

OSCAR YI HOU

*A sky-licker relation*

August 26–September 26, 2021

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James Fuentes is pleased to present **OSCAR YI HOU, *A sky-licker relation***.

Oscar yi Hou's work is anchored in personhood. While this exhibition presents a series of new portraits, what yi Hou's paintings really record is the relationship shared between the sitter and the artist. Foregoing fixed representation, the works in *A sky-licker relation* offer a testament to living alongside others. Made over the past year and a half, these works mark the importance and influence of nearness; the *being-with* of a queer lifeworld. In each work, yi Hou pulls together a syncretic field of iconography that describes complex layers of identity and relation. Through this process, nearness is not only at the core of the work's making, but now actively occurs within the visual plane of the work as well. The exhibition title is itself the result of a series of relations: *sky-licker* is lifted from Aimé Césaire's poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, which yi Hou first came across in Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. Like the evocation of a sky licker, yi Hou's given name in Chinese refers to a bird cry (一鸣) and he often uses birds as a self-signifier in his paintings and poetry, boundless and in flight.

A distinct sense of symmetry can be found in yi Hou's densely-detailed images, contributing to a compositional logic that is able to hold together a great deal of texture around each of the relationships being represented. Negotiating questions of opacity and (il)legibility, yi Hou employs polysemic symbols such as the five-pointed star, an icon laden with signification between East and West, to emphasize the buried yet multifarious meanings that surround his subjects. In this vein, at times the artist fuses the Chinese calligraphic tradition with graffiti seen on the streets of New York. Yi Hou also makes poetic use of the borders of his works, treating this marginal space as an expression of the interrelation between himself and the sitter—while at the same time reflecting upon the limits of grasping this relation. In doing so, the artist's paintings of others become a form of address, conjuring new signs and meanings to be shared in space. Here, yi Hou intricately demonstrates, in his words, "painting as a practice of dignity."

Oscar yi Hou (b. 1998 in Liverpool, England; lives and works in New York) received his BA at Columbia University, New York. His work has been included in exhibitions at T293 Gallery, Rome, Italy; James Fuentes Online; Sprüth Magers Online; Asia Society, New York; Tong Art Advisory, New York; Half Gallery, New York; Rachel Uffner, New York; Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles; and the Royal Academy, UK. *A sky-licker relation* follows yi Hou's exhibition of works on paper at JamesFuentesOnline earlier this year.

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