

# SURFER

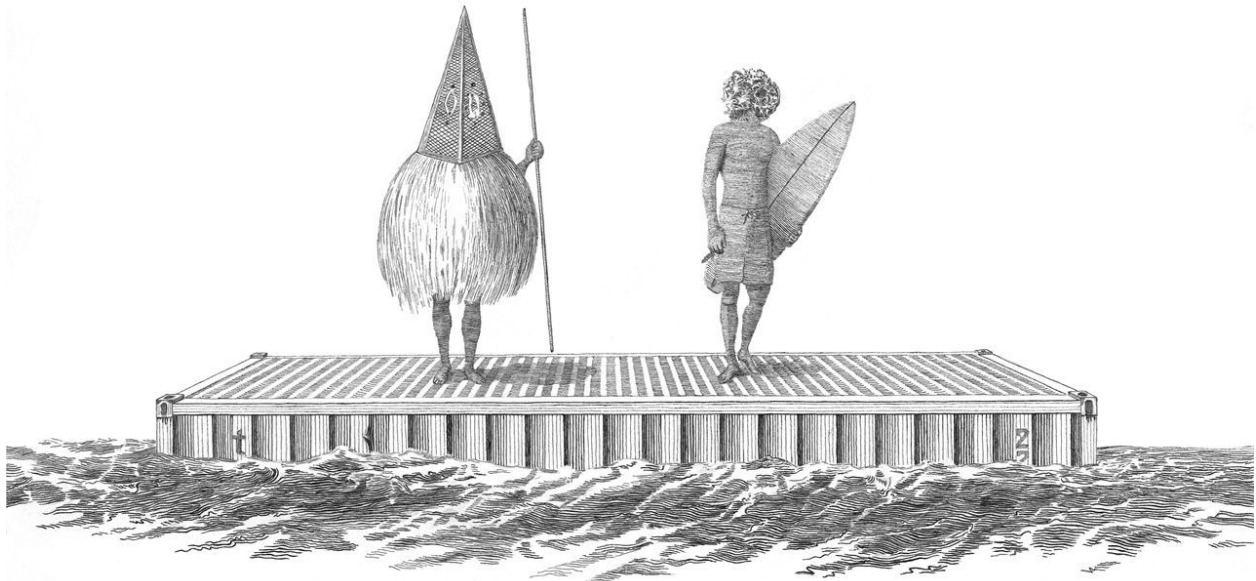
## THE ART AND TRAVELS OF MARTIN MACHADO

THE SURFER, ARTIST AND SEAFARER'S OCEANIC RELATIONSHIP REFLECTS IN HIS WORK BECAUSE A LOT OF IT IS CREATED WHILE AT SEA

By Ben Waldron, March 14, 2018

*Perhaps, while waiting for a set wave, you've seen the dark silhouette of a containership creep across the horizon. Possibly numbered among that vessel's seafaring crew is San Francisco based surfer and artist Martin Machado. While at sea, between bridge-watch shifts and helmsman duties, Machado spends what little free time he has stowed away in his cabin, where he creates art inspired by his containership surroundings and trans-oceanic travels. The sea steals thousands of shipping containers from these hulking ships each year. A motif in Machado's work are the steel boxes' imagined fates combined with a subtle social critique, occasionally from a surfer's perspective.*

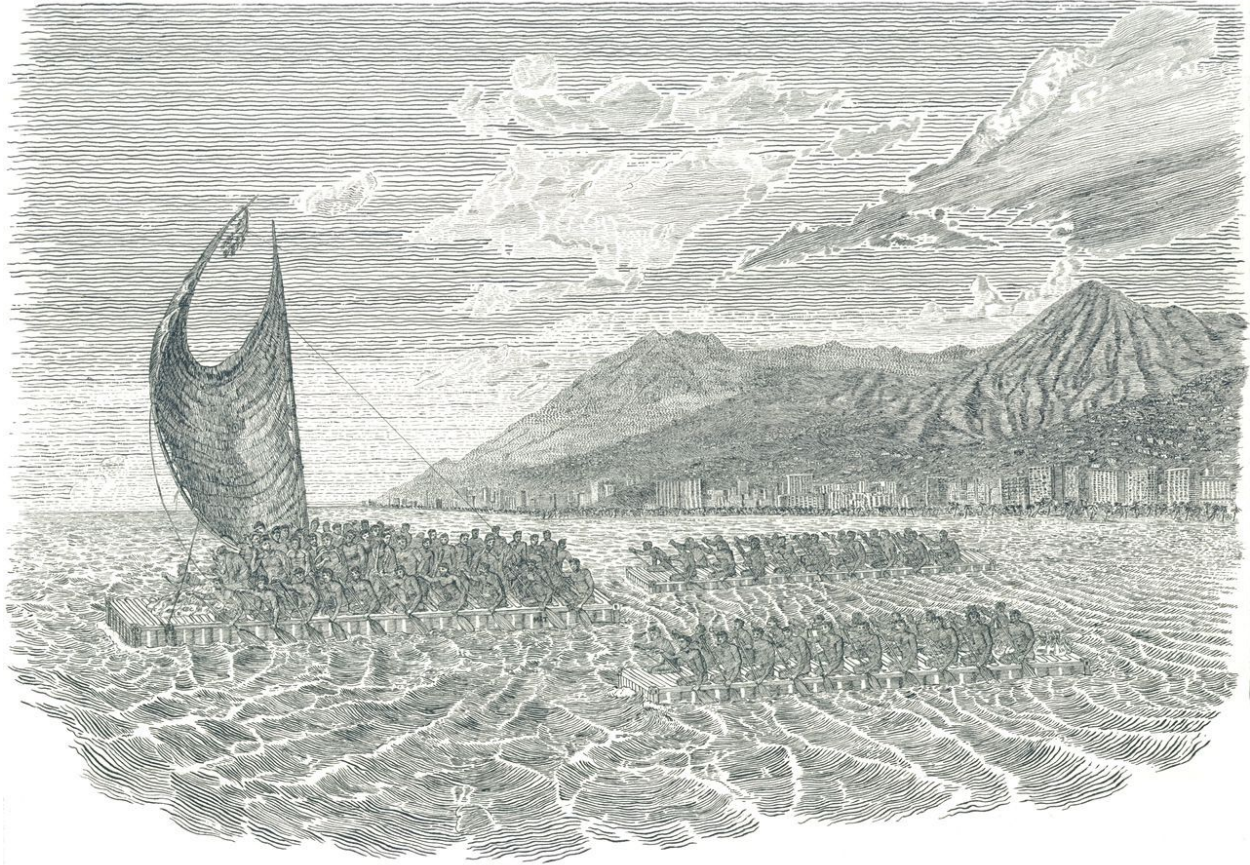
*SURFER talked to Machado about his artwork, travels and how he's sometimes able to squeeze in a surf while docked at a port far from home.*



“Exporting the Gnar”

**One of the first pieces of your work I ever saw was an island warrior standing with a modern day surfer on top of a shipping container. It kind of felt like a critique on the exploitation of surf culture.**

Totally, yeah. That’s actually supposed to be Rob Machado. I grew up as a fan of Rob Machado but also with my last name I thought it was funny and I wanted to include him in a piece. I came across this etching of a guy from Papua New Guinea--well that area is called New Ireland, but it’s technically Papua New Guinea. After I made the piece I found a documentary on surfing in Papua New Guinea where these tribes are starting to get into it and Australian companies are sponsoring the top guys from there. It’s just funny to me. It’s like a hoop dream kind of thing where guys from the ghetto try to use basketball to get out of their situation and now surfing can be the same opportunity. It’s just interesting to me how it’s affecting the world and small communities in rural areas.



“Bringing Gifts from ABC to Capt Cook”

**How about the “Bringing Gifts from ABC to Capt Cook” shipping container piece--the title is awesome with how prevalent ABC stores are in Hawaii, how did you come up with that?**

That whole [shipping container] series really came across because of these etchings I dove into. That piece in particular is based on an etching by John Webber I believe--he sailed with Captain Cook [1770s] on some of his trips. They carried artists on their journeys around the world. I thought it was interesting how much these artists went through and how it was sort of through their eye, through their lens, that people were interpreting these new worlds. So that piece in particular was inspired by... I think it was called ‘The natives bringing Captain Cook gifts from the Sandwich Islands.’ Which is what they used to call the Hawaiian Islands. So I did a twist on it, the gifts most people bring back from Hawaii these days are from ABC stores. They [Webber] would sell these books of artwork to fund future voyages and it’s kind of interesting to me the way these expeditions are tied into the ways that the island communities have developed and have been exploited or however you want to look at it.



"Passing Diamond Head"

**Do you ever get to stow a board when you're working on the containerships? It looks like you're pretty busy but do you find time for a surf when you're circumnavigating?**

Yeah, for the most part I've surfed on the Hawaii run. That's probably the easiest. I haven't really found the need to bring a board because I'm already lugging all this art gear along with cameras and stuff. So usually when I'm over there though I've got a few friends that will pick me up and take me surfing or I just use a bike, because some of the ships have bikes on them, and I'll just bike into Waikiki and get a rental longboard. I've checked the surf like in Sri Lanka and I've gotten close in Singapore. I got to surf a wave pool, like a standing wave, over there. I tried to catch a ferry over to this Malaysian island because that was the closest surf I could find looking online. I was there for a shipyard deal and it was for two weeks. Unfortunately I haven't gotten really random country surfs. I checked some surf in Oman when I was over there because apparently there are some nice beaches. Most of the trips that I'm on are just going to Hawaii back and forth or now I'll go to Alaska, then over to Asia, back to L.A., and then to here [San Francisco].



“Jack O’neill”

**I saw you did that piece of Jack O’Neill.**

Yeah that was a little ways back. I think it was a 60th anniversary thing they were doing for O’Neill. They did a big tour where they were basically having a party in a handful of locations around the world. I think it started in Bali or something, but they would reach out to the community there to do an art contest and a handful of artists were on this sort of tour. I think Thomas Campbell was there too. I was able to get a piece into the final leg of that tour in Santa Cruz when they had the Cold Water Classic going on. I got connected to the O’Neill family and was able to drop it off and meet them. It was awesome. Obviously now with Jack passing away it was such an honor to meet him in his last years.



“Thailand Wake 3” 35mm photo

**Tell me about the whitewash kind of boat-wake work you’re doing. Are those derived from photographs?**

I’ve kind of gone back and forth. Originally I was just carrying a camera on-board as much as I could and I would stare at those wakes. They’re really dramatic out in the open ocean. Basically what’s happening is you’re getting the white water, the air bubbles, and as they spiral down deep where the water is clear it shows off the clarity of the water. So if you’re in a really tropical area with turquoise water it’ll be extra vibrant because you’ll see all this whiteness down in the depths. So the same goes for open ocean when the silt kind of falls out of the water, you get extra clarity. When a container ship goes through the water it has such a big draw and it sucks air down. You get these really incredible wakes.

So I started to try to work with the photograph but in paint. I've kind of gone back and forth where if the photo is good enough I should just show the photo. It's kind of a way to work through the memory of a voyage or something in my mind. I think the wake is this physical record of the passage but it's also so temporary. I'm getting the snapshot of it but it's gone in a split second. It's kind of a funny ephemeral grasp at time or something.

**Kind of like a fleeting record of your travel maybe?**

Yeah. It's nowhere but it's also somewhere in the middle of the ocean.

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