

SOPHIE



HELLYER

Sophie Hellyer's world is submerged in water. Hellyer has been surfing the icy waves along the coasts of the United Kingdom and Ireland since the age of 13. Off the board, she is a vocal feminist and ocean advocate.

Hellyer grew up in Devon, in southwest England, with the ocean at her feet. As a girl, she fell in love with surfing. However, she soon discovered that unlike the ocean, the sport was not always a neutral space. When she was 14, she was informed that she could not join the local surf club, as she was seen as a “distraction” for the boys. When she started competing—at the age of 15, Hellyer received a sponsorship from gear brand Roxy—she says the whole ordeal began to feel “mentally challenging” and that she became “alienated” from her beloved sport. When she went off to university, Hellyer used the opportunity to take a break and step away from her board.

A few years later, Hellyer moved to Ireland—a change of location that, in retrospect, seems quite significant for the advocacy that now defines her life and career. There, she spent her time growing

her own food on the organic vegetable farm she had made her home and, in her own words, “surfing quiet cold waves.”

In Ireland, Hellyer returned to the water, her board in tow. She began to revel in her sport again, and in the joys of surfing, without the pressures of competition or sponsorship. She found a community of women who braved the cold Atlantic waves year round, just like her, and she began to take issue with the lack of appreciation and acknowledgement of these everyday athletes. “When I moved to Ireland I started to notice how rare it was to see women in wetsuits in the media,” she explains. “In the films, photographs, magazines, and stories about the Irish coast you hardly ever see a woman surfing, but in reality, the line-up at my home break was always full of women charging year round. The more I research intersectional >