

## Notes made re: Surf Type drawings at team Gallery, Nico Dregni

Surfing is something like 90% not–surfing. Ann Pibal's drawings balance moments of acrobatic grace with the surrounding time traveling, waiting, watching, being watched, and wiping out. The saying goes that the best part of surfing is talking about it afterwards; the clearest manifestation of that adage is *The Surfer's Journal*, a publication that prints page after glossy page of backlit waves and sapphire swells dotted with colorful boards and delightfully athletic bodies. Dismantling a trove of vintage issues found in Todos Santos, Mexico, as well as relatively recent issues from her own allowed-to-lapse subscription, Pibal has made three groups of drawings under the collective title *Surf Type*. Each grouping corresponds to a distinctive quality of light, with the bleached heat of high noon daylight contrasted by saturated color backings, and lineups of hearts, stars, and the worn appeal “Save the Whales” corroding into pattern. The lustrous, mercurial, silver drawings are criss-crossed with x's and in the fleeting glow of the golden hour drawings, abstracted characters and symbols diffuse foreground and background, as twilight fades to black. Crisp patterns are laser cut into the images, distributing the graphic across the pictorial; as the figure-ground relationship between them shifts, the rhythmic patterning reads as schematic of ocean swell.

The tantalizing and idyllic images selected by Pibal are emblematic of *The Surfer's Journal*, which could masquerade as a tome of centerfolds for oceanographers, but are equally emblematic of the social and cultural dynamics of surfing. For all the waxing poetic on the power and beauty of the ocean, there is an equal amount of ink spilled chronicling a distinctly patriarchal history, steaming with unchecked colonial conceit; the jet-set protagonists foregrounded on these pages are almost exclusively a cast of white-guys-being-dudes. Throughout its almost 28-year existence, only two issues of *The Surfer's Journal* have featured a woman on the cover, and the sole female presence in the *Surf Type* photos is a Russian model hired to ride an elephant through a Polynesian jungle for the film *Strange Rumbblings in Shangri-La*. Pibal's drawings poke holes in the fantasy of the images, slicing through the scenes of manufactured escapist fiction.

Present in several of the drawings is surfing's golden boy, Laird Hamilton, whose origin story—the chosen son, progenitor of tow-in surfing, conqueror of big waves—positions him as an archetypal figure, both of surfing and masculinity. One can all too easily imagine the biopic titled *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, with “chiseled” and “force of nature” as leading adjectives throughout the opening montage. This brand of rugged male bravado is surf marketing orthodoxy, its heroes presented unironically as interlocutors with sublime forces. Pibal's selections shift our focus to allow room for speculation about the durability of the conditions supporting these cultural icons.

Ultimately, Pibal employs the *Journal* as a device to address modernism's exclusive-by-definition orthodoxy, and the patriarchal inheritance offered by 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century American painting. Using this material as the physical substrate for her drawings, Pibal subsumes and transforms the shared context and gendered history of both painting and surfing to examine persistent aesthetic and social legacies.