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### WHAT TO SEE IN N.Y.C. GALLERIES IN FEBRUARY: NATHANIEL OLIVER

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On the left, Nathaniel Oliver's "The Faith of Fishing" (2023), and on the right, "Awareness Beyond My Senses" (2023). Credit: Nathaniel Oliver and Karma, New York

Nathaniel Oliver's first solo exhibition at Karma Gallery, "My Journey Was Long So Yours Could Be Shorter," is a fantastical world where symbols operate like pins on a map, helping you find your way. It is quite an expansive map: water bodies recalling the wharf of his childhood home in Washington D.C. and the Middle Passage across the Atlantic; West African clothing and masks; and flora native to the Caribbean. There is also a crescent and a star, present in the flags of many Muslim countries.

These sometimes disparate motifs are made stronger by the layers and textures present in the works. In "Would You Believe Me If I Told You," a flat green plant gives way to a shiny orange door frame, where a man is dressed in an intricately decorated blue shirt. He achieves the same effect with blue hues in "At What Cost, Do I Stay or Go," where a stormy sea looms behind a curtain with white strips falling across it, like rain.

These representations, however, blend well with the artist's predominant practice of working with darker tones of colors, and even when he chooses bright ones they seem to be dim, as if the lights were turned down. A palpable result of this is a haze in the paintings, making the figures almost dreamy, as if they were evoked from a myth. But, as the title of the show suggests, a people's connection to their forebears

is not merely the stuff of legends. For Black Americans it is a matter they contend with in everyday life, and the current rights they enjoy in this country were hard-earned by previous generations. In this way, Oliver's homage, even when laced with fantasy, is entirely plausible.