

# MAGAZINE

## The Cliffhangers: Carlos and Jason Sanchez

By [Lisa Hunter](#) on March 12, 2013

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Carlos and Jason Sanchez, *The Everyday* (2009), chromogenic colour print, 57" x 120"

The Sanchez Brothers have the storytelling instincts of a Hollywood director. Their carefully staged photographs are almost like movie stills, full of dramatic tension: a bomb explodes on a city street; in a motel room, a menacing masked man prepares to do who-knows-what. What's going to happen next? The Sanchez Brothers never give you the complete story. With them, it's one thrilling cliffhanger after another.

Ambitious young artists are often told: "Be so good that people can't ignore you." That's what Carlos and Jason Sanchez did, exploding like supernovas onto the Canadian art scene this past decade, while still in their twenties. Their large-scale photographs are already in major museums; right now, their dramatic *Misuse of Youth* is included in the National Gallery's new show *Clash: Conflict and its Consequences*.

The brothers "co-direct" their elaborately staged images, almost as if they were making a movie. But as their book, *The Moment of Rupture*, points out, movies are about montage—putting together multiple images to create connections. The Sanchez Brothers only show you the most interesting moment of the "story".

On the surface, their work seems similar to that of Gregory Crewdson, who also creates huge, painstakingly art-directed photographs. But their sensibility—and their choice of which moment to show you—is quite different. Crewdson's photographs feel cinematic; they have an artificiality that makes you feel like you're watching a movie. The Sanchez Brothers blur the line between truth and fiction. Some of their most powerful images are the ones that feel almost like photojournalism.

In *Rescue Effort*, for instance, we see a man being dug out of a mudslide. Is he alive? Is he dead? Actually, he's an actor breathing through an air tube. But the image is so convincing that it could be the cover of a news magazine. If you didn't know they were artists, you'd think the Sanchez Brothers were the luckiest photojournalists alive.

Sometimes, though, the images that seem quiet or innocent are even more unsettling. *The Hurried Child* shows a beautiful, smiling little girl at a beauty pageant. But in a post-JonBenét Ramsey world, we can't help worrying about the girl—especially if we see *The Hurried Child* at the same time as *Abduction*. In the latter photo, a man offers a young girl a present in what seems to be her bedroom. Something feels slightly creepy about the scene, even before we see the title. The man is looking at the girl a little too intently, and the girl doesn't look happy to be getting a present. The horror of the scene builds slowly.

I'm impressed by the way the Sanchez Brothers are able to manipulate our emotions. We all see so many photographs in our modern lives—probably hundreds every day. Our brains have learned how to parse them, how to tell the real from the fake. We know instinctively that a glossy, airbrushed image is probably trying to tell us something. We quickly suspect that an Internet hoax looks just a little too Photoshopped. We're tough customers.

Carlos and Jason Sanchez have figured out how to get past our it's-only-a-movie cynicism to give us something surprising. In the tradition of the best Hollywood moguls, they know how to leave us wanting more.