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New Museum to Present Major Exhibition of Works by Ellen Gallagher

**“Don’t Axe Me” to Bring Together Twenty Years of Works and
a New Series of Paintings**

June 19–September 15, 2013

New York, NY...Opening this summer, the New Museum will present the first major New York museum exhibition of the work of **Ellen Gallagher**. Spanning the past twenty years and including thirty works, “Don’t Axe Me” will provide one of the first opportunities to thoroughly examine the complex formal and thematic concerns of one of the most significant artists to emerge since the mid-1990s. The title of the exhibition, “Don’t Axe Me,” evokes her radical approach to image, text, and surface—drawing equally from modernism, mass culture, and social history. This focused survey at the New Museum will run concurrently with Gallagher’s exhibition at the Tate Modern, London (May 2013).

The exhibition traces the transformations, excavations, and accumulations of Gallagher’s practice through a number of her iconic paintings, drawings, prints, and film installations. A major new series of paintings will be presented alongside some of the artist’s most celebrated works. These include several of her early paintings, comprised of intricate drawings rendered on penmanship paper and collaged onto the surface of the canvas, as well as a selection of works on paper using watercolor, ink, cut paper, and other diverse materials. “Don’t Axe Me” will also feature the first New York presentation of *Osedax* (2011; made in collaboration with Edgar Cleijne)—an immersive environment consisting of 16mm film and painted slide projections inspired by a species of undersea worm that burrows into the bones of whale carcasses.

The exhibition highlights the humor, historical depth, psychological complexity, and formal inventiveness inherent in Gallagher’s rich oeuvre. “Don’t Axe Me” will be on view in the New Museum’s third- and fourth-floor galleries from **June 19–September 15, 2013**, and is organized by Gary Carrion-Murayari, Curator.



Ellen Gallagher, *Untitled*, 2012. Oil, ink, and paper on canvas, 24 x 24 in (61 x 61 cm). Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth Gallery

Over the past two decades, Gallagher has created a subtle and diverse body of work exploring notions of materiality, history, and language. In her early paintings, Gallagher dispersed fields of repeated bulging lips and eyes—borrowed from the imagery of minstrel performances—on grid-like backgrounds of penmanship paper. In constructing these works, which hover between drawing and painting, Gallagher inserted charged images into the language of modernist painting. She would continue to incorporate historical material in subsequent works—most famously using mid-century advertisements for African-American beauty products from *Ebony* magazine and other publications from the same period, abstracting the portraits of female wig models and their captions with stylized layers of yellow Plasticine, dabs of oil paint, pencil marks, and incisions directly into the paper. Gallagher’s formal processes exemplify the visual and linguistic transformation and historical reimagining that has defined her work ever since. These fragments continue to appear excised from their original context and subsumed into the rich layers of her paintings and drawings.

Gallagher’s visual cosmology has also continued to expand since the 1990s, including images and references to figures as diverse as writers Gertrude Stein and Herman Melville, the musician Sun Ra, Freud, and historical figures such as Eunice Rivers and Peg Leg Bates. She consistently creates surprising, dynamic relationships between characters, writing new narratives about the past and present in a manner that evokes both poetry and science fiction. Her work also reflects a sustained engagement with the natural world and, in particular, with the sea, both as a historical and cultural protagonist and as an inspiration for the kinds of formal explorations of complex figure-ground relationships she creates across the surfaces of her work. Through her unique technical approach, Gallagher produces fluid spaces where science, art, and popular culture continually meet, interact, and transform in novel ways.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by Gary Carrion Murayari, Curator.

Ellen Gallagher was born in 1965 in Providence, Rhode Island. She attended Oberlin College; SEA (Sea Education Association), Woods Hole, MA; Studio 70, Fort Thomas, KY; School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and Skowhegan School of Art, ME. Gallagher has had solo exhibitions and projects at a number of international institutions including the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2001), Des Moines Art Center (2001), the Drawing Center, New York (2002), the Whitney Museum of American Art (2005), the Freud Museum, London (2005), Tate Liverpool (2007), and South London Gallery (2009). She has participated in a number of major group exhibitions including the 1995 and 2010 Whitney Biennials, SITE Santa Fe’s Fifth International Biennial (2004), and “La Triennale” at the Palais de Tokyo (2012). Gallagher lives and works in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, and New York.

Support

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About the New Museum

The New Museum is the only museum in New York City exclusively devoted to contemporary art. Founded in 1977, the New Museum is a center for exhibitions, information, and documentation about living artists from around the world. From its beginnings as a one-room office on Hudson Street to the inauguration of its first freestanding building on the Bowery designed by SANAA in 2007, the New Museum continues to be a place of experimentation and a hub of new art and new ideas.

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