

Sig Alert: More Street Art Ahead

By [Craig Stephens](#) Monday, May 30, 2011

What is cliché for some can be a discovery for others. More street art might mean greater traffic congestion, but much like today's pop TV shows Glee, American Idol and TMZ, if there's an audience for it, why not - right?



The “street art” illustrative based movement has of late infiltrated the art establishment. In fact, it seems to be the art establishment right now. Testament to its current reign are three key shows – lowbrow stalwarts The Clayton Brothers, assorted graffiti artists in Street Cred: From Concrete To Canvas, and Getting Upper, graphic artists’ reinterpretations of the alphabet – all running simultaneously under a single roof, the Pasadena Museum of California Art

Veritable icons of the L.A. art scene, The Clayton Brothers would win the ratings hands down on this week's lowbrow network with their show *Inside Out*, a retrospective of paintings and installations at PMCA.

The Clayton's newer paintings (from their series *As Is* and *Jumbo Fruit*) *Beware, Danger Set Free* and *Joy Jelly Jump Junk* offered some shining moments. Like visions of urban domestic dystopia they utilize obtuse imagery and a futuristic color pallet that distinguishes them from older works.



Danger Set Free depicts a ghostly figure brandishing a wrench, tending to an overflowing sink while a blowtorch ominously “blows” nearby, wires bursting from a wall -- Armageddon looms.

Two high concept installations, a house and a laundry utilize sound for further sensory effect.

Recalling visions of Ed Keinholtz’s installation The Beanery, Wishy Washy and I Come From Here are structures covered with snippets of urban gibberish, non-sequiturs such as “baldness,” and “For You,” while a spastic looking maid dances by.



Trained at Art Center in Pasadena, the Clayton Brothers art sees distinct similarities to naive African-American styled work, most harking from visionary artists such as Frank Jones, an artist who spent his life in prison and worked exclusively in red and blue colors; also Howard Finster, a painter and preacher from the South whose style mirrors the Claytons' suburban naïveté.

Still, despite the financial returns, riding the gravy train of a designated genre (namely lowbrow) seems to frustrate brothers Clayton. "We never really felt that we belonged to the notion of lowbrow as an art genre. It's a term that seems to have come about ten years ago, seemingly spawned by a show held by Robert Williams. We really don't like to classify ourselves. We grew up on punk rock and really just did our thing. Our work is mainly narrative based and we branch through painting and on to installation based projects."

Thematically Rob Clayton says he is entrenched in visions of suburbia and working class idealism, with family values too engrained in his psyche. "We don't really classify ourselves. We started working together in 1994. We have been showing internationally and it has been an extremely exciting process. Organically, we just let things happen," Rob says. "Most of our influences are real, and down to earth, by nature. Storytelling really is the key. We try and capture something that really has a sense of character and symbolism. "



Ok, so what of the other two aforementioned shows? Fewer hot chicks, witty banter and color usage overall. Street Cred seems an extension of Art In The Streets for the b/c- (and d-) listers hailing from the local graf scene. Yep, you've seen it - rather than rope in global names its focus is on L.A. street art and its various subgenres. Oddly, Concrete to Canvas is also the name of a book published in 2005, the first of its kind to bring together a wide variety of artwork produced solely by artists who are skateboarders.

Less about spray cans and baseball caps, Getting Upper consists of 26 graphic artists' reinterpretations of the alphabet. There's a mix of abstract here, a "J," shaped from lace, an "L," from a circuit board schematic and a "K" from a montage of orange circles and red bits. Given such a blunt directive this isn't as exciting as the other two shows.

-Craig Stephens