

# Art in America

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## The Clayton Brothers at Bellwether

Those of us not fortunate enough to have washers and dryers might more excitedly anticipate the trek to the local Laundromat if it resembled the Clayton Brothers' *Wishy Washy*, the walk-in, heavily graffitied title piece in their recent exhibition. Los Angeles-based Rob and Christian Clayton have shown their collaborative work regularly in West Coast and Houston galleries, as well as at Art Basel Miami Beach, but this was their first New York solo outing. Painted inside and out with dense abstract patterns and collaged words, *Wishy Washy* came complete with three life-size fake Maytags, a shelf lined with bottles of detergent, a change machine and a table surrounded by a couple of grimy chairs.

Nearly hidden behind the laundry shack were over a dozen 14-by-17-inch brightly colored works on paper, some showing grotesque characters with red-rimmed, green or exploding eyes, frizzy hair and bony blue hands. Add a few lines of acerbic text, and many of the drawings could be frames from an R. Crumb comic strip. In *Gain Control* (all works 2006), a man with shifty asymmetrical eyes and scraggly black hair overlaid with colorful outlines of diamonds crouches behind a green bottle of Gain detergent.

A number of larger canvases more strongly evoke a horror-movie Laundromat, chaotic, dirty and full of lint balls and families with crying children. The kids—sickly, miniature adults with blue skin, beady eyes and incongruous business-casual dress—look rigid and possessed. In the more somber *Sometimes the Load Holds Me Down*, a small gold sun shines down on a dejected-looking woman pushing a cart through a hilly, psychedelic landscape, blue-black hair hanging in a glossy sheet beside her lined brown face. In *Color for People*,

a purple, muscle-bound woman in a bra, miniskirt and gym socks kneels in mid-air beside a table, wielding an oversize bottle dropper like a machine gun as the room tilts and spills around her.

Perspective runs free in the Claytons' works, pushing the action forward in Technicolor tableaux. The mundane subject matter combined with the artists' faux-naïve style creates a kind of postmodern folk art, like a mash-up of Lari Pittman's flat narratives and Beatriz Milhazes's flamboyant decoration. The Claytons' paintings resemble storyboards plotting a day-in-the-life saga of locals in the rundown Los Angeles neighborhood where their studio is located, as seen through wild eyes.

—Leigh Anne Miller



The Clayton Brothers: *Color for People*, 2006, mixed mediums on canvas, 24 by 18 inches; at Bellwether.

