

Charles Moffett

Charles Moffett is pleased to present *Overcome by Joy*, a solo exhibition of eight new works by London-based artist Gianna Dispenza (b. 1990, Washington State) that explore how emotive readings of figurative subject matter can be altered when context is added or removed. The show thoughtfully examines the role of narrative framework through the interpretation of emotion. Formally the works interrogate what materially constitutes a painting.

Dispenza's works on canvas straddle the mediums of painting and sculpture. The foundation of her first New York solo exhibition is a heavy reliance on the textural qualities of clay, rather than the broad representational capabilities of paint. Working with the sensibilities of a sculptor, but also adhering to the traditions of painting in many ways, including the initial incorporation of an underpainting, Dispenza's process begins physically, by pushing clay with her palms, building or reducing shapes and arrangements. She often combines unconventional materials, like volcanic ash or industrial grout.

Dispenza prioritizes tone, texture, and the non-hierarchical treatment of the picture plane. Thematically, however, each work allows for a myriad of readings. *Overcome by Joy*, the exhibition's eponymous painting, distills Dispenza's exploration of "an image or event understood in different ways, sometimes conflicting ways. The line between joy and grief is blurred at the extremity of emotion, and it's the thinness of that line that's interesting." Rather than working towards a singular interpretation, Dispenza welcomes the multiplicity of readings, and with surprising playfulness, invites the viewer to interrogate the boundary at which extremes break down.

'Overcome by Joy' was the headline for a newspaper clipping showing the tennis player Andy Murray collapsed in ecstasy. He'd won. But without the header, he could just as easily be buckling dejected and defeated. I like this complication. That's part of the reason I love the sports section, because the rapture of winning or losing is so pronounced, but visually it is often the headline that distinguishes between the two (it is also a rare space of intense intimacy, touch, and emotion among men). 'The World Raises its Arms,' a ten-foot triptych, is the other painting in the show that's based on a newspaper clipping. The original photograph is a group shot of all the world leaders, taken at the G7 summit in 2015. And here we have this kind of class photo of the great powers gathered together, doing nothing. Apart from the fact that there's only one woman, it could almost be a school photo of kindergarteners. Their distraction and absolute lack of composure is a little bit endearing, and a little bit terrifying.

A recent influence in Dispenza's life—and serving as the focus of her 'Bather' paintings—is her discovery of a natural women's-only bathing pond in London, which she was visiting every other day before the pandemic (she even chose her current home due to its proximity). The three 'Bather' paintings on view *Summer*; *Swimmer*; and *The Bathers* all address the emotional complexity of being inside or outside of the Ladies Pond by reimagining the compositional trope of 'bathers at a water's edge'. Whereas this archetype has been ubiquitously rendered through the voyeuristic male gaze of historically important artists, like Cézanne and Gauguin, Dispenza's 'Bather' works derive from her personal experiences. Dispenza explains that working in grayscale "removes some of the emotional associations with color and emphasizes the role of context." Many of the works in the show offer a variety of readings. For instance, the figurative subject in *Swimmer* appears to be treading water—but could also be interpreted as drowning. The works are about the interplay of context and a viewer's circumstantial perception.

Gianna Dispenza (b.1990) was born in the United States and has lived and worked across multiple countries, including the UK, Lebanon, Italy, Mexico, and Switzerland. In 2014, she graduated with a BFA in sculpture from the San Francisco Art Institute and received her MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art in 2020. Recent exhibitions include Charles Moffett Gallery, New York (2021), The Stable, S-Chanf Switzerland (2021), Art Verona (2020), König, London (2020), Bass & Reiner, San Francisco (2020), Studio of Yinka Shonibare, London (2020), Galleria Ramo, Italy (2019), The V&A, London (2019), Les Jardins d'Étretat, France (2019).