Publishing and Art Criticism

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- 1 In 1991, the Archives de la critique d'art brought together various publishers¹ and the contemporary art public for a symposium on art publishing² held in Rennes. Backed by the Ministry of Culture, publishers and art critics, the journal *Critique d'art* duly launched its first issue in May 1993, combining a demanding critical approach with practical information, aimed at making it easier to distribute books about contemporary art, using the Quebec bulletin *Arttexte* as one model among others. Jean-Pierre Criqui, Elisabeth Lebovici, Jacques Leenhardt, Roland Recht, Daniel Soutif and Andrzej Turowski all joined the first editorial board. One initial requirement stipulated by *Critique d'art* was a comprehensive treatment of French publications (books and catalogues alike). The review would thus gradually act as a watchdog overseeing the activities of publishers and authors in the field of contemporary art in France, and in the French-speaking world. As it made the most of its role as a bibliographical tool, a reading guide, and a medium for critical reflection, *Critique d'art* would provide reading keys for understanding how literature dealing with 20th and 21st century art was produced. It became clear, in no time, that the journal could only fulfil this brief by opening up to the international scene. From then on, coverage of current art events became selective, yet without becoming confined to just the prevailing art scenes, or overlooking minorities and their challenges.
- 2 This is how the distinctive character of *Critique d'art* has come into being. Just as the Archives de la critique d'art have developed on the basis of a close collaboration with donors, the review has been nurtured by the participation of publishers, bookshops and others professionally involved with books, and the establishment of a scientific network of writers and advisers. More than 1,400 publishers have submitted their books to us, and, to date, 12,288 books and catalogues have thus been selected, identified and referenced in the form of bibliographical processing guaranteeing that these works acquire visibility in libraries, educational and research establishments, and the like. Added to these cohorts have been writers who also number in the thousands, with close on a hundred associated with each issue.

- 3 Over the years, *Critique d'art* has worked hand in hand to improve the professionalization of contemporary art publishing, holding up a mirror which, unlike many search engines and algorithms, provides a more subtle and precise image of what is being thought and written. The review is in step with the whole community of artists and authors, critics, theoreticians and historians, from their emergence to their assertive presence in major works, and we are ever more attentive to sounding them out. The sheer bulk of publications which arrive on our desk every six months has prompted us to train our youngest colleagues, and ensure that there are enough of them to share the reading of new books and catalogues, and that a critical know-how is being handed down. But our goals are not statistical. For each issue, we strive to offer an understanding of art that is assisted by the way our headings develop, these being so many ways of questioning new approaches, artistic, theoretical and historical alike, to the societal challenges of art, and our observation of it. The attention paid to authors invariably goes hand-in-hand with that paid to artists. This is why each major stage in our history is marked by an original proposal. To celebrate the publication of our 50th issue, we have chosen to highlight Elisabeth Ballet, who has been particularly generous in her project. To the contributions in the pages of *Critique d'art*, she has added an original print specially designed for our collector readers.
- 4 *Critique d'art* is read online by more than 300,000 readers each year, and it is always our aim that this should be just the first step in their (your) access to books on art and to artworks.
- 5 Enjoy!

NOTES

1. The first publishers to come forward and support the creation of *Critique d'art* were Deyrolle, Aldines, Jacqueline Chambon, Joca Seria, Flammarion, Macula, la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, museums like the CAPC in Bordeaux, the Musée de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix, the Musée des beaux-arts in Nantes, the Musée Ziem, the Musée des beaux-arts in Calais, contemporary art centres like La Criée, the Nouveau Musée/Institut, the Magasin in Grenoble, the Quartier in Quimper, the Villa Arson in Nice, and, needless to add, the Regional Contemporary Art Collections (FRACs) of Basse-Normandie, Brittany, Corsica, Languedoc-Roussillon, and Limousin, among others.
2. *Edition et critique d'art*, a conference organized by the Archives de la critique d'art in partnership with the Association internationale des critiques d'art – Section française, on 7 December 1991. Participants included Dominique Carré, Jacqueline Chambon, Macula (Jean Clay), L'Echoppe / Galerie Lelong (Patrice Cotensin) and the art critics Jean-Pierre Criqui, René Denizot, Catherine Francblin, Claude Gintz, Bernard Martin, Jean-Louis Maubant, Jean-Marc Poinot, Daniel Soutif, and Catherine Strasser.