

Artists navigate capitalism of ocean

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The sea is part of nature, but nowadays the ocean is dominated by capitalistic exploitation. It became an object of colonization and divided by border-making as a side effect of modernization

“Gridded Currents,” an exhibition held at Kukje Gallery in downtown Seoul, approaches the sea seen through a capitalistic perspective in a critical way. “The exhibition provides an opportunity to see how we divide and deal with the sea, consumed by modernist ways of thinking,” independent curator Kim Hyun-jin who organized the exhibition said.

The exhibition encompasses works of four artists from various backgrounds — Nina Canell, Kim A-young, Runo Lagomarsino and Charles Lim Yi Yong. The videos, paintings and installations reveal colonial history and nationalism behind nature.

Swedish artist Lagomarsino’s works present poetic imagery of the sea, but they rather reflect the irony deeply rooted in Eurocentrism.

He printed a 16th century ship fighting the sea monster Kraken on a large curtain, titled “Mare Nostrum



Installation view of “Gridded Currents” curated by Kim Hyun-jin at Kukje Gallery in central Seoul

Courtesy of Kukje Gallery

Mare Mostrum” (Our Sea Our Monster). “Europe is Impossible to Defend” borrows an illustration from the famous story of the Egg of Columbus.

“It represents the historical legacy of colonial times in Latin America,” he said.

Works on the second floor reflect more physicality. “Sea Grammar” is a slide projection of some 80 images of

the Mediterranean Sea, punctured with holes by the artist. The number of holes increase as the projection progresses, hiding the original seascape. Lagomarsino raises the question of refugees and immigration as a large population of refugees from Africa and the Middle East are desperate to cross the Mediterranean.

Lim is from Singapore and has a unique background of being a former

Olympian as a sailor. Being born in a city surrounded by water and sailing a yacht professionally, the sea was the living foundation for Lim.

His work “SEA STATE” literally divides the sea by grid and presents how the Singaporeans perceive the sea as a wall, not as an open space.

“The sea was present in everyone’s lives, but it is going out of our mind. I wanted to bring this back,” Lim said.