This event, organised by Antje Kramer-Mallordy and her colleagues at the Archives de la critique d’art, marked the culmination of the 30th anniversary celebrations of the founding of the ACA in 1989 and the end of a year-long programme of seminars, publications and public events. It was postponed from January 2010, on account of the strikes and public unrest at the time.

The organisers succeeded in bringing together some 30 representatives of the three principal institutional supporters of the ‘Groupement d’intérêt commun’ (GIS), established in 2014 to protect the long-term interests of the archives – namely, the Association des critiques d’art (AICA), whose members and networks have provided the (already) 2.3 linear kilometres of archival material that constitute the collection; the National Institute of Art History, in Paris (INHA, established after AICA, in 2000), which now legally owns the collection; and the University of Rennes 2, which provides the premises and funds the staffing and services; together with representatives, primarily, of Rennes Metropole, the City of Rennes and local artistic institutions, such as the Art School, Art Museum and contemporary art spaces, including the FRAC (Fonds Régional d’Art Contemporain) and the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme en Bretagne (MSHB), which have supported the ACA, in varying measure, mostly from the very beginning. In addition to Antje Kramer-Mallordy, the ACA was represented by its former director, Nathalie Boulouch, who had skilfully guided the organisation through four years of change, uncertainty and expansion, and all their colleagues from the ACA: Jelena Le Magoarou (administration), Laurence Le Poupon (archives), Sylvie Mokhtari (review Critique d’art) and Emmanuelle Rossignol (library).

AICA was represented by Jean-Marc Poinsot, the founding President of the Archives and Professor Emeritus of Art History at the University of Rennes 2, and Jacques Leenhardt, a past president of AICA International and AICA France, who represents AICA on the Governing Board of the GIS, along with Elisabeth Couturier, the current president and Christoph Domino, a past president of AICA France, Elisa Rusca, from AICA Switzerland and Henry Meyric Hughes, past international president of AICA UK and international president of AICA, who represents AICA on the Scientific and Cultural Council of the Archives, along with numerous members of
Olivier David, president of the University of Rennes 2, spoke enthusiastically in support of the ACA, both as an engine of research and for its social utility. Donors were represented, for example, by Irene Weidmann, the former head of exhibitions at the Council of Europe, in Strasbourg, and Djilali Kadid, painter, art critic and journalist.

The principal events, from 14.00 to 19.00 on Wednesday 4 March, comprised an initial round table discussion, on ‘Constellations institutionelles’, covering the history, purpose and institutional background of the Archives, as well as their long-term perspectives, in both a national and an international dimension; a second round table, on ‘Constellations critiques’ led by Christoph Domino and Jean-Marc Huitorel (Chair of the ACA’s Scientific and Cultural Council) involved the participation of AICA members Elisabeth Couturier, Florian Gaité, Elisa Rusca and Tristan Trémeau. The meeting was rounded off with a specially commissioned lecture by the philosopher, Georges Didier-Huberman, in which he explored some of the theoretical issues associated with forming, preserving and promoting an archive, with special reference to his own studies of Aby Warburg, Erwin Panofsky, Walter Benjamin and others.

Up to one hundred people, to a large extent comprising students and art professionals, in addition to the thirty or so delegates and a handful of members of the general public, attended the main proceedings. The ACA team made excellent arrangements and provided generous hospitality. The day itself started with a morning visit to the premises of the ACA, where three small-scale displays of documentary and archival material had been arranged. Those who were able to stay on for the following day were also invited to join a programme of guided visits, organised by AICA France, to the FRAC Bretagne, the Galerie Art & Essai, the Museum of Fine Arts, the contemporary art space La Criée, the publishing house L’endroit éditions and a vernissage of works by Vincent Malassis at the Phakt Gallery.

Overall, this special programme marked a high point in the history of the ACA, and a fitting conclusion to the three-year PRISME programme to digitalise AICA International’s institutional archives, from 1948 to 2003, with funding from the Fondation de France. It celebrated the achievement of the ACA’s new statute, as GIS, which promises to ensure a stable future for the
organisation – the only one of its kind in existence – and underpins the basis for future development and expansion, especially on the international level, with the aid of AICA, as always and the backing of France’s highly respected National Institute for the History of Art (INHA). At the very least, it has also served very effectively to draw attention to the vision and principles behind the founding of the ACA and highlighted a number of exemplary actions (publications, digital activities, talks, debates, residencies, exchanges, artistic collaborations, scientific and educational activities) that we may hope will provide a foundation for future growth and engagement with research bodies and a wider public. The ACA is a precious resource and a ‘community of ideas and interests’ (Jean-Marc Huitorel) that AICA’s members, wherever they are, may contribute to in a variety of ways, and learn to cherish and use for their own professional ends. Our thanks go to all the organisers, backers and participants in this special occasion!

hmh. 7.3.20