

Art in America

February 2008

NEW YORK AND MONTREAL

Carlos & Jason Sanchez at Caren Golden and Parisian Laundry

The Montreal-based brothers Carlos and Jason Sanchez are directors as much as they are photographers. Like fellow Canadian Jeff Wall and other photo-based artists who construct fictional scenes for the camera (Gregory Crewdson, Katy Grannan and Angela Strassheim, to name just a few), the Sanchez brothers' elaborately stage their photographs, which are large in scale, and highly cinematic. The images are fraught with unease: the world as conjured by the Sanchez brothers is not a safe place.

Rescue Effort (2006), one of their better-known images, is a tightly cropped view of a man being pulled from the mud, presumably after some natural disaster. It is unclear exactly what has happened, or whether the rescue effort has succeeded. None of the participants' faces are visible, and the image brings to mind many other pictures of natural disasters and rescue attempts from newspapers and television. The works in these two shows, in fact, seemed



Carlos and Jason Sanchez: *Rescue Effort*, 2006, inkjet print, 42 by 74 inches; at Caren Golden.

to encapsulate the fears and anxieties threading through stories in the daily news. Some images suggest specific worries—abduction, natural disaster, terrorism—while others are more primal. In *Natural Selection* (2005), two dogs, teeth bared, prepare to attack a third, whose ears are flattened in fear. At 24 by 96 inches, the image is wide but tightly cropped; there's no breathing room, and the unvarnished terror it suggests sets the tone for other photographs whose content may be more ambiguous.

The vulnerable child was a theme in evidence in both Montreal and New York. In one 2004 image on view in Montreal, a girl sits on a bed, staring at a card in her hand, while a man kneels on the floor in front of her. The title, *Abduction*, puts a menacing spin on the scene. The portrait *John Mark Karr* (2007), on view in New York, appears to be a picture of an ordinary

man gazing with dissatisfaction at his own reflection, though in the company of the Sanchez brothers' other photographs, he seems creepy enough—even before it registers that Karr is the man who confessed (falsely) to murdering JonBenet Ramsey.

But if the tension of these slyly constructed narratives pulls viewers in, it's the photographers' skilled compositions and effective use of color that hold them. The shadowy greens and grays of the morgue in *Identification* (2007), for instance, describe an emotional space that separates the grief-stricken couple from the employee busily going about her paperwork in the brightly lit office behind them. It's a scene that usually takes place out of public view, when the spectators have all gone home. In imagining so richly these moments on either side of disaster, the Sanchez brothers produce unnerving meditations for our anxious age.

—Jean Dykstra