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Playing House

BY KATIE VAUGHN

Clayton Brothers: Inside Out is type of show that words can't really do justice. You simply have to see the art for yourself in person. Fortunately, that's a worthwhile endeavor.

The **Madison Museum of Contemporary Art** is the first museum to offer a survey of the work by brothers **Rob and Christian Clayton**. Twenty-six paintings and three installations, all made from 2001 and onward, are divided into six distinct sections. Through vivid, often fluorescent, color and a multitude of techniques, the brothers evoke memories, particularly of their childhood in Colorado, and tell stories, often of life in California, where they now live.

The first section, *Green Pastures*, focuses on the brothers' recollections of a mentally disabled boy with whom they grew up. A huge structure resembling a church looks like both a playhouse and a shrine to their neighbor, with children's book pages as roof shingles, imagery painted on the exterior and a cross up top with the boy's name. *I Come From Here*, the next division of the show, also deals with the Claytons' childhood. Another large house is outfitted with curtains and window awnings but covered both inside and out with bright paintings and framed drawings. The repetition hints at the ritual nature of family life.

Wishy Washy depicts a slice of daily life in the city, right down to the sound of traffic whizzing by a busy street. The brothers have created a Laundromat with replica Maytag washers, big windows and garish lighting. The room feels eerily familiar—and anyone who's spent time in a public laundry is likely to feel the same way.

The *Patient* section signals an end to the installations and the start of a focus on paintings and drawings. The brothers can stick to two dimensions when their works are filled with colorful and grotesque portrayals of the human body and its various bodily functions. Somehow, these

medical- and anatomy-themed works give way naturally to *Jumbo Fruit*, a collection of works featuring food. It's a clever and very contemporary response to the venerable still-life tradition. When done by the Claytons, bananas are nearly human-size, blueberries explode in the air and giant strawberries coexist with astronauts.

The final portion, *As Is*, is more somber and literally hits closer to home. The series of work is inspired by when Christian started house hunting in 2008 and saw many homes that were put on the market unexpectedly and in "as-is" condition. The brothers found the homes both depressing and full of interesting signs of their former inhabitants' lives. Their images show interiors with a menagerie of items—birds, tires, blenders, gas tanks, electric shocks, people with frizzed hair—all of which raise questions about what on earth is going on in these spaces.

That's perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the Clayton brothers' work: You feel familiar in the environments they've created, yet they're so unconventional you know you don't really belong there.

But it's sure fun to spend some time in their world.

Clayton Brothers: Inside Out runs through January 2, 2011.

For more information, visit mmoca.org.