

SURFÁIL SNA SCANNÁIN:

THE HISTORY AND CULTURAL POLITICS OF THE IRISH SURF FILM GENRE

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FILMEU Doctoral Seminar 2022.



ROBERT PAUL 'ROUGH SEA AT
DOVER' (1896)



WHAT ARE SURF FILMS? DISTINCTIONS...

Mainstream and counterculture

Surfing and Film quickly began to overlap in the 20th C.

Developments in camera technology meant that amateurs could now create. This became the driving force of subcultural surf filmmaking.

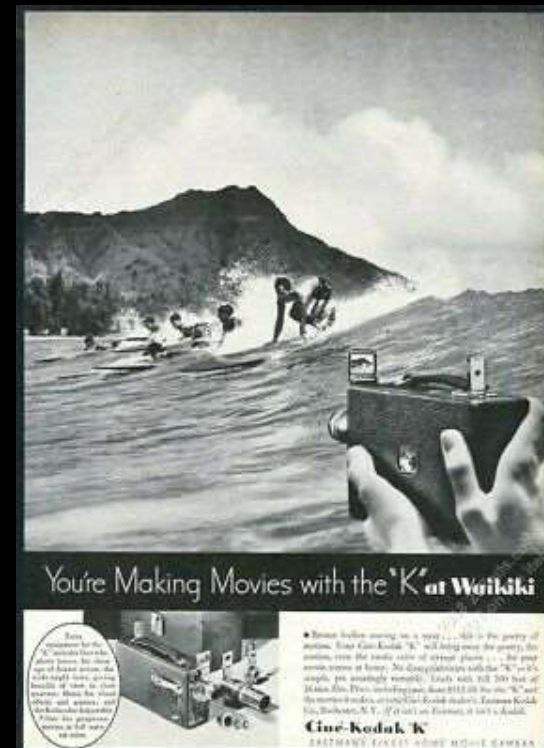
By the 1950s, Hollywood was producing surf and beach party films, but these are not representative of the 'surf film genre'.

1930s: 16mm
Camera
Advertisement

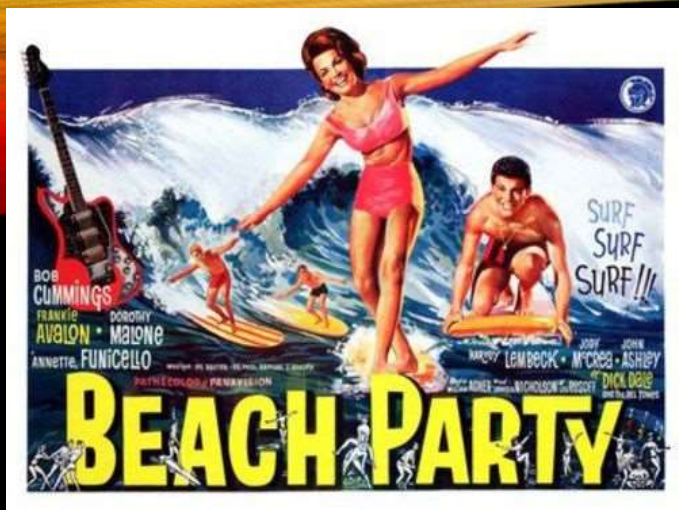
Surf Scenes, Waikiki (Edison Company, 1906)



Sons of the Surf (1926)



HOLLYWOOD EXAMPLES...



Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

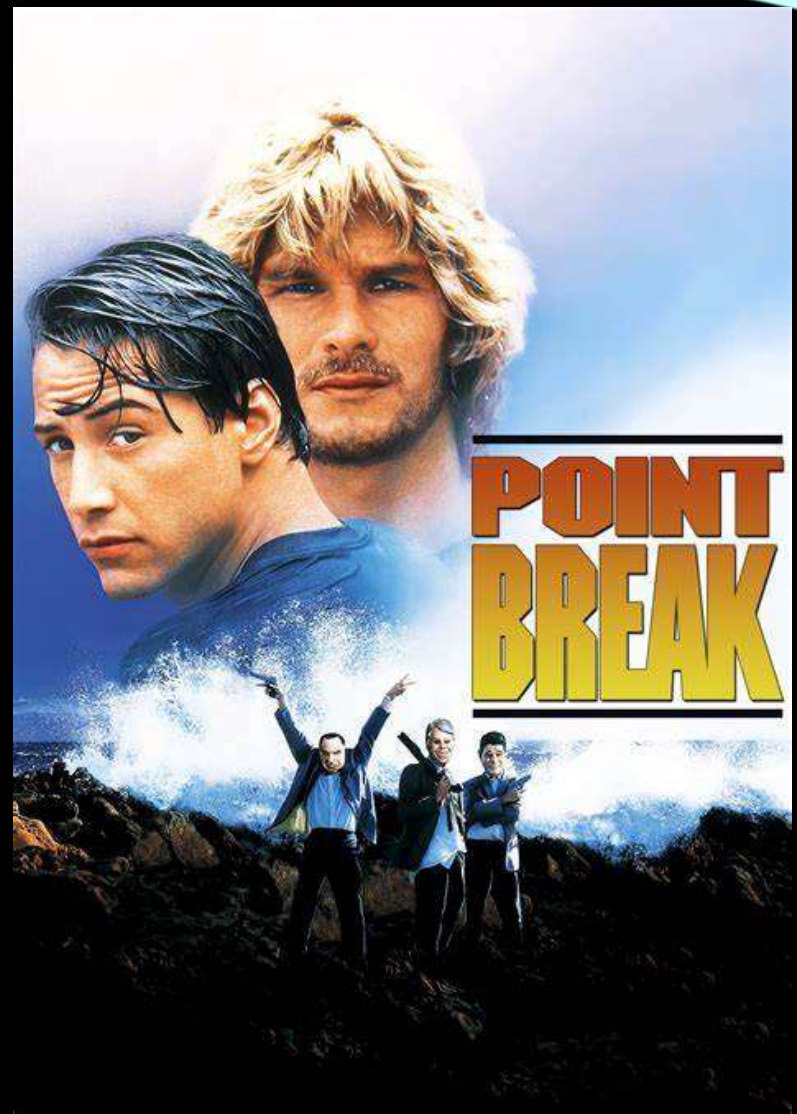
JAN-MICHAEL
VINCENT

WILLIAM
KATT

GARY
BUSEY

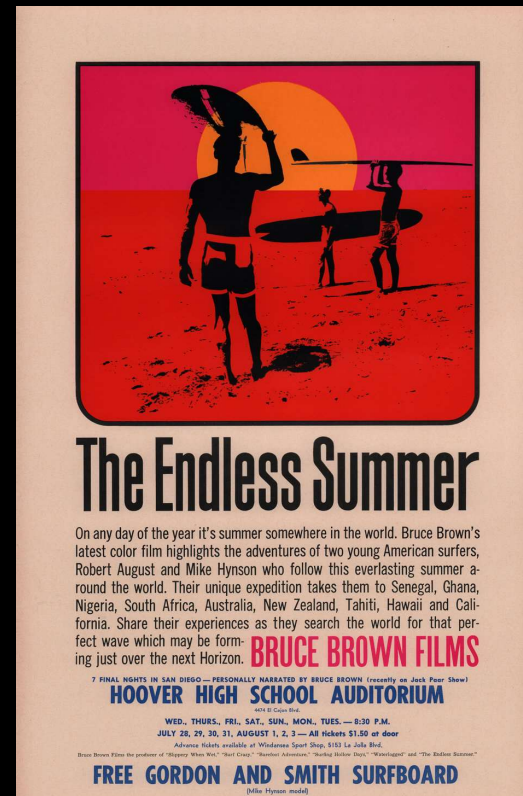
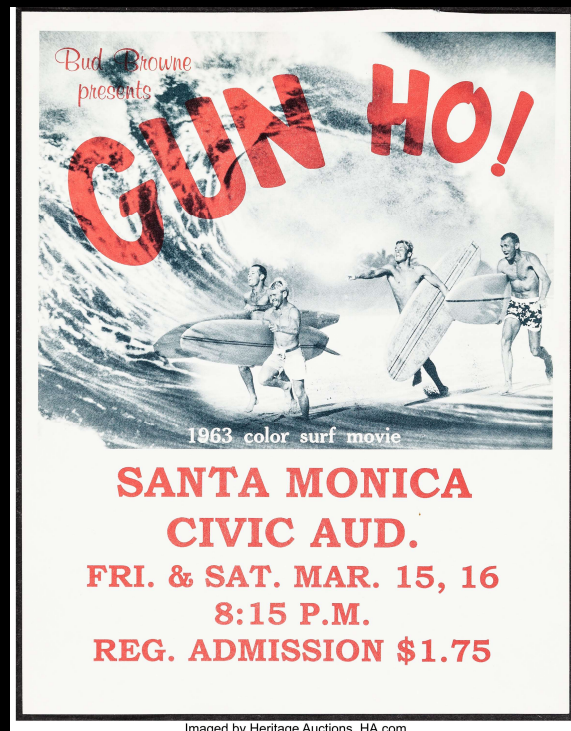
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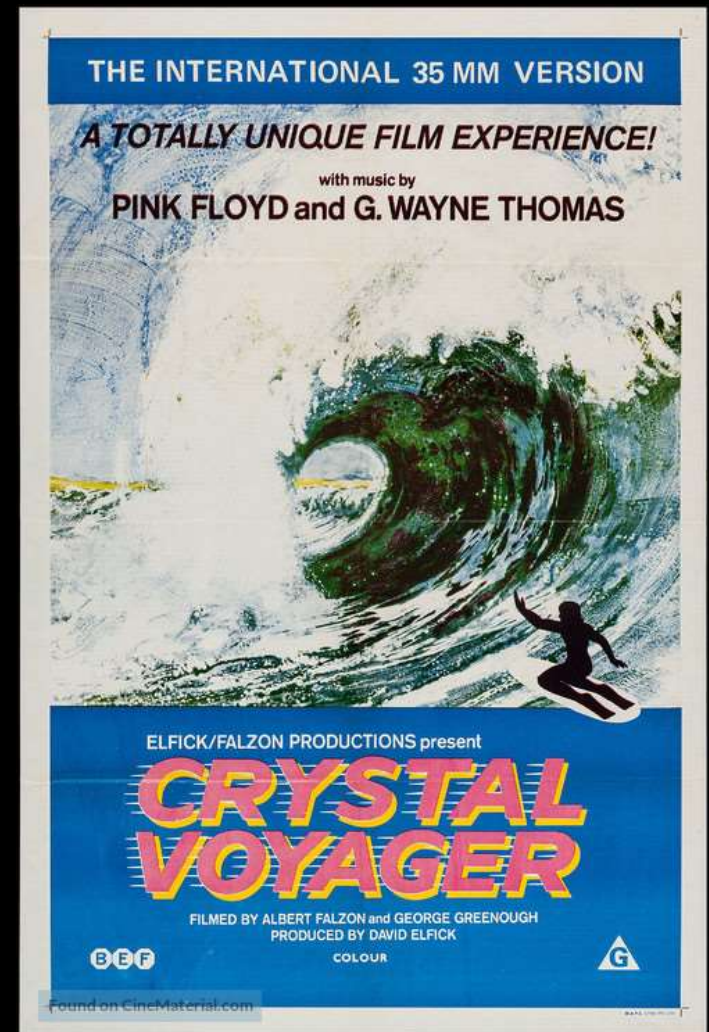
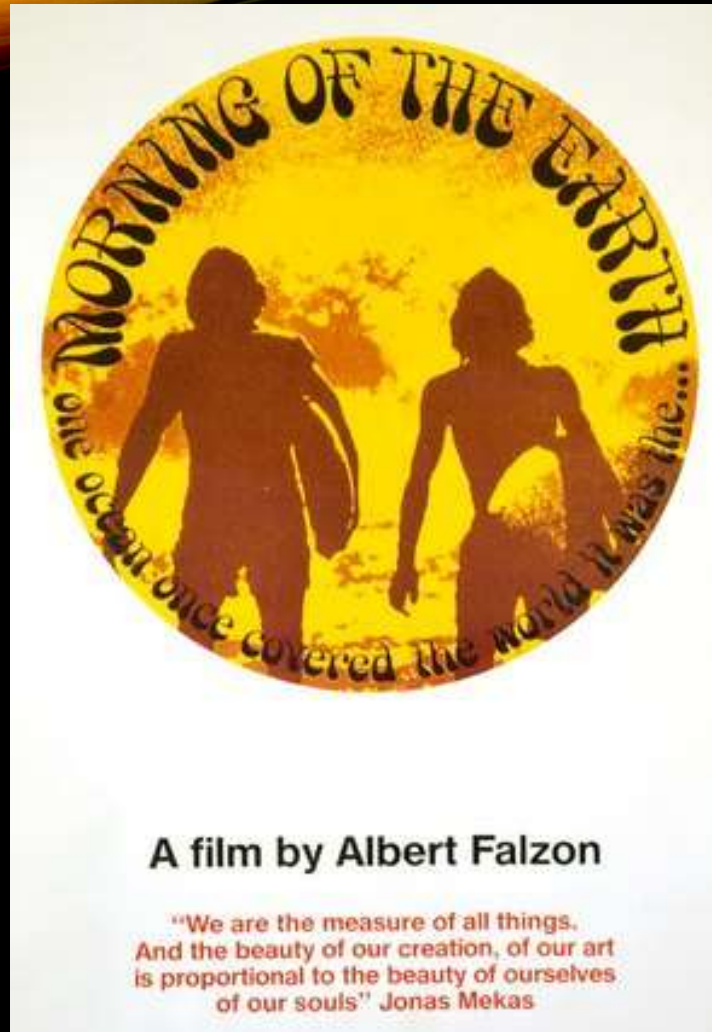


WHAT ARE SURF FILMS...?

- The Classic Era:
- Bud Browne
- Bruce Brown
- Alby Falzon
- John Severson



Alby Falzon and
The Australian
Avant Garde



EMERGENCE OF AN IRISH SURF CULTURE

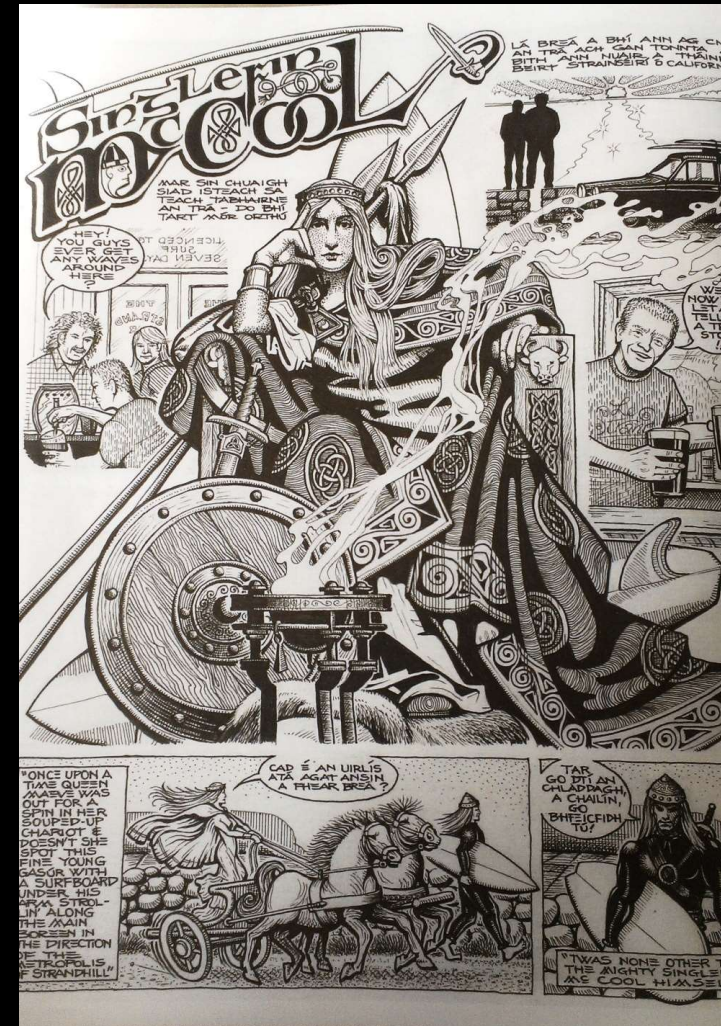
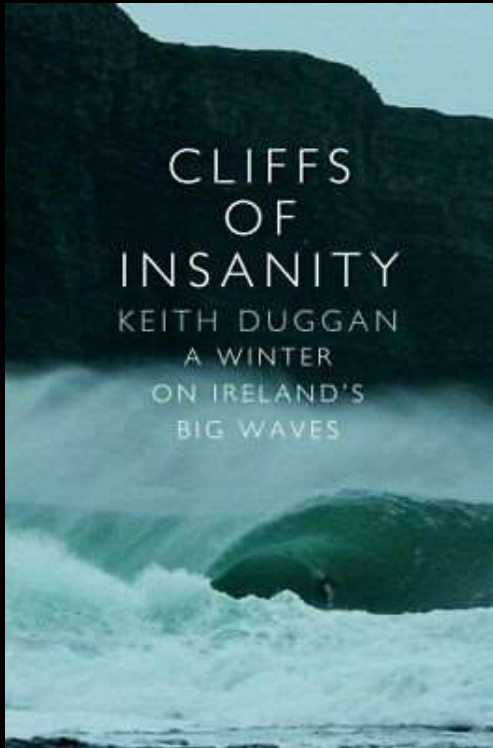


Boat Show, RDS, 1966

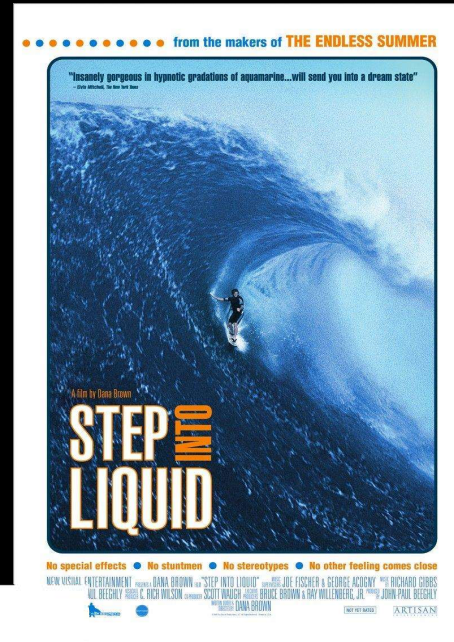
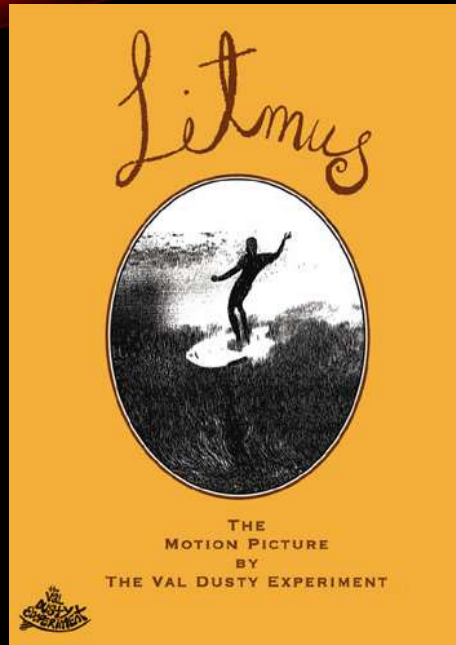
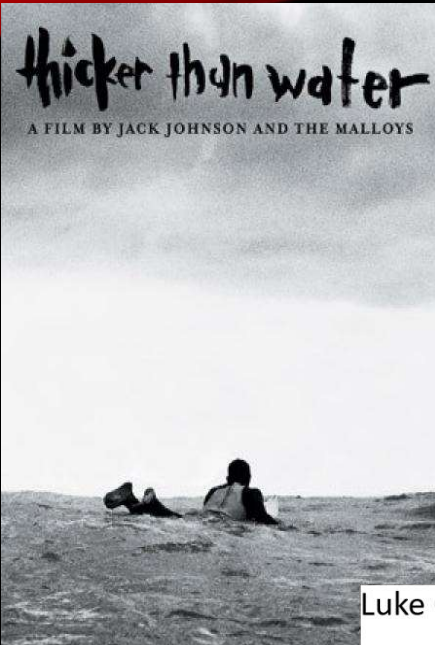


Street Art, Bundoran, 2015





AMERICAN AND BRITISH FILMS IN IRELAND



Luke Gibbons:

The absence of a visual tradition in Ireland, equal in stature to its powerful literary counterpart, has meant that the dominant images of Ireland have for the most part emanated from outside the country, or have been produced at home with an eye on the foreign market

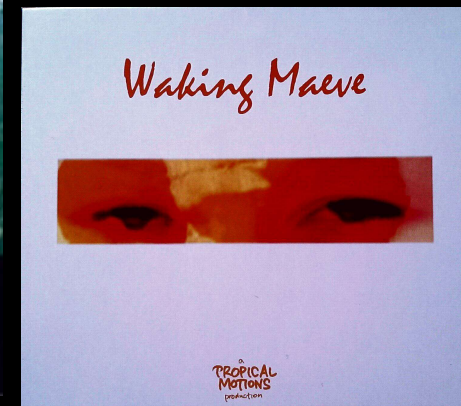
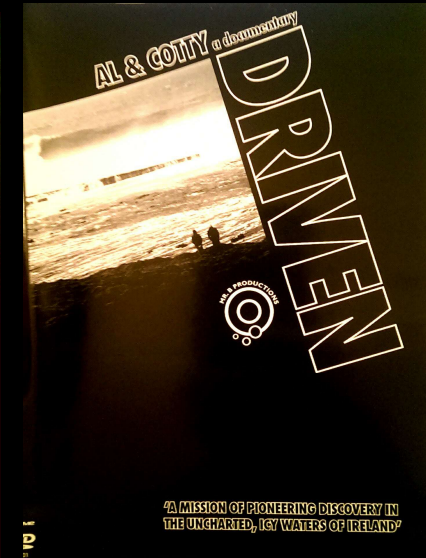
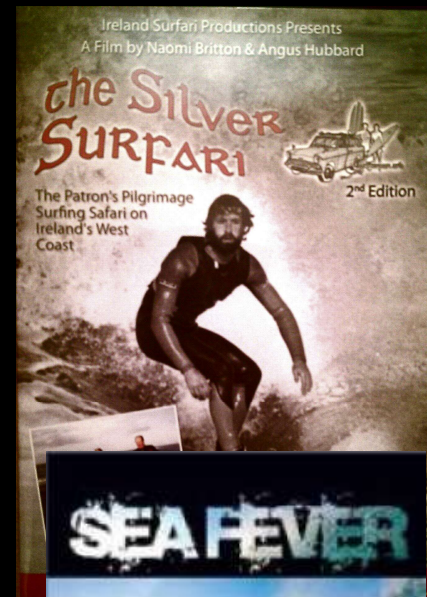
- As in wider Irish Cinema, American and British filmmakers were the first to occupy the representational space of Ireland in the surf film.
- In the 1990s, Ireland would serve as a space uncontaminated by the ills of consumerism and modern culture for US and Australian filmmakers.

EARLY HOME MOVIES ...



IRISH SURF FILM HISTORY: 2000 - 2010

- Vibrant surf film culture now exists in Ireland, part of a wider subculture.
- Distinct subgenre of Irish Cinema/Film
- Produced outside of mainstream industrial channel. Eclectic in form.
- Consist of subgenres: Documentary/Narrative Driven/Commercial films/Community Films/Abstract/Personal/Experimental/Short/full length/edits/Stream of consciousness.
- First decade dominated by Film and DVD releases.
- *Eye of the Storm* (Joel Conroy, 2002)
- New ways of representing and engaging traditional spaces
- Postmodern mythic culture
- Engagement with Irish language, culture, and traditional music.
- Surfing is positioned as part of 'folk' culture.





DARK SIDE OF THE LENS

KEY FILMMAKER: MICKEY SMITH



Key Film: (*Dark Side of the Lens*, 2010)

KEY FILM: WAVERIDERS (JOEL CONROY, 2008)

- Supported by the Irish Film Board.
- Narrated by Cillian Murphy, employs Wilde and Yeats in quotation.
- Conroy wanted the film to eschew stereotypes of Ireland and Irish people.
- Produced by Derry filmmaker Margo Harkin (Hush a Bye Baby)
- Follows the role of Irish-Hawaiian figure George Freeth, who partially introduced surfing to the American mainland.
- Also follows Donegal native Richie Fitzgerald as he recounts his story of surfing in Northwest Ireland.
- An separate edit of the film was made for release in Northern Ireland (also funded by BBC NI)
- Irish-American Malloy brothers recount their experience of Irishness.
- Global Irishness – 'all purpose identity credential'.



IRISH SURF FILM HISTORY: 2010 - 2021

- Wider changes in filmmaking culture reflected in the Irish surf film.
- Move to new modes of online exhibition although some cinema exhibition still takes place
- (Vimeo on Demand, Amazon Prime, etc)
- Explosion in production and video professionals in the west of Ireland, very often linked to surfing.
- Emergence of feminist texts – Dr. Easkey Britton as a ‘star’ of Irish surf film.
- New engagements with Irish masculinity
- Coastal representation from within the community has produced art that redresses centuries of outside romanticism.

Key Film: *Beyond the Noise* (Andrew Kainerder, 2017)

“It's an abstract film about our disconnection and connection with nature...using surfing as a catalyst for a bigger picture. Cities are growing, humans are multiplying and so we're kind of being drawn away from nature, from the natural environment and truly caring about it”



COMMERCIAL FILMS



FEMINIST SURF FILMS...

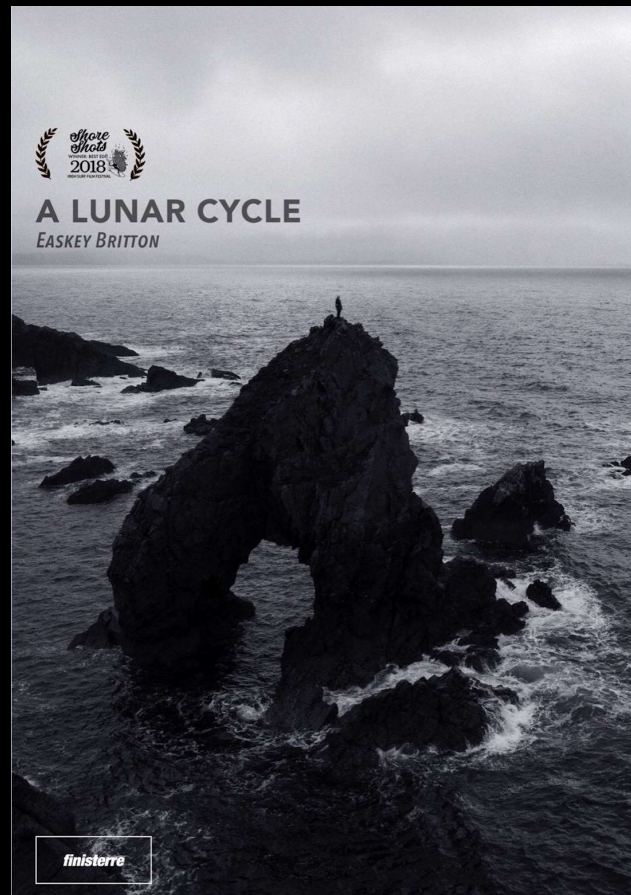


INTO THE SEA

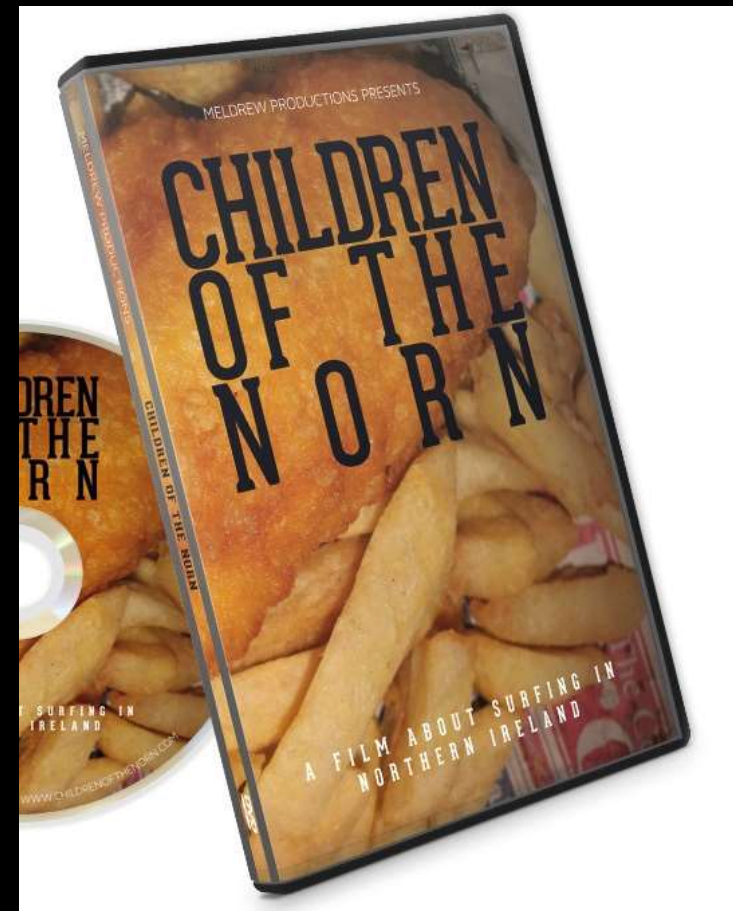
Directed by Marion Poizeau

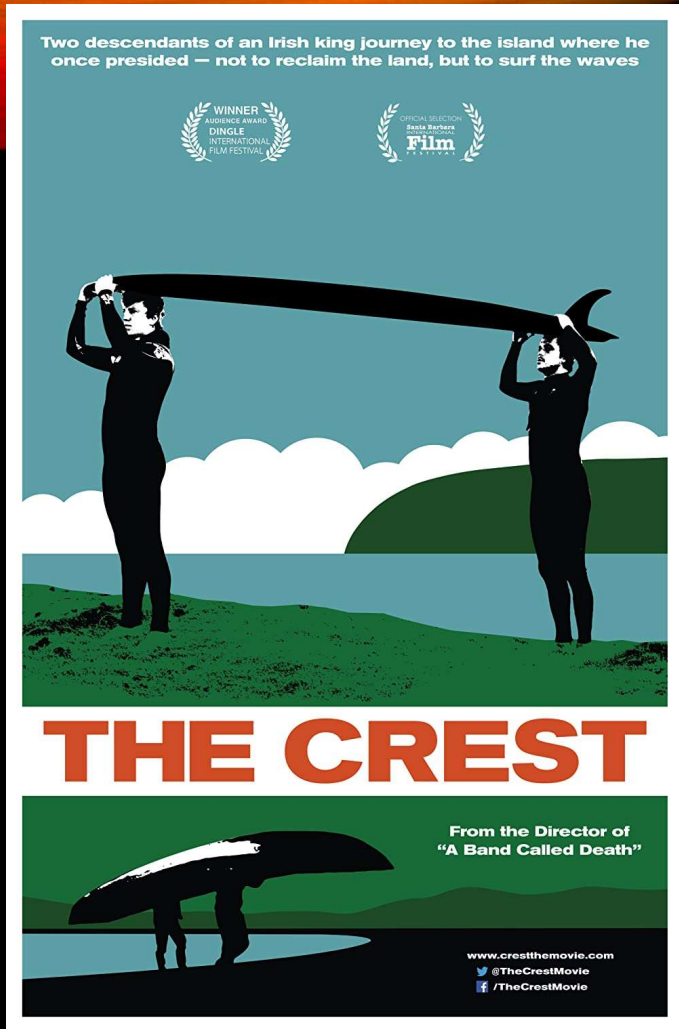


Edited by Bahman Kiarostami



NORTHERN IRISH SURF FILMS





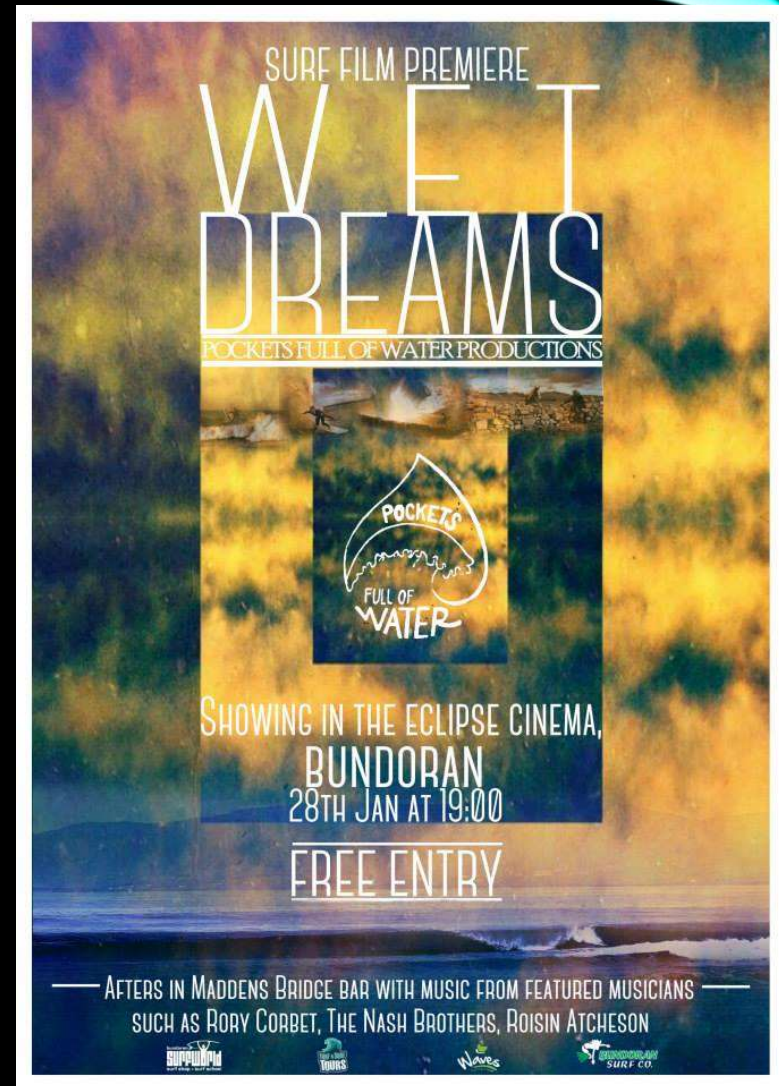
IRISH-AMERICAN SURF FILMS

The Crest (Mark Christopher Covino, Ireland/USA, 2017)

-Descendants of Irish immigrants return to Ireland to surf and discover their cultural heritage

- Portrays the 'fantasy of return' to an arcadian Ireland, not dissimilar to other cinematic and literary narratives.

COMMUNITY FILMS: A LIVING FILM CULTURE

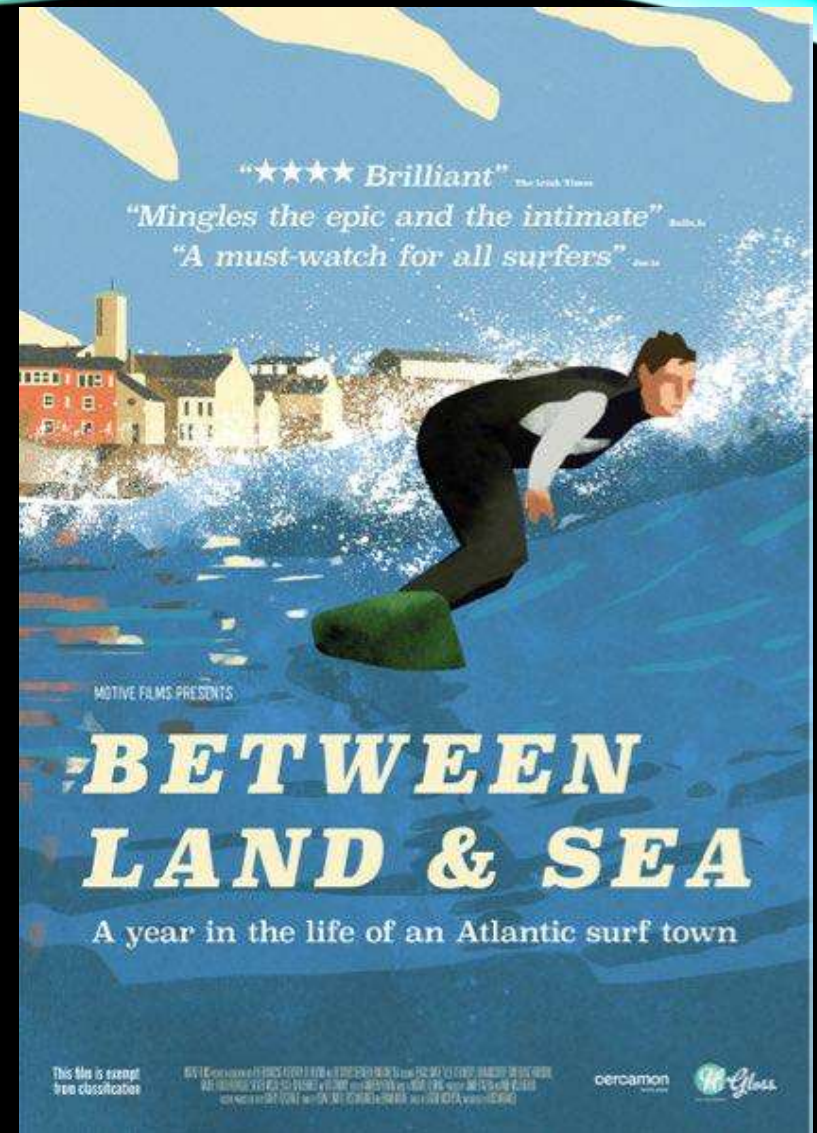


KEY TEXT: *BETWEEN LAND AND SEA* (ROSS WHITAKER, 2016)

- Documents 6 surfers over a year in the Clare town of Lahinch and the influence that surf culture now has over the town.
- Water cinematography by Kev. L. Smith

Ross Whitaker:

“who could have known that a low-budget but highly ambitious film about an Irish seaside town would sell out eight times in a row at venues in Dublin, Waterford, Cork and Ennis?!”



Keep It A Secret

The story of the dawn of surfing in Ireland

A film by Sean Duggan



MOST RECENT EXAMPLE...

SURF FILMS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN IRELAND



- Changing representations in national and regional identities
- Move from traditional to globalized, postmodern cultures
- Transformation in signs and symbols of Irishness, often entailing a loss of depth of meaning, often layering meaning.
- Marginalised areas in the west repositioned as empowered spaces
- Films represent and reflect a post celtic-tiger dematerialism
- A shift in representational meaning in Irish culture from urban Dublin to the West of Ireland
- Central to marketing of the 'Wild Atlantic Way' + Tourism
- Displays postnational/transnational film culture
- Online communities bridging previously disconnected local spaces.
- Environmentalism and ecological ideology embedded within the texts.
- Politically liberal and inclusive, but still predominantly masculine.
- Documents the emergence of a wider beach culture in Ireland, not dissimilar to Australia in the early 20th Century.



- Irish surf films are a form of subcultural filmmaking. They represent a growing genre of Irish film.
- They offer new modes of national and regional representation and new interpretations of Irish cultural identity.
- They can be critiqued in similar ways to other forms of Irish film, art and literature.
- Gunning's "Cinema of Attractions"
- Works of fiction
- Commodification of experience

"Surfing is a widescreen activity"

IN CONCLUSION...





THANK
YOU...

The
STRAND
BAR



GUINNESS
Surfing is good for you