

Karen Rosenberg, 'Memorial and Mold, Flecked With Nearly Everything', New York Times, 25 January 2008

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ART REVIEW | JAN DE COCK

### Memorial and Mold, Flecked With Nearly Everything

By KAREN ROSENBERG

The word *denkmal* translates from German as monument or memorial. In Dutch it is a mold for thought. Both definitions fit the work of Jan De Cock, a 31-year-old Belgian artist who appropriates and arranges photographs in what might be viewed as an open-ended yet ultimately conservative encyclopedia.

"Denkmal 11, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, 2008" is Mr. De Cock's first museum show in the United States. Overflowing with references to modern art, experimental film, photography and architecture, the project pulls most of the museum into its orbit.

As its title suggests, "Denkmal 11" is the latest in a series (previous sites include Tate Modern and the Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt). It is also the starting point of a yearlong project called "American Odyssey," for which Mr. De Cock will travel to and document [Jackson Pollock's](#) Long Island studio, [Frank Lloyd Wright's](#) Fallingwater in Pennsylvania and other cultural landmarks around the country.

Mr. De Cock has described his work as "film montage in space." Photographs and photomontages in austere black frames are clustered on the walls, some as high as the ceiling or as low as the floor. In some of these groupings, smaller photographs are arranged on white backgrounds. Others are partly obscured by white mats with peekaboo cutouts, or by sculptural interventions in the form of slotted plywood boxes.

In an interview with the curator Roxana Marcoci, Mr. De Cock said: "To me Modernism is the most important period in art history. Dare I say that postmodernism did not exist?" His art incorporates elements of De Stijl, Russian Constructivism and Kurt Schwitters's collage/studio *Merzbau*, among other things.

He nevertheless pays tribute to one of the giants of postmodernism, Marcel Broodthaers — the Belgian who mocked [MoMA](#) and other museums in the late 1960s by turning his home into a fictional "Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles." Mr. De Cock's installation includes a photograph of an eagle perched over a doorway. (Visible through that doorway are stop-motion photographs by Eadweard Muybridge, another influence).

To his credit, Mr. De Cock does not just rehash museum highlights; he trains an eye on the hidden lives of art objects outside the galleries. He took many of the photographs for "Denkmal 11" from MoMA's galleries, film theater, conservation lab, frame shop and library. Several photographs in the installation show famous artworks in the lab: the corner of an [Edward Hopper](#) painting, a basketball from a [Jeff Koons](#) sculpture. Another photograph shows an image of Barnett Newman's "Vir Heroicus Sublimis" on a computer monitor.

Other photographs show pieces of the artist's 2005 installation at Tate Modern. (He frequently recycles images from earlier projects.) Also included are exterior shots of architecture in Buffalo and the ornate interiors of the George Eastman house in Rochester. Film is the most salient point of reference; objects appear from different angles, sometimes separated by a thick black line that suggests celluloid.

Viewers can choose to navigate the installation with Mr. De Cock's complex, quasi-conceptual index. Objects (photographs and sculptures) are grouped into 13 modules, corresponding to times of day. Each object within a module is labeled with a location (often including a street address) or with a reference to a page in the artist's multivolume encyclopedia. Most people will not find this system useful, and some will find it maddening.

Mr. De Cock has said that his "Denkmals" were inspired by [Jean-Luc Godard](#)'s multipart collage-film "Histoire(s) du Cinéma" (1988-98). They also sit squarely within the tradition of photographic archives like [Gerhard Richter](#)'s "Atlas," a continuing compendium of images that sometimes function as source material for his paintings. A glimpse of the cover of the most recent edition of "Atlas" can be seen in Mr. De Cock's installation.

Like Mr. Richter, Mr. De Cock collects his photographs in book form: giant, impenetrable volumes that are frequently cross-referenced in the exhibition.

But while Mr. Richter's archive functions as a repository of repressed family and national history (it includes horrifying images of concentration camp victims), Mr. De Cock's archive is impersonal and overwhelmingly tasteful.

Beholden as it is to retro film and theory, "Denkmal 11" could almost have been made 30 years ago — or 70 years ago. It's not surprising that MoMA's curators gave Mr. De Cock the run of the building, but it's hard to shake the feeling that they should be breaking molds, not making them.

*"Jan De Cock: Denkmal 11, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, 2008" continues through April 14 at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, Manhattan.*