



The Art of “Me”

by Francesco Bonami

In Martin Scorsese’s movie *Taxi Driver*, from 1976, Robert De Niro alias Travis Bickle, in one of the most memorable scenes of the history of cinema, looks at himself in the mirror and asks, “Are you talking to me?!” The exceptional focus of Katrin Bellinger’s collection is the precursor of Travis Bickle’s intuition. In the making of art someone or something is always looking at “me.” The “me” is the author, the artist who is facing his or her enemy, which can be the white sheet of paper, the model, the subject of one’s own reflection. Nevertheless, the enemy is there, staring at this “me.” The most famous expression of Travis Bickle’s feeling is by far Velasquez’s masterpiece *Las Meninas*. In this canvas the exchange of gazes and reflections are simultaneously mesmerizing, confusing and challenging. Katrin Bellinger has chosen to build her collection around this inner timeless feeling shared by all the artists of the world. The uncertainty produced by the task of transforming reality through the passage through a different vision. The case can be reinforced by looking only at drawings, where the relationship between subject and object, reality and work of art is shortened and made direct. The mind, the hand, the pencil, the paper or the canvas. The process of drawing, differently from painting, reduces the power of gesture and enhances the power of the sign. The core of Katrin Bellinger’s collection is even more different, though. It is about the relationship of the artistic gesture with the surrounding space. When placed in a museum, like the Soane in London or the Teylers in Haarlem (Neth-

erlands), the works regain their autonomy, since those spaces act more as the architecture of the mind than as conventional exhibiting institutions where history gets the upper hand over individuality and identity. A collection—as is very well expressed by the Soane Museum—is a matter of identity and inner certainties, which Katrin Bellinger expresses very aptly in the selection she has made to manifest her way of collecting. She must have experienced the Bickle syndrome either as the subject looked at by an object, or as the witness of an object’s reaction to her craving gaze. Are you looking at me? How many paintings and drawings must have asked this question, challenging her choice or possible rejection. Most of the time works exist at a certain safe distance, maintained by the viewer. We peek more than look into the privacy of creation, the silence of concentration, fearing to intrude and disrupt that delicate balance that has been established with great difficulty between the author and the subject. I would say that all of Katrin Bellinger’s collection is about the fear of disruption, the fear of transforming intimacy into public spectacle. In an age where spectacle is fundamental for human interaction, Katrin Bellinger’s collection reminds us that something else exists, hidden from the eyes of the crowd. The gift of looking through the crack of a door or a window frame at a different and symbolic space, the space of creation. In the best Travis Bickle tradition, the final confrontation in art is between “you” and “me.” Are you looking at me? Yes, I am!











