

Artist challenges Euro-centric narratives

June 22, 2021 | By Park Han-sol

Page 1 of 1

Artist challenges Euro-centric narratives

By Park Han-sol
hansol@koreatimes.co.kr

The 1883 adventure novel, "Treasure Island," the 1928 Great Barrier Reef expedition in Australia and the 1962 film, "Mutiny on the Bounty." What do these seemingly disparate fictional works and historical events have in common? For Sydney-based artist Daniel Boyd, these elements represent the Euro-centric and imperialist ideals that have shaped dominant historical discourses in Australia.

By featuring objects and landscapes associated with these images in his distinct pointillist paintings, the artist creates his own visual dialogue of decolonization, one that draws on his Aboriginal and Maa-nan heritage.

"There's something important about lineage or ancestry that I find. For a lot of people in history — a lot of First Nations people — it's a big part of who they are," he said. "(My work) starts with who I am, and they (my ancestors) are part of who I am. So it makes sense to use their narratives (in the work) and share our history."

Boyd's new paintings and video works, which explore how the romantic notions behind colonial settlement erased the identities of the indigenous people, are now on display at the exhibition, "Treasure Island" at Kukje Gallery in Jongno District, Seoul.

By restoring what has been lost and overlooked, the 39-year-old artist emphasizes the importance of reading history as a collection of multiple perspectives rather than one grand, singular narrative. This message is delivered not only in content but also in form, notably through the curious form of pointillism he employs in his paintings.

He repaints on canvas portraits and landscapes that he has found in photography archives or museum collections, before overlaying them with a myriad of transparent dots of archival glue. The space between the dots is then blacked out, leaving only parts of the paintings to be visible through the round, clear glue droplets.

"The surface is made up of all these



Boyd's "Untitled (POMOTB)" (2021)

convex dots that sit on the surface, and they act as lenses. So it's about perception and how we collectively understand something," he said.

The constellation of transparent droplets represents fragments of visible information observed through many individual lenses, while the black space between them indicates lost or missing parts of history. Such a collective arrangement then invites the viewers to fill in the dark voids themselves by actively connecting a series of dots in their heads in order to create a unique narrative.

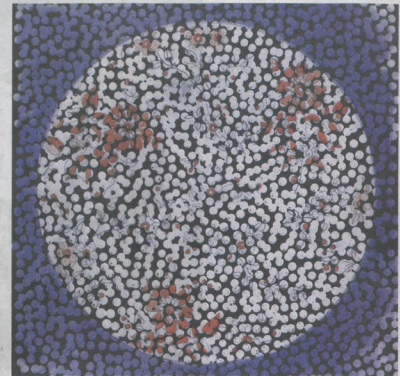
In both the adventure novel, "Treasure Island," written by Robert Louis Stevenson, and the cinematic adaptation of the "Mutiny on the Bounty," which tells the story of a rebellion that took place on Britain's Royal Navy vessel, the HMS Bounty, during a mission to collect breadfruit plants from Tahiti in 1789, Boyd sees how these portrayals of two tropical islands have contributed to the construction of popular stereotypes of their inhabitants.

Subject to repeated objectification and otherization as uncivilized bodies in need of enlightenment, in these narratives, Indigenous people

were treated as one-dimensional background characters, in stark contrast to their more complex European counterparts.

Boyd incorporates into his work objects, historical figures and characters associated with the legacies of colonialism in Australian culture and society, in order to bring such still living traces up for discussion in a subtle but powerful way. Among these objects are the treasure map that appears in the popular novel about the island, a portrait of Robert Louis Stevenson and a poster for the 1962 film, "Mutiny on the Bounty." But the most notable works on in this exhibition are those that focus on a colorful set of dinner plates, once personally owned by Stevenson, that are now stored in the University of Sydney's Chau Chak Wing Museum.

The artist explained that he was fascinated by these everyday objects, as they were present during Stevenson's conversations with dinner guests, bore witness to those who washed the dishes at the time, and were at the center of discussions by the curators of the museums where the plates have been on display.



Daniel Boyd's "Untitled (FDWHFTU)" (2021)



Australian Aboriginal artist Daniel Boyd

Courtesy of Kukje Gallery

The plates' presence and messages change depending on their context — whether it be Stevenson's dinner table, a history museum or an art gallery. As Boyd's five paintings of the plates are scattered throughout the Kukje Gallery's exhibition hall, it will be interesting to see how each one will create different narratives based on its relationship with the other works around it.

Some of the showcased pieces highlight the artist's personal roots through depictions of his own ancestors, who were also left out of mainstream historical narratives. "Unti-

itled (GGASOLIWPS)" depicts his great-grandfather, Harry Mossman, on the Great Barrier Reef Expedition in 1928, a project launched by British researchers to study the Australian coral reef system.

Mossman was a part of the "Stolen Generations," generations of Aboriginal children who were forcibly removed from their families by the Australian government and denied the opportunity to practice their culture and traditions by being placed under the guardianship of Christian families and church-related institutions — a practice that started in the

early 1900s and continued well into the 1970s.

In "Untitled (TDHFTC)," Boyd's sister is shown getting ready for a traditional dance performance. The painting subtly poses a question about whether any element of "authenticity" remains in this traditional dance, as it underwent inevitable changes throughout the colonial history of Australia and now arguably exists to cater to the pretext of "protecting diversity." By sharing these images, Boyd connects his personal roots to his ongoing interest in recalibrating the historical lens through which we normally view Australia's history, as told by those who have dominated it.

His paintings and video work on display resonate with contemporary viewers who have been bearing witness to the recent trend in the developed world of hegemonic cultural frameworks being questioned, critiqued and replaced by efforts to bring "peripheral," marginalized narratives increasingly into the spotlight.

The exhibition, "Treasure Island," runs through Aug. 1 at Kukje Gallery.