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The Clayton Brothers Take Us Inside their Thrift Store-Inspired World

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Christian Clayton estimates that he and his older brother Rob have been collaborating since his birth. The artist duo, known as The Clayton Brothers, share a Pasadena studio where conversation provokes an intuitive, symbiotic practice. Each work is a unique blend of both brothers' creativity and contemplation. Growing up in Aurora, Colorado with their father, a photographer, the brothers grew up skateboarding, building ramps, listening to punk rock, and designing flyers and t-shirts for friends—always with a camera in tow. Art school followed for both brothers and a collaborative career in art making was a natural progression.

Inspired by public spaces and the objects and individuals that inhabit them, the artists have homed in on local thrift store, Sun Thrift, for their new show at Culver City's Mark Moore Gallery. Titled "Open to the Public," the show features vibrant drawings, paintings, sculptures, mixed media, and video works embedded with rich narratives and a cast of characters that could only be realized through two minds, and two sets of hands. We spoke to the brothers in anticipation of the show about their process, thrift stores, and the origins of "Open to the Public."

Artsy: Can you tell us about your process? We've read that you're never both working on the same work at once. How do your works come about and how do you collaborate on a single piece?

Rob Clayton: We just start to have conversations; sometimes it will take us a few months, going through what we're interested in working on. We've opened up to a lot of different mediums over the years, like drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, film. And this current show that we're doing, "Open to the Public," is something we've been working toward for maybe three years, four years now.

Christian Clayton: Yes, [Sun Thrift has] been a muse of ours. We go in there and think about everything, and come back to the studio and have these conversations, threading narrative and bits and pieces of things that we've found. As far as our collaboration goes, the studio is an open, organic environment. We leave things out for each other to see what the other guy might respond to. We refer to it as an abstract narrative; it might start with a conversation about somebody in the thrift store and then end up about a certain material that was in the thrift store. Then there's this whole course of producing and editing.

Artsy: Have you been visiting thrift stores for all of your lives? Is there a history there?

RC: Yes, we've always been interested in them. It's interesting to go to different thrift stores in different communities throughout the United States. You see these eclectic, curatorial-type atmospheres.

CC: [Sun Thrift] is the best thrift store we've ever been in. It's always evolving and changing. Even though everything there is the same—in the same place—the products and things go in and out.

RC: But there tend to be a lot of the same people going.