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Gagosian Presents *Ellen Gallagher: Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish* in Paris



Ellen Gallagher, *Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish*, 2025, oil, pigment, palladium, and paper on canvas, 116 5/8 x 79 1/2 inches (296 x 202 cm) © Ellen Gallagher. Photo: Thomas Lannes

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PARIS, March 26, 2026—Gagosian is pleased to announce *Ellen Gallagher: Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish*, on view through May 23 at the rue de Ponthieu gallery. The exhibition features a cycle of three large-scale paintings titled *Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish* that Gallagher produced between 2023 and 2026. Among these is a work featured in Gallagher's exhibition *All of No Man's Land Is Ours* at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2023–24).

Built upon canvas-mounted sheets of ruled, gridded paper that are stained in a vibrant pink hue, then layered with brilliantly colored, thickly impastoed pigment and incised palladium leaf, each of the *Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish* paintings employs a material abundance from which Gallagher's playful meditations emerge. She takes a sculptural approach to her process, often working paintings from multiple positions. Exploding their compositional grids into groupings of vibrant lines and biomorphic shapes, she melds Post-Minimalist abstraction with imagined ocean-floor topographies and phantasmal worlds.

Gallagher has long been fascinated by the ocean. Her 2010 film installation *Osedax*, a collaboration with Edgar Cleijne, opens with a shipwreck off the coast of Rhode Island, interspersing animated imagery of a whale fall—the descent of a whale carcass to the abyssal depths of the ocean floor—within a radiant network of sea flora and fauna.

The *Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish* series similarly considers this phenomenon of slow decomposition becoming an intertwined regenerative ecosystem. The whales' bodies support a profusion of life, from crustaceans and mollusks to bone-eating *Osedax* worms and specialized bacteria. Cross sections of the same bones suggest a shifting orientation within each picture plane, exploring the permeability between bodies and the environments they inhabit. For Gallagher, the seabed is inseparable from the historical marks of colonization and enslavement. In these works, tumbling caryatid forms inspired by African Fang sculptures join the whale bones amid strands of kelp and crinoid fossils.

Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) is an important source of inspiration for Gallagher. The series title, *Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish*, alludes to chapter 89 of the famously discursive novel, in which the author departs from the book's primary narrative to define "fast-fish," which have been claimed by a whaler, versus "loose-fish," which remain free of such claims.

This discussion develops into a wide-ranging reflection on the nature of possession and freedom. Melville further uses the microcosm of human conflicts and frailties on the ship to suggest broader struggles in American society. The book's publication coincided with the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), which legally obliged free states to return escaped fugitives to their enslavers in the South. Whaling ships were a place where Black men might find refuge. For the artist, we are the progeny of the novel's Pip, one of the earliest significant Black characters in American literature, whose grammars we inherit whether we like it or not. Pip's descent to the seabed is obliquely referenced in each of the *Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish* paintings. With their underlying grids of penmanship paper, above which hover imaginative and interspecific realms, Gallagher's works suggest a wealth of resources that can constitute possibilities on the other side of the Middle Passage.

A conversation between the artist and Robin D. G. Kelley, the Gary B. Nash Endowed Chair in United States History at the University of California, Los Angeles, will be held at the gallery on Saturday, March 28, at 11:30am.

For Ellen Gallagher's biographical information and exhibition history, [please visit gagosian.com](http://gagosian.com).

#EllenGallagher

ELLEN GALLAGHER

Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish

Opening reception: Thursday, March 26, 6–8pm

March 26–May 23, 2026

4 rue de Ponthieu, Paris

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