

Carlos and Jason Sanchez: The Cry

Maison des arts de Laval, 24 September to 24 November 2008

Vincent Lavoie

Volume 52, Number 212, Supplement, Fall–October 2008

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/62095ac>

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Publisher(s)

La Société La Vie des Arts

ISSN

0042-5435 (print)

1923-3183 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Lavoie, V. (2008). Carlos and Jason Sanchez: The Cry / Maison des arts de Laval, 24 September to 24 November 2008. *Vie des Arts*, 52(212), 10–11.

THE WORKS OF BROTHERS CARLOS AND JASON SANCHEZ ARE PERFORMANCES CHARACTERIZED BY RIGOROUS ORGANIZATION OF EVERY ELEMENT. AS SUCH, THEY FOLLOW BASIC PRINCIPLES OF STAGECRAFT AND BEAR WITNESS TO HISTORIC LINKS BETWEEN PHOTOGRAPHY AND DRAMA.



LAVAL

CARLOS AND JASON SANCHEZ

THE CRY

Vincent Lavoie

Translation: Catherine Browne

To create their works, the Sanchez brothers use skills and methods associated with stage performances or film production: they use props, design sets, call on extras (essentially friends and family), cast roles, etc. In some cases, months are required to produce a single image. The Sanchez's works are the final stage of a patient and painstaking creative process involving forms of knowledge that are not exclusively photographic. While the finality of their work is photographic, the process is not.

Natural Selection, 2005
Inkjet print
61 x 243 cm
Courtesy: artists and Caren Golden Fine Art, New York

AUTHENTIC SCENE OR SIMULACRUM?

The Sanchez *œuvre*, photographic in its destination and theatrical in its inception, embodies the mix of forms of artistic knowledge. In this sense, it resembles fashion photography (a theatrical genre if ever there was one), even as it uses themes akin to those of press photography (accidents, emergency interventions, contests) or amateur photography (parties, family rituals) – and this despite the fact that these photographic practices are dedicated to promptness and the cult of the instant. Does this mean that the artistic process, governed by a slow meticulousness, is in contradiction with the artists' preferred themes? In a way, yes. But

this contradiction is a productive one and is what makes the work interesting. In the first place, it dispels the illusion that event-based images are the product of totally spontaneous actions. Photojournalism is regulated by codes of ethics, editorial intentions, visual stereotypes, and market forces; family photography is governed by rituals and myths of permanence and happiness. And, especially, the works of the Sanchez brothers cultivate antagonisms by producing fictions based on known or credible events or situations.

In the art of the Sanchez brothers, the narrative potentialities of representation are not associated exclusively with one or two studied arrangements on the part of the artists. The works' narrative dimension, i.e. the

way they produce or revive stories (whether journalistic, media, private or family), often derives from the subject and situation that are being represented. This is the case with *John* (2002), a taxidermist photographed in his workshop surrounded by a bric-à-brac of instruments, products, props and samples related to his trade. A rather disorderly inventory establishes an incomprehensible syntax rather similar to the one in *The Gatberer* (2004), a work presenting a character surrounded by a perfectly heterogeneous mass of objects, one that induces a response close to asphyxia in the viewer. For anyone ignorant of the mysteries of taxidermy, this gathering of things appears quite opaque. The principle ensuring the coherence of the paraphernalia is not apparent. However, the opacity does provide a few glimmers of light that may enable us to experience fragments of narrative and parts of sentences spewed out by the half-beast with the toothless mouth. Screaming behind the taxidermist's back, the hairy creature imposes itself as a key actor in a scene that turns out to be less disjointed than it looked. For the enraged chimera, along with the snowy owl – Quebec's emblem, printed on John's sweatshirt – and the Number 67 model squirrel at the other end of the diagonal, form a strange bestiary that gives the work an unexpected heraldic dimension. In fact, the work presents itself as an allegory of fixedness symbolized here by operations of embalming, reproduction and moulding.

ALLEGORY OF FIXEDNESS

Let us take another look at the beast whose cry, doubly and perpetually smothered by naturalization and photographic capture, leads to an *aestheticized* observation. On this issue, it may be relevant to reread G.E. Lessing (1729-1781) who, in an analysis of the Laocoon – a sculptural group dating from the 2nd century BC – advises restraint in the expression of passions. “When, for instance, Laocoon sighs, imagination can hear him cry; but if he cries, imagination can neither mount a step higher, nor fall a step lower, without seeing him in



Rescue Effort, 2006
Inkjet print
106 x 188 cm
Courtesy: artists and Caren Golden
Fine Art, New York

a more endurable, and therefore less interesting, condition.”¹ In other words, if imagination is to have a free rein, emotion must be presented with reserve and economy. This applies to the visual arts which, unlike drama where narrative authorizes transient outpourings, imply the choice of a “pregnant moment” – an instant that leads us to believe the worst without ever showing it explicitly. *Imagining drama rather than representing it*: such is Lessing's proposition, leading to the thought that ultimate or “extreme” violence, to use a fashionable term,² is found not so much in images as in ourselves. Quintessentially an art of interruption, photography, while released from the tutelage of the “decisive instant”,³ has still never really conformed to Lessing's precepts. And this is especially true of press photography, chief purveyor of 20th-century representations of violence. This is what the work of the Sanchez brothers is telling us, either allusively through the use of statements on exacerbating the passions (*Natural Selection*, 2005) or

concealing them (*Masked*, 2007), or, more explicitly, through the choice of subjects that attract high media coverage. □

¹ G.E. Lessing, *Laocoon*, tr. by Ellen Frothingham, Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1874, p. 17.

² See Paul Ardenne, *Extrême. Esthétiques de la limite dépassée*, Paris, Flammarion, 2006.

³ See Henri Cartier-Bresson, *Images à la sauvette*, Paris, Verge, 1952, reprinted in *Cahiers de la photographie*, Paris, Association de la critique d'art contemporaine, No. 18, 1985, p. 20.

EXPOSITION

CARLOS AND JASON SANCHEZ
Photographs

Maison des arts de Laval
1593 boulevard de la Concorde
Laval

24 September to 24 November 2008