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CELEBRATING THE MAJESTIC ALLURE OF VAST MOUNTAINS

by Xu Qin



“Big Room” by Xiao Jiang, oil on canvas, 2020

It's Xiao Jiang's fourth solo exhibition with the Vanguard Gallery at the M50 art district. Titled “Mountains Aside,” the exhibition lays emphasis on new paintings from the artist's ongoing interior series, which was conceived early this year.

Putting his iconic depiction of mountains aside, the scenes and figures captured in the domestic setting are further developed, reconfigured and coordinated on canvas. Xiao also employs contrasting placid colors to produce a visual anomaly, and dissolves the subjects into geometric color blocks with no descriptive details.

The eyes are drawn by the paintings' ever-changing perspectives and multilayered scenes in which subtle motions are portrayed with moist or dry brushstrokes, or the absence of a figure was tactfully implied by the composition of furniture.

“Yes, there is a sense of structure which I deliberately composed to showcase the shifting of perspective, which allows the visitors to participate in the most ordinary scenes being presented in their own daily life,” Xiao said.

For Xiao, the seemingly insignificant leisure and mundaneness caught in the interlude of daily scenes possesses a distinctive aura – a yearning to escape the pressures of daily life.

Despite what the title has suggested, the motif of mountains continues to find its presence in this series of interior paintings, introduced as a mountain-lined vista outside the window. The figures inside appear concrete, while their minds are detached, as if wandering into the mountains afar.

Born in 1977 in Jinggangshan, Jiangxi Province, Xiao started painting mountains in his early artistic practice. Part of the reason is that he spent a long time living in a place with mountains.

“It's true that you open the door or windows, and you see the mountains in my hometown,

miles and miles away,” said the artist. “Even though huge changes have taken places over the past years in Jinggangshan, which is now a county-level city. The area is still surrounded by steep forested mountains, dotted with unusual rock formations, ancient trees, waterfalls and caves.”

Having furthered his study in the China Academy of Art in oil painting, Xiao moved to Shanghai in 2006 to become a professional artist with a studio of his own.

Generally, the mountains in his paintings have sharp peaks but smooth ridges, stretching to the distance under the outline of the neat and sharp lines. The color blocks framed by the lines, such as green, blue and red, delicately integrate or collide with each other. However, it is not his intention to portray the homesickness. Instead, he only wants to strengthen the unavoidable and pervasive boredom nature of life itself.

“In my memory, the scenery is no more as clear as before, but it turns into a kind of vague and ambiguous atmosphere and continuously occupies my mind. At last, it becomes an experience in my life that has motivated me to keep going when faced with never-ending obstacles,” he said.