

INTERVIEW WITH THE CLAYTONS

After a mind-bending cross-country haul, with the bus re-painted and back in impound, a mechanic shares some fruit with the Claytons.

So what happened this time?

CB: Black ice and jack-knife trailer full of Alka-Seltzer hit this tanker full of helium. Pow. Took out a bridge where there was none. Over a dry ice riverbed. Put a horseshoe tunnel in the sky, where it spilled a whole load of fruit across four lanes of white canvas.

Really. That's surreal.

CB: Yeah. The State Trooper's got a chain gang of chimps cleaning up the mess as we speak.

Dispatch will want a full report. So what do we tell them you're working on now?

CB: Fruit. Jumbo Fruit. A ton of it. Help yourself. You like banana flavor?

Thanks. What about purple, you got anything with that purple flavor?

CB: We've easily got five, maybe six flavors. Some of them are fluorescent. There'll be a lot of that in Jumbo Fruit.

Jumbo Fruit?

CB: That's the show we have in July, here in L.A. At Patrick Painter Gallery.

I see you're working on these paintings together, as usual. They seem to be emerging as portraits, of fruit. And people. Do you know where you're going with these?

CB: No clue. We're as curious as you are. He acts like he knows, but he can't, because I haven't told him yet. I think we both have an idea of where we think they're going. And where we'd like to see them end up. Someplace we've never been. Definitely someplace we've never been, but that we'll remember when we get there. It's like I'm trying to provoke him, and he's trying to subvert what I'm doing while all I'm trying to do is help him and live up to his expectations and stuff. And then I keep trying to surprise him by showing him that we're both thinking the same thing. Or not, like we're both deliberately not thinking about one thing. And painting it. It's all about starting out with bad directions. We have to both get lost to find where we're going.

The people that you paint... they aren't what I'd call glamorous. They are the ones most people overlook. And though they're often in very mundane places like laundromats or clinics, they seem to have very complex or magical inner lives, that seem to be converging or exploding around them.

CB: You find a lot of that on buses.

And the children that look like old men, it's the way Christ looks in the Gothic paintings, two feet tall with a wrinkled little head.

CB: Definitely another bus phenomenon.

With all of these supernatural things, the halos and cosmic rays, the wedges of other realities and the visions and jumbo fruit happening to these people, it's no surprise they often look baffled or stunned.

CB: It can be pretty distracting with all that going on.

It's like a rapture or enlightenment. It's all very promising, to the viewer, that it can happen to anyone anywhere.

CB: Well, you know we encourage all kinds of interpretations, and totally believe in freedom of speech, but that's an opinion you should keep to yourself. If you're going to have weird thoughts like that, better not tell anyone. It can get you in a heap of trouble.

You're smiling. And I feel some enlightenment happening. I think this time you are collaborating against me, not the canvas. And I'm honored.

CB: Your rapture is our pleasure. It's what we do.

Is your work together on Jumbo Fruit in anyway different?

CB: No. Well, they're always different. Yeah, the back and forth, fighting for the Brodie knob. It always gets a little topsy turvy, but that's what a roll-cage is for. Like they say in paradise, "Fish tail, rooster tail, shaggy dog tale... banana peels aren't half as slippery as you think. " That's how we see it, anyway.

And you teach this philosophy?

CB: We teach at Art Center College of Design. It's prestigious, and it's local. Which makes it sound convenient, but to tell the truth, it's probably why we live in L.A. Our work is starting to get around. China, Art Basel at both ends, New York and stuff, but Art Center has always been here for us. We go way back with them.

Do you teach your collaborative approach to art? I'd think that your unique working relationship sets an example for students to follow that is a little unrealistic.

CB: We don't teach realism. No time for that, but unrealism, that's another story. We teach them how to collaborate with their imaginary friends. It's a Tim House sort of thing. It's like if you have a guest in the attic, do you listen to them, or not? And do you need a translator, or pest control? That's what working together is like.

The weird voice in my attic told me that you have a museum show on the horizon, a sort of retrospective, and all three of your buildings will be together for the first time. That will be something to see.

CB: If you're in Madison, stop by. The Madison Museum of Contemporary Art. We'll have our whole village set up. You should bring your imaginary family, they'll feel right at home.

Their bags are already packed. Are you guys taking a bus?

CB: That's up to a higher authority.

Right. Which reminds me, what do you want me to tell Dispatch?

CB: Tell them to check our web site. www.claytonbrothers.com. It's all there. It's like our alibi.