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Bree Gilliam, *Not Your Mammy*, 2026, oil on canvas

Buffalo Arts Studio presents *id* by Bree Gilliam

On View August 28 – September 5, 2026

Artist Reception: Saturday, September 5, 2026, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm

Buffalo, NY — Buffalo Arts Studio is excited to present *id*, a pop-up exhibition by visual artist Bree Gilliam that explores her complex lived experiences as an artist and woman, navigating the expectations and assumptions connected to her identity as a Black woman in the United States. Through narrative-based self-portrait paintings, the exhibition challenges harmful stereotypes and societal misconceptions. The exhibition will be on view from August 28 through September 5, 2026, with an artist reception held on Saturday, September 5, from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm.

Contemporary social issues have long been a focus for Gilliam, whose emotionally charged paintings highlight the challenges underrepresented individuals face in their daily lives. Her figurative paintings depict scenes, moments, and voices expressing to the viewer the joy, trauma, history, and emotions these individuals carry. *id* follows in Gilliam's exploration of these topics, in a growing body of work currently consisting of six paintings that reflect

different stereotypes and prejudicial expectations she has been confronted with, including *Not Your Mammy* and *Sheltered*.

Not Your Mammy is a self-portrait of Gilliam dressed in the mammy caricature costume, a racist stereotype with origins in the antebellum American South that grew to prominence during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras. This caricature depicts enslaved or later freed Black women as content and docile, domestic motherly figures wholly devoted to raising and caring for someone else's children and family. Gilliam's defiant pose and handling of the child's doll challenge stereotypes and expectations of motherhood and servitude to others.

Sheltered features Gilliam sitting hunched under a blanket fort, reflecting the internalized stress and expectations placed on someone who is said to have had a "sheltered upbringing". Through her use of color and brushstrokes, she adds a certain weight to the image as the structure appears to both confine and protect her from the outside world. This contrasts with the nostalgia the viewer might feel when remembering blanket forts and the childlike wonder in constructing them. There is a sense of isolation in its protection, a feeling that because no one understands you completely, you have to make a place where you feel comfortable. That the blankets enveloping her are the elusive sense of childhood warmth Gilliam is constantly trying to find again.

About the Artist

Bree Gilliam is a fine arts painter and muralist from Buffalo, New York. She attended SUNY Buffalo State University, receiving a B.F.A. in Painting and a minor in Art Therapy in 2022. She is the owner of Paintphoria LLC, Buffalo, NY's first splatter studio. She is best known for her figurative oil paintings, which feature intense colors, bold symbolism, and expressive brushstrokes to evoke emotion in her audience, sparking introspection and conversation. Gilliam was Hunt Gallery Resident Artist in 2023 and has exhibited at various Western New York galleries, including Buffalo Arts Studio, Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, and Burchfield Penney Art Center. She has been commissioned to paint numerous murals in Western New York. Her most notable mural, titled *Bright Days*, was completed in 2026 in collaboration with Buffalo AKG Art Museum and Evergreen Health Services. In 2026, she received a New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) Grant.

id is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.

About Buffalo Arts Studio

Buffalo Arts Studio (BAS) connects diverse communities through visual arts, offering inclusive exhibitions, educational programs, mentorships, and public art initiatives. BAS provides vital resources for visual artists, including affordable studio space and paid opportunities. Through its programs, BAS serves as a catalyst for self-empowerment, innovation, and regional enhancement.

This exhibition is generously supported by The Cameron and Jane Baird Foundation, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, DownRoot Fund, part of the Crossroads Community Fund, Erie County Cultural Funds, M&T Bank, and through the New York State Council for the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature.

Buffalo Arts Studio is located in Suite 500 of the Tri-Main Center at 2495 Main Street, Buffalo, NY 14214. For media inquiries, interview requests, or high-resolution images, please contact Sydney O'Shei at sydney@buffaloartsstudio.org or 716-833-4450 x 114.