

Joni Sternbach

*American*

ARTIST'S STATEMENT:

SurfLand is a collection of contemporary portraits of surfers created using the historic wet-plate collodion process. The photographs are a unique blending of subject matter and photographic technique. Using an 8" x 10" camera and the instantaneous wet-plate collodion process, I am creating one-of-a-kind tintypes that are imbued with a feeling of ambiguity, timelessness and mystery.

Landscapes, seascapes, and the human imprint on these views has been my focus. Returning year after year to the same location has led me to examine the juncture between land and sea, exploring subject matter in a constant state of transition. Surfers are an integral part of this liminal state. I am fascinated by the physical and poetic way that they inhabit America's watery landscapes.

I work with a large-format camera and wet process that must be prepared and developed on location. The procedure is elaborate and fortunately draws spectators as well as entices new subjects. Other subjects have found their way to me via surf websites, pro shops, and word-of-mouth. Once on location I compose carefully before sensitizing the plate. The very nature of collodion is spontaneous and unknowable. It is precisely the raw quality of the process that suits the subject matter, giving it a distinctive appearance and echoing important traditions of nineteenth-century anthropological photography.

The photographs were shot on both coasts: Montauk's Ditch Plains on the East Coast as well as Malibu, Del Mar and Rincon beaches in California. <|>SurfLand</|> is a chronicle and celebration of these fascinating denizens of regional surf spots across the nation.

"Sternbach makes her photographs in tintype, a labor-intensive technique little changed since it's invention in the 1850s. Spontaneous and unpredictable, the streaks and tonal variations in the finished photographs reflect their hand-made character, the corners rubbed where they were held in the camera.

Posing on rocky outcrops, in front of uprooted trees, or on thick mats of woody flotsam, Sternbach's surfers inhabit strange landscapes. The best of Sternbach's photographs convey insistent longing. They are about relationships – the relationship between surfer and board, between human and landscape, between photographer and subject, and between the surfers themselves...she has discovered a new sort of home – a place without walls, defined only by belonging and the physicality of existence." — Philip Prodger, Curator of Photography, Peabody Essex Museum