

HUH.

CLAYTON BROTHERS

By Jack Lowe - December 2009

The Clayton Brothers have been collaborating ever since they've called themselves artists. They now live in California and work in a high street studio where people are welcome to walk in and have a look at what they're doing.

Over the years their vibrant pieces have been exhibited at important exhibitions like USA Today at The Royal Academy and The Armory Show in New York.

We caught up with them for a quick conversation.

How do you think where affected by the area you grew up in?

ROB: All that matters was it was a western suburb. In the seventies, mass marketing and the resulting homogenising of suburban culture was in full swing. There were suburbs all over the country that were all getting their cues from the same TV shows and filling up their fridges and their homes with all the same stuff. It didn't matter where you grew up. Everyone got the same jokes, heard the same stories, craved the same candy. What did matter was we grew up in the same house.

CHRISTIAN: We're still exploring the parallax of our common experiences. I remember certain events one way and Rob another. A lot of what we paint is us trying to sort out our slightly different perspectives.

When did you first start to think of yourselves as artists?

C: From the beginning. Our dad's a photographer. He really taught us how to look at things, how to see. He'd take us out of the suburbs on road trips or into the old sketchy

part of town. To the places and the people that mainstream culture pretty much ignored. Our aesthetic is largely because of that dissonance that he got going in our impressionable little heads

When did you first start collaborating and why?

R: Under parental pressure, we used to collaborate on birthday cards to our grandma. Later we worked together on alibis, embellishing textbooks, and subverting ceremonies... performance art if you will.

C: Later, working as individual artists, we'd still pass things back and forth. It was a way of improvising. Riffing. Communicating things that can't be expressed with words. Then about ten years ago it became pretty much full time.

What do you think of California?

R: Southern California was the model for the safe suburban culture we grew up in. Skateboards, baja bugs, Mattel Toys, Disney, the TV shows and the commercials were almost all made here. This was ground-zero for that crazy bland expansion, that obliterated or painted over all regional cultures. And then punk rock came along in L.A. and other places and challenged the norms and made it OK to be an outsider. Now it's like southern California is going through this burned-out decadent phase. The irrationality isn't as exuberant. There's the recycling of used myths. Planned obsolescence is obsolete because nothing works after the warranty expires. Technology is the new king with no cloak and the ads are trying to create a nostalgia for what's coming soon, promising that entropy will be something to cherish and remember. For us, this is a totally entertaining side-effect of years of commercial inbreeding.

C: Look at Jacko's funeral. That was classic.

Where do you find inspiration?

C: We both teach, so sometimes students bring to our attention examples of the cultural malaise we might otherwise overlook. But really, inspiration isn't something we have to

find.

What do you do if you don't feel like painting?

R: Sleep. Eat. Teach. Walk the dogs. Visit the dentist. Catch up on the neighborhood. We have kind of an open door policy at our studio and it's always interesting who wanders in. Some of them think we're a shop or something. Some are lost, or staggering under invisible burdens. Cosmic rays, cheap wine, God, formaldehyde. We're between a funeral home and a tanning salon, with a laundromat across the street. When we're not painting, we have a lot more time to listen to these people. Those are the kind of things we do when we're not painting.

C: If we didn't have these other obligations then we might get tired of painting, but as it is now, we're always grateful for any time that there is left over for art.

Plans for the future?

R: We have a retrospective at the museum of contemporary art in Wisconsin coming up (September 10, 2010 at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art in Madison, Wisconsin.) The logistics are crazy because they're determined to get together our three largest assemblages, plus ten years of paintings. They're being great about it all. Until then, I see us painting.

C: We try not to get too strategic about planning for the future. The present is never exactly what we imagined it would be. There's always new things, technologies, opportunities and calamities that no one could see coming. We welcome them all.