



Clayton Brothers: Open to the Public

Mark Moore Gallery
August 16 - September 20, 2014

By MEGAN ABRAHAMMS, SEPT. 2014

Everything here was unwanted at some point, or just discarded and left behind. So there's that embedded in the store, and chasing that, or being intrigued with it, or investigating it, is what we're after. -- Christian Clayton

Playful, poignant, popping with color, bordering on quizzical, this broad and engaging exhibit by the Clayton Brothers explores evocative narrative themes extrapolated from the scene of a thrift shop in Sun Valley, California. This body of work is characterized by a quality of spontaneity, which in part may be attributed to the brothers' process. Working on the same pieces at different times, they overlap, making it unclear where one brother may have left off and the other picked up. The style of these works also has a sense of immediacy. A preponderance of the pieces are free-form mixed media works on paper, sometimes combining elements of collage and assemblage with drawing and painting. Dynamic, gestural and layered with color as they are, the work manages to capture a sense of the excitement shoppers might feel on discovering treasures among the cast-off items at the store. Contributing to the sense of nostalgia, consistent with the thrift store theme, the works are framed in pastel colors reminiscent of the palette and luster of 1950s-era Fiestaware pottery.

A series of seven pseudo-portraits with different colored backgrounds is mounted together in the back gallery. Entitled, *Attention Sun Thrifters*, (All 2014, mixed media on paper, 14 x 11 inches) the series refers to the PA announcements made in the thrift shop. Elements of this series are stitched together with thread, as if binding the newfound second-hand hats, ties, scarves and jewelry to the entities of the shoppers who have acquired them. The eyes of the portrayed are variously proud, uncertain, whimsical, and even closed, as if they might be asking the viewer, "Should I buy it?" or, "Should I have bought it?" even, "How do I look?" or maybe, "Don't you wish it was yours?"

Found Still Life, (2014, mixed media on paper, oil and acrylic on canvas, 79 X 39 inches) is a male figure, perhaps a boy, holding what might be a toy in his hand. Attached beneath is a found painting of a still life, depicting flowers in a vase. Resurrected from the discarded art works relegated to the thrift store, the still life is included here in a newfound, somewhat incongruous context. *Do You Need Help? and May I Help You?* (Both 2014, mixed media on paper; 23.5 x 35.5 inches) comprise a diptych -- each half portraying two faces -- one in black and white (presumably the salesperson) and one in color (the shopper). The shoppers' heads are composed of two half-faces joined above the mouths, with the effect of making their expressions look surprised or confused -- and most certainly in need of some kind of help.

A piece of repurposed quilt is collaged on the top of the image, *Grandma, Mother, Daughter*, (2014, mixed media on paper, 12 x 15 inches). Below it a female figure reclines on a table in an awkward pose, her internal anatomy exposed as in an X-ray, revealing part of her skeleton and a fetus, the future daughter. The quilt wryly represents the grandmother. *This is Not a Man with a Pipe*, (2014, mixed media on paper, 19.5 x 24.5 inches) is an ersatz portrait of a man, smoking a pipe, very unlike the Rene Magritte *Ceci N'est Pas Une Pipe* which it references. This is one of the few pieces included here with a nuanced background layered in dots and splashes of paint rather than a solid block of color. The single large canvas, and thematic focal point *Open to the Public*, (2014, mixed media on canvas, 95 x 78 inches) conveys more of that piece's character of studied, art-historical gravitas.





Divided into composite rectangles, the background is formed of blocks of color: greens, yellow, violet and blue. Textured triangles and other shapes are superimposed. Two angular somewhat haphazard nude figures dominate the foreground, portrayed with various items found in the thrift shop -- a pen, a bird, a pot, a table-tennis paddle, a toy horse, pliers, and other miscellaneous oddities -- related only by sharing the fate of being random found things arranged together. The male gazes at the female, perhaps lusting for her, or maybe for the questionable treasures she has found. She dangles a purse from twisted, elongated fingers.

Inspired by their repeated visits to Sun Thrift over a period of years, the paintings, assemblage pieces, and drawings produced by the Clayton Brothers are just one component of their diverse and surprising collaboration. Supplementing their own work is a trove of documentary material presented in the project room including photographs, video and selected objects carefully harvested from the store, as if displaying a collection of artifacts from an archeological survey. This extracurricular curatorial component provides context and a framework illuminating the source which inspired the whole undertaking. Among these items is a hand-printed sign, instructing the shoppers:

PLEASE LEAVE ALL

HANGERS ON THE RACKS

THANX THANX (sic)

A mini rack with a display of colored plastic hangers stands nearby. Another sign insists:

No Items on Hold No Exeptions!!! (sic)

NO SE APARTA MERCANCIA sin exepcion!

Thank you MNGT. (sic)

Assorted neckties are draped here and there. Vases, bottles, and ceramic ornaments, price tags intact, are lined up beside a wooden sign inscribed with the simple directive, DREAM. Video footage from the thrift shop plays on a continuous loop, showing a parade of shoppers sorting through racks of clothes and other objects. Interspersed cuts focus on close-up shots of peculiar items displayed on the shelves, like a snow-globe made from a Gerber baby food jar. Rob and Christian Clayton may be poking fun at thrift store culture, but in a gentle way, without a hint of malice. Even the darker aspects -- the borderline hoarding and obsessive browsing, the economic context that requires purchasing used consumer goods -- are conveyed with a sense of benevolence and self-awareness as to their own participation and embrace of the thrifting system. *Open to the Public* might be seen as a light-hearted homage to the appeal of found object as an art-historical trope, as well as to the quasi-performative thrill of the act of repurposing and recontextualizing a humble, discarded thing.

