blood flood out of the mangled fake lamb.

"With *Easter Party*, it was the first time we built a set of that size," says Jason. "We met with a production designer, worked with a special effects crew to get the piñata to bleed. It was three months' work."

"Yes, our techniques are very cinematic. Each production is cinematic, lighting, wardrobe, even make-up sometimes. The work ethic is like that of the cinema."

Jason says the brothers were initially interested in what happens before and after the shutter is pressed, but that they are now focused on "the very moment in the picture."

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