

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Francesca Gabbiani: Catch the Light

June 26 – September 11, 2021

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Catch the Light*, a project-room exhibition of new collages by Francesca Gabbiani—the artist’s sixth solo project at the gallery.

Francesca Gabbiani’s newest body of work—of women surfers hanging ten or riding tubes and nighttime vistas of bioluminescent waves underneath the glowing moon—arose from daily walks on Malibu beaches in 2020. Greater LA has long been a jumping-off point for Gabbiani’s work, so turning her attention to the ocean feels both fresh and cohesive. The new collages chronicle the wonder and solace the ocean provided the artist during an otherwise traumatic year, while simultaneously addressing the growing urgency to face climate change in a more substantial way.

In what Gabbiani calls her Surfette collages, blue-green waves capped with white foam rumble underneath cerulean skies. Female figures dance on candy-colored boards, seeming to glide smoothly and effortlessly across each page of churning, chaotic water. The sea and clouds and women are all intricately cut (by hand) from layers of watercolor paper. Even though each component in a collage has sharply defined edges, Gabbiani paints her waves with wet-on-wet layers of swirling gouache and ink, creating the illusion of sunlight filtering through translucent walls of water.

The bioluminescent waves are not quite so towering—they whisper instead of roar—but the searing electric glow of the water, the soft airbrushed haze in the sky, and the moon smoldering low over the horizon still make for dramatic seascapes. Gabbiani created these collages in response to a remarkable algae bloom she witnessed in Malibu last year—it made headlines and drew curious spectators out of quarantine. In the daytime, the algae turns the water a murky red, but at night, crashing waves activate the bloom’s luciferin, the same chemical that gives fireflies their luminescence. Although enchanting at night, the opacity of the algae blocks enough sunlight from fish and sea plants that many do not survive. Darker still—a red bloom (including the one in Malibu) comes from increased water runoff with elevated levels of toxic chemicals from farming, factories, and sewage treatment plants. The phosphorescent waves in Gabbiani’s collages might seem like natural wonders, but they likely point to human negligence—perhaps even environmental abuse.

Given this context, the images of women surfers transcend simple celebrations of summer fun, becoming instead models for a different way of conceptualizing our relationship to the natural world. When we see surfers riding epic waves in magazines and movies, the athletes are usually men. Year after year, they take on more massive sets, looking to outdo each other and prove their strength, fearlessness, machismo, and dominance. And so Gabbiani was

awestruck when she saw a woman surfing with an unfamiliar elegance and creativity—a different sort of energy than the usual domineering male surfers. She seemed to be dancing in symbiosis with the waves, as if water and light were her partners in collaboration, rather than adversaries to overcome.

Gabbiani's latest body of work asks us to consider what the world would look like if we understood the Earth and its processes and non-human inhabitants as forces to respect and collaborate with, rather than (taking the particularly masculine angle of) trying to bend Mother Nature to our will. A 2019 study by an Australian university found that governments with greater numbers of women in elected positions have successfully enacted more stringent climate policies than countries where men monopolize power structures. In government, as in the ocean, women simply take a different approach. Francesca Gabbiani's *Surfettes* make a quiet argument that perhaps achieving equal representation is the key to getting climate change under control.

Surf's up. Let's go. All of us together—but ladies, please lead the way.

Francesca Gabbiani was born in Montreal in 1965, grew up in Geneva, and lives and works in Los Angeles. She has received the Swiss Federal Award of Art three times and had a mid-career retrospective at Kunsthaus Centre d'art Pasquart (Switzerland). This fall Gabbiani will participate in *Earthbeats*, an exhibition at Kunsthaus Zürich, and soon she will complete post-production on her new short film, *Sea of Fire*, which explores cycles of destruction and rebirth in nature and the impacts of urbanization on the environment. Gabbiani has shown at Galleria d'Arte Moderna (Milan), KANAL—Centre Pompidou (Brussels), Kunstverein Wolfsburg (Germany), Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain (Geneva), Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), Tucson Museum of Art (Arizona), and Underground Museum (Los Angeles). Her work is in the collections of the Hammer Museum (Los Angeles), Hood Museum of Art (New Hampshire), Kunsthaus Centre d'art Pasquart (Switzerland), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Museum of Modern Art (New York), Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), UBS Art Collection (New York), and Yale University Art Gallery (New Haven).