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INFLUENCES: PERFORMING ARTS:

XIAO JIANG

by Meg Whiteford



Xiao Jiang, *In the Studio*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Karma.

When describing my yearning for privacy and newfound revulsion to constant connectivity to a friend, he asked: How do you pray? I said, Look at paintings. One such pause came from the landscape paintings of China's Jinggangshan mountains in Xiao Jiang's exhibition *Continuous Passage*. If there are any, most of Jiang's figures look away, or he obscures their faces, or they turn to their book, a corner. With titles like *Strolling*, *Resting*, *Country Road*, Jiang isn't subtle about his leisurely aims. Yet there's more at work than a series of luncheons in the garden. One triptych of hefty forest-green mountains, rendered in Giotto geometries, covers an entire wall; but in the right corner of the burlap canvas lurks a utility pole. No matter how alone we think we are, how absorbed in our deliberations, there will always be an intrusion. So, I turned to a press release quote about material choice: "For Xiao, burlap forces his process to slow down, a quality he matches in his compositions, in which muted colors are heavily layered, therefore imperceptible to an impatient eye...." I read this and Jiang's paintings two ways. One, the improbability of silence in our impatient, techno-surveilled state; and two, only those who layer in patience will achieve a quality of retreat. The mute world that Jiang depicts is at once stark and poignant, humbling and contemplative, and so a place of peace, which is also not a fixed place but a place that must be continually sought and walked toward. A passage through, not a location where.