CARLOS AND JASON
SANCHO

CARLOS and Jason Sanchez have achieved an enviable reputation for their disquieting theatricality of their large-scale photographs. Their works are so psychologically nuanced and acute that they effortlessly win us over to the dark side.

Take a work like Descent (2003), in which we see a woman drifting downwards, body slack and arm eerily unconscious, into deep water. What happens? She is not wearing a bathing suit and, we may be sure, like an antithesis, is not about to leave this life. She has just left it. Shot from the side, the figure appears to be viewed through the glass of a large aquarium. The water looks deep. We are caught by the horror of all and held there, hazzamhazzam. Was she murdered? We will never know, yet can never forget the image. It continues to haunt the imagination. In this respect Descent is like other Sanchez photographs—is impossible to forget. They stake an immediate claim upon you—the cinematography is gripping—and yet we need time to fill in the blanks of these viscously felt fictions. Slow shocks to the system, as it were, they work progressively on the psychology of the viewer.

The Sanchez brothers are masters of inventing eerie images, which hook us and��n their shock value. Rather than cheap, shill or tawdry, they are usially beguiling, captivating and mysterious, with a powerful virulently anger. They play up the anmunous underside of our moral, our institutions and taboos, and do so with a cruel, razor-sharp edge. Moreover, the artists are in control of every detail. If the images are hypnotic, it is also because they are brilliantly lit and the palette sumptuous. From construction of the set to final painting, it may be months before an image is finished. Nothing is left to chance. The Sanchez are meticulous, building their sets hand-in-hand from the ground up, insisting on high production values and rejecting anything sloppily that might detract from credibility. Recently, they stepped outside photo work per se to make Between Life and Death (2006), in which, with raw graphics and uncanniness, holographic images of a severely crumpled GMC city bus brings home to the viewer the unspeakable, outall body experience of one of the passengers in the (fictional) accident. Solidly researched, the work lifts the hair on the back of your neck, and is a true installation spoof story.

There are no easy answers in our reading of this or any of their work. Ambiguity reigns supreme. Furthermore, their photographs have no moral edges. Their most disturbing implications are never revealed easily, and in this respect the Sanchez’ never play it safe. Perhaps this is why we invest ourselves so readily in their images. Once there, it is difficult to remain objective about what we are seeing; the imagination makes leaps in the dark. In many ways their work speaks to the readiness of the human spirit, reminding us of scenes from David Lynch, where a single image often suggests a world of hurt, fright and shame just outside the frame.

In The Hunted Child (2003), for instance, a smiling, radiant little blonde, jauntily clad in pajamas and jeans, is captured poised at the centre of a prissiness stage, her hands clasped in front of her. Why is she turned-in is she about to escape onstage? We think of Friedkin’s The Exorcist. And then in one of their latest images, a remarkable portrait of a quintessential narcisst entitled John Mark Kran (2007), the subject is caught looking at himself in a gift mirror, with an obsessed, troubled expression. Kran, who confessed last year to ‘accidentally’ killing Jaredbart Ramsey, was all over CNN in the summer of 2006. He subsequently had his confession quashed and was released from custody because his DNA was not found at the scene. He was photographed by Carlos and Jason this year in his Atlantic home.

Brought up in Bexel on the outskirts of Montreal, the brothers have taken the photomystical world by storm, and have numerous solo and group art exhibitions throughout Canada, Europe and the U.S. They are represented by Christopher Curtis in Toronto, FORD in Ancaster and, in Spain, by Galerie Regina Malheiro in Madrid, and recently started exhibiting at Caron Golden Fine Art in New York. Following a solo show there in October—November 2007, they hold another exhibition at the Houston Center for Photography in November—December 2007.

Like the final pages of a novel so riveting that it keeps us reading way past midnight, a photograph by the Sanchez brothers is impossible to shug off, or at least not easily. We keep on looking, even if, in that single frame, a deception (nily or otherwise) is nowhere in sight. Their work is about the dark glamour that certain images have, and, in a world of pure appearance, their enigmas live on inside us.

JAMES D. CAMPBELL is a writer and curator who works in Montreal. He is the author of over 100 books and catalogues on contemporary art and artists.