



Clayton Brothers: Inside Out at MMoCA offers a strange, compelling take on the world [Jennifer A. Smith](#) on Wednesday 09/15/2010 12:32 pm

"More is enough" reads a cryptic motto painted on the wall of the Clayton Brothers' installation *Wishy Washy*, named after a Laundromat near their Los Angeles studio. That vague philosophy seems to sum up the brothers' jam-packed art. Rob and Christian Clayton are two fortysomething brothers whose paintings and installations are crammed with image layered upon image, strange epigrams and riotous colors.

While the two have attracted international attention, the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art's latest show, *Clayton Brothers: Inside Out*, is the first large museum show of their work.

While the pair frequently cite California surf and skater culture and punk music as influences, it's easy to see a whole host of other references: folk and outsider art, pop art, underground comics, even some of the Chicago Imagists.

The brothers, who work and teach together, address themes like childhood memories, modern life and human vulnerability. Repeated motifs like leg braces, crutches and bottles of pills suggest human infirmity.

If that sounds a little grim, the end result is not. There's often a grotesque, psychedelic sensibility at play. In *The Human Body* (from the *Patient* series), a nurse sporting an old-fashioned cap emblazoned with a red cross tends to her patient. Yet while the patient has a human-like (albeit furry) leg clad in a tennis shoe and tube sock, the rest of its "body" is a burbling, alien mass of organs and tissue.

The nurse's face and arm are flayed in the manner of an anatomical drawing, revealing her muscles and bones. She prepares to administer an injection from a comically oversized syringe. Yet as crowded as the composition is, it still coheres through a kind of trippy logic that runs throughout the brothers' work.

In addition to paintings, the show includes three installation pieces, one of which MMoCA owns and has exhibited before. *Tim House* pays homage to a childhood friend with developmental disabilities. The small structure has the exterior form of a church or old schoolhouse. Inside, however, it's like a secret clubhouse filled with drawings, paintings and ephemera.

Wishy Washy, the Laundromat installation, incorporates sound to give the sense that the machines are running. A crutch left propped up against a dryer suggests that a patron has just left—and might be coming back. As with the other installations, all surfaces are covered obsessively, like many outsider art environments.

Curated by MMoCA director Stephen Fleischman, *Clayton Brothers: Inside Out* is a welcome introduction to a strange, compelling take on the world.

Rob and Christian Clayton, *Wishy Washy* (from the series *Wishy Washy*), 2006. Mixed media on wood panel with electrical and sound, 96 x 96 x 100 inches. Courtesy of the artists.