

Clayton Brothers exhibit is a double delight

By Michelle J. Mills, Staff Writer
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"Joy Jelly Jump Junk" painting by Clayton Brothers

It could be said that anything graced by the Clayton Brothers' hands is twice inspired. Each piece of art, no matter how small, is created as a joint effort and you can see some of the results in "Clayton Brothers: Inside Out" opening Sunday at the Pasadena Museum of California Art.

The brothers, Rob Clayton of Pasadena and Christian Clayton of South Pasadena, have been working together since 1996 and their abstract narrative paintings and mixed-media installations have been exhibited around the globe. They use a range of materials, including acrylic and oil paint, paper, canvas and woodworking, welding and other types of construction. Their aim is to experiment rather than stick with a formula.

"Anything goes in here," Rob Clayton said of the brothers' La Crescenta studio.

Both artists work separately, and bounce ideas and reactions back and forth, said Christian Clayton. Most work is freeform. The pieces include familiar images and universal concepts, along with a twist of something slightly odd, allowing the viewer to initially relate to the work and then, hopefully, return to discover its other levels and meanings. The Claytons said they don't use drugs and their work is not based on psychedelic trips, although their art is intense with bold color. They said the people in their pieces are not meant to be depressed or scary; rather, they tend to be complex and emotional.

Inspiration comes from the men's surroundings, such as with the installation piece, "Wishy Washy," a 100 square-foot structure with recorded sounds playing inside and out. It is based on a Laundromat down the street from their studio. "The idea is that people of all cultures, all races, all economics, anybody is welcome in a Laundromat," Christian Clayton said.

Four years apart, the Claytons aren't twins, but they easily complete each other's sentences and seem extraordinarily in tune with one another. They admit that they do fight occasionally, but the men don't let their egos get in the way of their work together.

"We've always gotten along really well and shared a lot of influences together. We have a lot of respect for one another. We know what the other one needs," Christian (the younger) Clayton said.

The Claytons grew up in Colorado and moved to Pasadena in the 1980s. Their father was a photographer and an artist and shared his interests with his children. They attended Art Center College of Design in Pasadena and now teach there.

