

documentation céline duval

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Too

in: *Artforum*,
September 2010

The artist Céline Duval, who chooses to be known as documentation céline duval (all lowercase) has steadily built up a huge stock of photographs and classified them according to personal impulse. She is best known for her appropriation of amateur photographs, notably from family albums. Regrouping pictures on the basis of recurrences in pose, subject, or composition, she reproduces them in artist's books or blows them up in digital slide shows and as prints. Staging new focal points within the photographs, dcd effectively disorganizes the memories crafted by the albums. Her frequent choice of jovial pictures, however, makes it hard not to think that she is primarily creating monuments to the golden days of photography, when, for example, friends and family would willingly pose in acrobatic formation.

Her series *Les Allumeuses, 1998–2010* (*The Teases*, or *The Igniters*; all works 2011) represents a powerful rift within that oeuvre. Begun in 1998—when Duval started to collect and categorize advertisements and other pictures from women's and general-interest magazines to combat the bafflement their inane thematic trends inspired—this series did not find its form until 2010, when she became fed up with both the pictures themselves and the ultra-capitalist ethos they promote. She decided to burn this part of her stock. The eleven videos in this show, each titled *Les Allumeuses, 1998–2010*, with a subtitle, are static shots of neat piles of magazine clippings on a brick hearth. Each video, tightly framing a stack of cuttings, shows a hand picking up a picture from the pile and immediately taking it off camera. We hear it being crumpled. And we hear the fire it has just fed. Picture by picture, the pile diminishes until it's gone. The stacks are grouped according to recurrent details: props such as telephones, swings, or tree trunks; settings such as swimming pools; forms such as circles and spheres; literal or implicit gestures such as masturbation. The extent to which the subjects in dcd's clippings bend and twist themselves out of shape for the camera is staggering.

dcd's burnings are anything but dramatic. Nor are they ceremonious. The camera films from an informal angle while reflections from the fire slightly obscure the documents. The artist's decision to perform the incineration off-screen circumvents even the beauty of a burning photograph. Such printed matter usually ends up in the dump anyway, if not as tinder for the fireplace. In the long feminist history of taking images from magazines, most artists, from Hannah Höch on, have employed photomontage. In dcd's case, there is no collage, just crisp, squarely cut pictures. Perhaps the closest comparison for her work would be that of the little-known Marianne Wex, who in 1979 published the book *Let's Take Back Our Space: "Female" and "Male" Body Language as a Result of Patriarchal Structures*, which brings together a vast archive of found photographs of the human figure mixed in with her own pictures, all categorized according to bodily postures. The material singularity of dcd's *Les Allumeuses*, however, is that in filming her thoughtfully ordered clippings destined for destruction, she managed to orchestrate a montage in one continuous static shot.

dcd came to a point in her work where she had to burn it, incinerating twelve years worth of pictures selected from magazines, all carefully trimmed and classified. The bold incisiveness of her gesture is plain in the fact that its only remnant is a nonsacralized digital recordings. Ironically, a pigment-ink print at the far end of the gallery reproduces an ad for archival boxes, something dcd will need fewer of after this reduction of her personal image bank.