

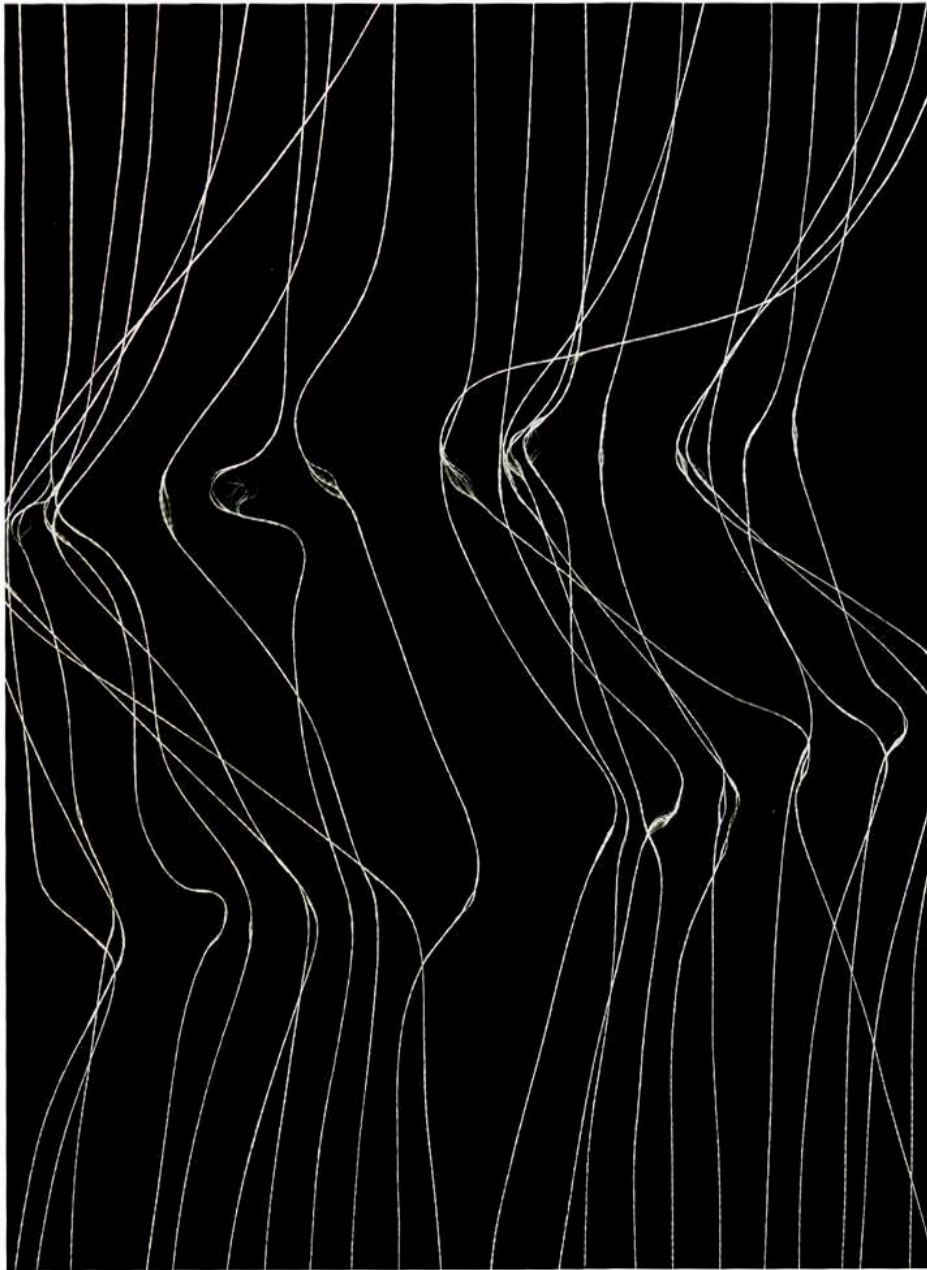
Land

Scapes

I once heard surfing described as riding the horizon and, as platitudinous as that sounds, I believe that it's true; surfers occupy an unfamiliar threshold between body and nature—above and beneath. Allow me to offer this example from my own life to clarify the nature of those distinctions and their overlap: when I was ten years old, on a road trip through Northern California with my family, I looked over a cliff on a grey morning and saw tens of upright bodies floating motionless in the far, horizon-less distance. For a long, quiet moment, it seemed to me that they were walking on water.

Photography by
John Luke

When seated on a moving airplane, I often forget that I'm elevated thirty thousand feet above land. Surfing, I'd argue, has the opposite effect, refusing the possibility for passive disconnect with one's vital and immediate surroundings. The tools used to experience the ocean (or better yet, the threshold that separates us from it)—neoprene, foam, fiberglass and wax—are, by sophisticated design, quite minimal. The board is light enough to float while formidable enough to support a human body. Likewise, the wetsuit is both thin and dense, allowing for a full range of motion while adequately conserving bodily warmth. The required equipment is itself an evolving exercise in restraint and balance.





Surfers must rely on their boards and suits to experience the water's calms and swells; however, there comes a point (perhaps you know it, or at what point it will occur) on the water in which the distinction between a surfer and their equipment utterly and remarkably vanishes. Not unlike the dissolve of the horizon line itself, each becomes an absolute and unbroken extension of the other. In a sport particularly alive with duality, this momentary joining of body and non-body is the purest and most arresting thing I can imagine, and the most difficult to describe within the terms of language. Suffice to say this: riding the ocean's surface is as close as we may possibly come to knowing its deepest depths.