

[Art](#)

[#BALLOONS](#) [#FOIL PAINTING](#) [#PAINTING](#) [#PLANTS](#) [#PORTRAITS](#)

Balloons, Plants, and Bubble Wrap Become Powerful Subversive Symbols in Alicia Brown's Portraits

JANUARY 31, 2022

GRACE EBERT



"Love notes from my father in a foreign land when the apple trees blossom" (2021), oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches. All photos by Daniel Perales Studio, © Alicia Brown, shared with permission



In her new body of work *What About the Men?*, Jamaica-born, Sarasota-based artist [Alicia Brown](#) extracts and reenvisions elements of traditional portraiture. She recasts objects of cultural and social status, like the elaborate gowns and thick ruffled collars worn by wealthy aristocrats throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, by instead rendering her subjects in casual clothing like shorts and rubber flipflops with colorful latex balloons, plants, and plastic bubble wrap coiled around their necks.

Contemporary and subversive, Brown's oil paintings are rooted in history and a reinvented use of symbols interpreted as power, control, celebration, adaptation, and survival. She explains:

As an artist from the Caribbean, Jamaica, which was colonized by Europe, presently there is still that system of classism that has its origin during slavery and colonialism in Jamaica that the natives have to navigate in order to fit into society. I have referenced the collar as an object that is European and replaced it with objects such as spoons, cotton swaps, shells, balloons, bubble wrap, and recently elements of nature. These collars adorned the neck of the models who are regular people and who are constantly going through a performance of creating an identity to gain acceptance.

Derived from a photograph of a friend, family member, or neighbor, each intimate portrait is set against a lush backdrop of foliage or in domestic scenes with encroaching plant and animal life. "Through my work, I hope to convey to the viewer to look beyond their eyes and to see themselves as the person represented in the painting, to share their world, and to come to the awareness that we share so much in common, we are all connected as beings," the artist shares.

If you're in Rochester, you can see *What About the Men?* through March 6 at [UUU Art Collective](#). Otherwise, visit [Brown's site](#) and [Instagram](#).