

Julia Bottoms, *Because We Should*

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Worthy Dialogue Curatorial Essay by Shirley Verrico

People of color have been trapped in someone else's narrative for too long, and when we have tried to write our own narrative, our words have often been erased from the mainstream history books. I believe it is time for us to use the talents we possess to speak our truth. Our lives are worthy of dialogue. – Julia Bottoms

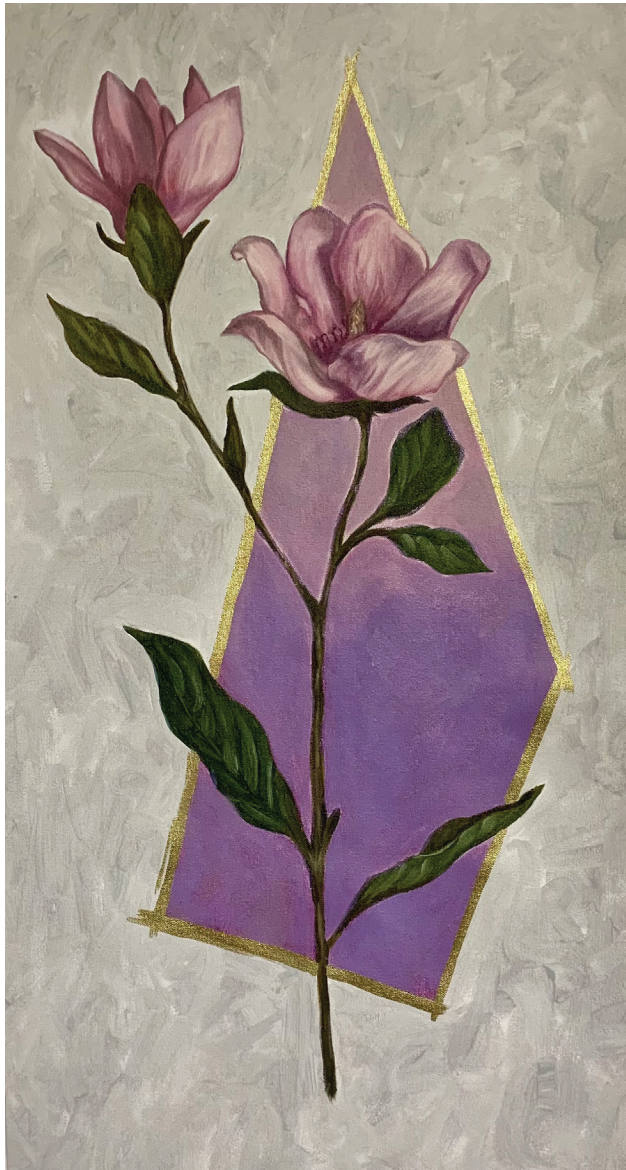
Julia Bottoms is an oil painter and muralist who rejects the hyper-sexual, violent, and sinister portrayal of people of color that too often saturates the media. Her large scale paintings on unstretched canvas honor the individuality and character of each of the people she paints. Bottoms believes that making art that celebrates Black bodies and Black creatives begins with acknowledging the power of the individuals during the photoshoot.

Bottoms photographs her models herself, using the intimacy of the session to develop mutual trust and respect. She reassures the models that they hold the power in the studio space during the sessions. Bottoms sees herself in the dynamic young people she paints and although she employs poses and props in the tradition of the classic nude, the figures are strikingly contemporary.

Because We Should includes four canvases that feature single figures at nearly double life size. Each is named for the model; Frankie, Zhanna, Richie, and Navi. The figures stand outside of time and space, demanding the viewers' attention. Bottoms captures the beautiful individuality of her models, including personal style choices like hair color, nail polish, tattoos, and jewelry. Along with the physical pose and facial expression, Bottoms uses colors and brushstrokes to convey something deeper about each of the models. She also intentionally blurs a section of each portrait, suggesting that there is an energy that runs through and connects everyone.

For *Because We Should*, Bottoms also created a series of four portraits where the subjects emerge from, and move beyond, various shapes and colors. The four portraits are heroic in scale, painted on 36 inch square canvases. The figures are expertly rendered, carrying a sculptural weight against the intentionally flat backgrounds. The portraits are separated by five rectangular canvases, each showing a single stem of a decorative plant floating in front of a geometric shape.

Our culture seeks out the beauty of Blackness, cuts it from its roots, rearranges it, throws it in a vase and consumes it until it's no longer that beautiful, living plant it was, but rather an edited withering thing in a vase. – Julia Bottoms



Her Floral Form (purple), 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas,

Bottoms sees each flower as a metaphor for the ways society isolates and commodifies Black beauty. Together, the series functions like metopes and triglyphs on the frieze of a Doric Greek temple, constructing a timeless narrative of Black power and Black beauty.



Richie, 2021, oil and acrylic on canvas,

Artist Biography

Julia Bottoms is an active visual artist based in Buffalo, NY, where she recently completed a six-week residence at the Albright-Knox Northland, participated in the University at Buffalo Arts Collaboratory Working Artist Lab with Cecily Brown, and was an Albright Knox Participating Artist for the Works From Home Project. Her large-scale mural work includes *Mamie Smith Memorial Mural* in Cincinnati, OH, the East Delavan Library Mural and seven panels on *The Freedom Wall*, in Buffalo, NY, among others. Bottoms has been featured in solo and group shows across New York State and her work has been featured on the cover of *The Public*, in *Buffalo Spree*, *The Challenger*, in the HBO series *Insecure*, and online through *AfroPunk*. Bottoms holds a BA (2012) and a MA (2017) from Buffalo State College.

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