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# COLLECTING WITH INTENT

*Many motivations can lie behind the practice of collecting art, from personal passions or aesthetic interests to supporting contemporary artists or continuing a family legacy. Furthermore, collecting can be driven by a desire to affect change, both within and outside of the world of art.*

*Discover the purposeful approaches behind the collections of Katrin Bellinger and Tunji Akintokun, who have established their collections of works on paper and African contemporary art, respectively, with impact that reaches beyond the walls of their homes.*

*This new series, presented in partnership with AXA XL, investigates the philosophies behind Bellinger's and Akintokun's collections—how they developed their interests and connoisseurship, how they shaped their collections, and how their collections presented opportunities to contribute to philanthropic endeavors within and beyond the art world.*

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In collector Katrin Bellinger's home, *Miss Helena Beatson* (1767) by Katherine Read on display above the living room mantle. Placed on the mantle, *Vera Icon/Self-Portrait 10* (2010) by Caspar Berger and a Zappler clock inherited from Bellinger's grandmother. Photo: Alixe Lay.



# KATRIN BELLINGER

BY LUCY SCOVELL  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALIXE LAY

A selection of 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>-century drawings from Bellinger's collection, with *Model in the Studio* by Maxime Dethomas on display in the center.  
Photo: Alixe Lay.



Collecting art is a passion, an obsession," says the Old Master drawings specialist, collector, and former dealer Katrin Bellinger. "It brings me so much happiness."

Over the past three decades, Bellinger has assembled a collection of over 1,800 artworks, including drawings, paintings, prints, photographs, and sculptures, from the Renaissance to the present day. It includes notable works by Parmigianino, Rembrandt, Tiepolo, and Seurat, as well as standout works by leading women artists including Marie-Gabrielle Capet, Lisa Brice, and Chantal Joffe.

Many of these depict a singular motif: the artist at work. "I went to art school in New York, as I had always dreamed of being an artist, but soon realized that my talent was rather limited," she says, laughing. "The experience deepened my fascination with the artistic process, though, and the mystique around making, so the subject of creative production instantly appealed when I began to collect seriously in the late 1980s." Focusing on a singular theme was also a way of differentiating her interests as a collector from those as a dealer: "I always wanted to keep the things that would sell the easiest," she explains. "When I started out, I had a couple of drawings depicting the artist at work and so I decided to center my own collection around this subject to avoid a conflict of interest."

Bellinger was drawn to works on paper from the beginning because, she says, "they were not only more affordable than paintings but also offer a glimpse into the artist's mind." In recent years, she has introduced paintings, sculptures, and photographs into the mix

and explored the collection's central theme in novel ways to prevent it from feeling "too repetitive." The collection now includes, among others, self-portraits of the artist at work, photographs of the artist's model, as well as paintings and prints of artists' tools. The core strength of the collection, however, remains Old Master drawings, in particular 18<sup>th</sup>-century French drawings. Among the highlights are Jean-Honoré Fragonard's *The Inspiration of the Artist*, Hubert Robert's red chalk drawing of an artist in his studio from circa 1763-65, and Anne Guéret's portrait of a female artist with a portfolio from circa 1793.

Although Bellinger is no longer dealing in drawings, she still enjoys the hunt as a collector. "I still go to art fairs and auctions as you never know what you will find around the corner," she says. "That is the thrill of this life." What does she dream of adding to the collection? "I would love another great drawing from the Italian Renaissance," she says.

For a new work to enter Bellinger's collection, it has to evoke a visceral reaction in her or enhance the collection narrative in some way. "But I would never buy a work I did not like," she says. "You do have to live with it after all." Today, Bellinger's home is filled with a variety of artworks, all arranged in happy juxtaposition. "The joy of building a collection is provoking unexpected conversations between pieces," she says. Another reward is sharing it with those with similar interests. "I particularly enjoy visits where I get feedback," she says. "You never know what you are going to learn from someone looking at a work with a fresh perspective."

Opposite: Katrin Bellinger in front of self-portraits by Emile Friant (c. 1884), Daniel Maclise (c. 1826-27), and William Daniels (c. 1850). On the mantle, Not Vital's *Untitled (Self-Portrait)* (1995) and a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Inuit-Inupiaq mask. Photo: Alixe Lay.

The current hang is focused on British women artists. Central to the display is an 18<sup>th</sup>-century pastel by Katherine Read depicting her niece, the child prodigy Helena Beatson. It is a recent addition to the collection and is set to go on display in Tate Britain's forthcoming exhibition titled *Women Artists in Britain: 1520-1920* from May 16 through October 13, 2024.

For Bellinger, lending works from her collection to museum exhibitions is an important means of furthering understanding of the artists and artistic movements represented in her collection. By way of example, she cites the recent *Connecting Worlds: Artists & Travel* exhibition at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden. "It was an opportunity for us to research a certain aspect of the collection in depth and to work with a brilliant team on the accompanying catalog," she says.

As well as actively lending works to museums, Bellinger serves on the boards of the National Gallery in London and the Tate. She also runs the Tavolozza Foundation (*tavolozza* meaning "palette" in Italian), a non-profit she established in 2001 with the aim of heightening the accessibility and awareness of works on paper. In recent years, the foundation has supported a wide range of activities, from special exhibitions to digitization programs.

"It is so important that good quality images of works on paper are made available to the public online," she says, explaining that Old Master drawings in museums are often stored in print rooms due to their sensitivity to light. "In a lot of cases, the public may not even know they exist." To further her mission, Bellinger has also created an Instagram account, @The.Artists.at.Work, where she spotlights important works on paper as well as a website

detailing recent acquisitions, collection highlights, and the foundation's activities.

Of all the organizations and special projects the foundation has supported, Bellinger is keen to highlight the Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions (AWARE), a non-profit whose goal is the creation, indexation, and distribution of information on women artists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. "This brilliant resource is heightening awareness of women artists past and present, many of whom have been overlooked for too long," she says.

In 2024, the Tavolozza Foundation will sponsor a James Ensor exhibition in Brussels and a show in Berlin centered on Maarten van Heemskerck's drawings of Rome. As for the future of the Katrin Bellinger Collection, "that is a big dilemma," she says. "Looking after big collections, especially of works on paper, can be very tedious."

Her two sons, however, are interested in taking it on and shaping its legacy. She credits, for instance, her decision to expand into the contemporary sector to her eldest son Paul Henkel, a contemporary art dealer in New York. "Broadening the collection's scope has enabled me to commission new pieces and to acquire more works by women artists," she says with great enthusiasm. It is also a way of introducing new audiences to the collection. "Younger people are often less intimidated by contemporary art," she says. "But many contemporary artists like Glenn Brown draw inspiration from the past. They prove the relevance of classic works today."

Will she ever stop collecting? "Absolutely not," she says, laughing. "But it is nice to be at a point in life where I can give back to a field that I feel so passionate about."



*Self-Portrait on Artist's Palette* (1887) by Franz Ritter von Felbinger next to a table with a 16<sup>th</sup>-century *Female Mannequin*, a small *Self-Portrait* by Francesco Paolo Michetti and a *Self-Portrait* by Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier, as well as various contemporary bowls by Takahiro Kondo, Stephen Cox, and Ben Gaskell on display. Photo: Alixe Lay.



*Portrait of Katrin Henkel* (2023) by Eileen Cooper placed above *Fruttiera* (1990) by Andreas Schulze, in Bellinger's bedroom. Photo: Alixe Lay.



A selection of drawings depicting women artists in Bellinger's living room, including *Amateur Pastellist at her Easel* (c. 1737) by Arthur Pond, *Miss Helena Beatson* (1767) by Katherine Read, and *The Drawing Lesson* (1790s) by Gijsbertus Johannus van den Berg. Photo: Alixe Lay.



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*Woman by Niji Olagunju. from the collection of Tunji Akintokun. Photo: Alixe Lay.*