

## MICHAEL MOTE

*Interconnected*, 2013  
Oil on Canvas, 30 x 40 in



COURTESY SPINDRIFT GALLERY

## FRANCES LEFKOWITZ

### Dry Season Losing and finding myself in the surf

Just three waves, my friend Sherie and I tell ourselves as we tramp down to our rocky Northern California break, only to see the waves blown out or too big or closed out or too small. Set the expectations low, avoid wishful thinking, abnegate all claims on magnificence, and simply try to catch a wave. Then another. Then another. That's all, and make it be enough. Not to get all Zen-and-the-art-of-surfing on you, but reined-in expectations can be an architect of happiness: low expectations, reduced hopes, and paying all attention to each step it takes to do whatever it is you're doing—such as catching one wave, then two, then three. Bobbing on the water by the base of the raggedly majestic Mount Tamalpais; in the distance, a thick tongue of fog obscuring all but two tips of the Golden Gate Bridge; the cold electricity of saltwater on my skin; and every once in a while the smooth canine head of a sea lion popping up beside me with inquisitive brown eyes: shouldn't this be enough? Yes, and sometimes it is.

And then there are those days when the waves are especially big or small or I'm feeling especially weak or out of practice, like I may have trouble lifting my own body in one snap from belly to feet, kicking my legs underneath myself in a single motion. Those are the days I am both questioning and congratulating myself for simply getting me and my board to the beach, for stripping down to skin in the overcast chill and pushing my body into the 4-mm-thick wetsuit and the neoprene gloves, booties, and hood. Those are the days I am whispering to myself as I wade into the cold water, my board at my side, doglike in its loyalty and companionship, in the way it stays just a leash-length away from me because in fact we are tethered by a leash. Those are the days I am saying aloud, for me and my dog to hear, "Just one wave."

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A person can make a meditation out of anything, and lately I have been making mine of listening. Unlike the cypress and eucalyptus of my local beach in my native state, the palm trees where I am now in coastal Costa Rica, in the province of Guanacaste, have no real scent. It's January, dry season, so what you smell is heat, interrupted by passing whiffs of cooking, brush burning, and whatever body lotion you happen to be wearing. Though I am sweating all the time, even at night, I can't seem to smell it. So when I