

## Aarhus School of Architecture // Design School Kolding // Royal Danish Academy

### dust-cot, a cast of interior affinities

Foote, Jonathan; Dayer, Carolina

*Publication date:*  
2023

*Document Version:*  
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for pulished version (APA):*  
Foote, J., & Dayer, C. (2023). dust-cot, a cast of interior affinities. Exhibition

#### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

#### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

## ***dust-cot*, a cast of interior affinities**

*I am dying again the little death which broods forever in the Regina Hotel: along the mouldering corridors, the geological strata of potted ferns, the mouse-chawed wainscoting which the death-watch ticks.* Lawrence Durrell, *The Black Book*, 1938

The wainscot is of English origin, initially referring to wood paneling used to finish an interior wall, often made with high quality oak. Panel designs mimicked hanging tapestries, called ‘linenfold panels (*lignis undulates*)’, or were carved with figural reliefs in vines and fruits, so as to invoke climbing plants. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, following advances in labor-saving plastering, the wooden wainscot was brought down to half-height, a thrifty covering that preserved the otherwise finished surface from chair knocking and rubbing. Some wainscot motifs were copied in whitewashed plaster or wood moldings, as is clear from Vilhelm Hammershøi’s, *Dust Motes Dancing in Sunbeams*, from 1900.

One of the many finishing traditions abandoned from the bourgeois interior during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was the wainscot, following the need to introduce smooth, easy to clean and more hygienic surfaces into domestic space.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis on cleanliness and health went hand-in-hand with a novel understanding of common, household dust as “matter out of place”.<sup>2</sup> Whatever collected or attracted dust, such as moldings, wall panels, upholstery and curtains, were eventually relegated to the dust-bin of architectural history. The elimination of these elements led to notion of the modern, dust-baring finish that was bright, smooth and easily cleaned.

The visibility of dust-as-dirt led to the growth of cleaning labor, and eventually to the proliferation of the domestic devices needed to collect dust. Global market value of vacuum cleaners, invented at precisely the moment the wainscot was disappearing, is currently \$12 billion annually.<sup>3</sup> However, the modern project of finishing-by-dusting has not led to dust elimination; on the contrary, to a greater obsession with controlling and removing it. The wainscot not only collected dust, it effectively camouflaged it. What was once a finish to protect the wall, the wainscot, has been replaced by a pathological approach to *finishing as cleaning*.

As a study on the relation of interior dust to the interior finish, we propose to make and install a site-specific, semi-permanent wall panel, called *dust-cot*, a transformed version of the wainscot that is finished itself by a coat of dust. *Dust-cot* will be specifically designed, through material and surface relief, as an invitation for the dust-motes of the WAAC to act as slow and unremitting agents in its own finishing. In this way, similar to Marcel Duchamp and May Ray’s experiment with ‘dust breeding’, the WAAC *dust-cot* expresses the futility of the finish as a modern directive to repel dust. It thus has a mandate (sought through an agreement with the university cleaning company) to never have the dust removed as long as it remains installed.

The site of the *dust-cot* in the WAAC building should be determined in coordination with the organizers. Its anticipated size is approximately 36 x 72 inches, assembled in multiple, thin plaster panels.

---

<sup>1</sup> Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant* (Berg, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (Routledge, 1966); Joseph A. Amato, *Dust: A History of the Small and the Invisible* (University of California Press, 2000).

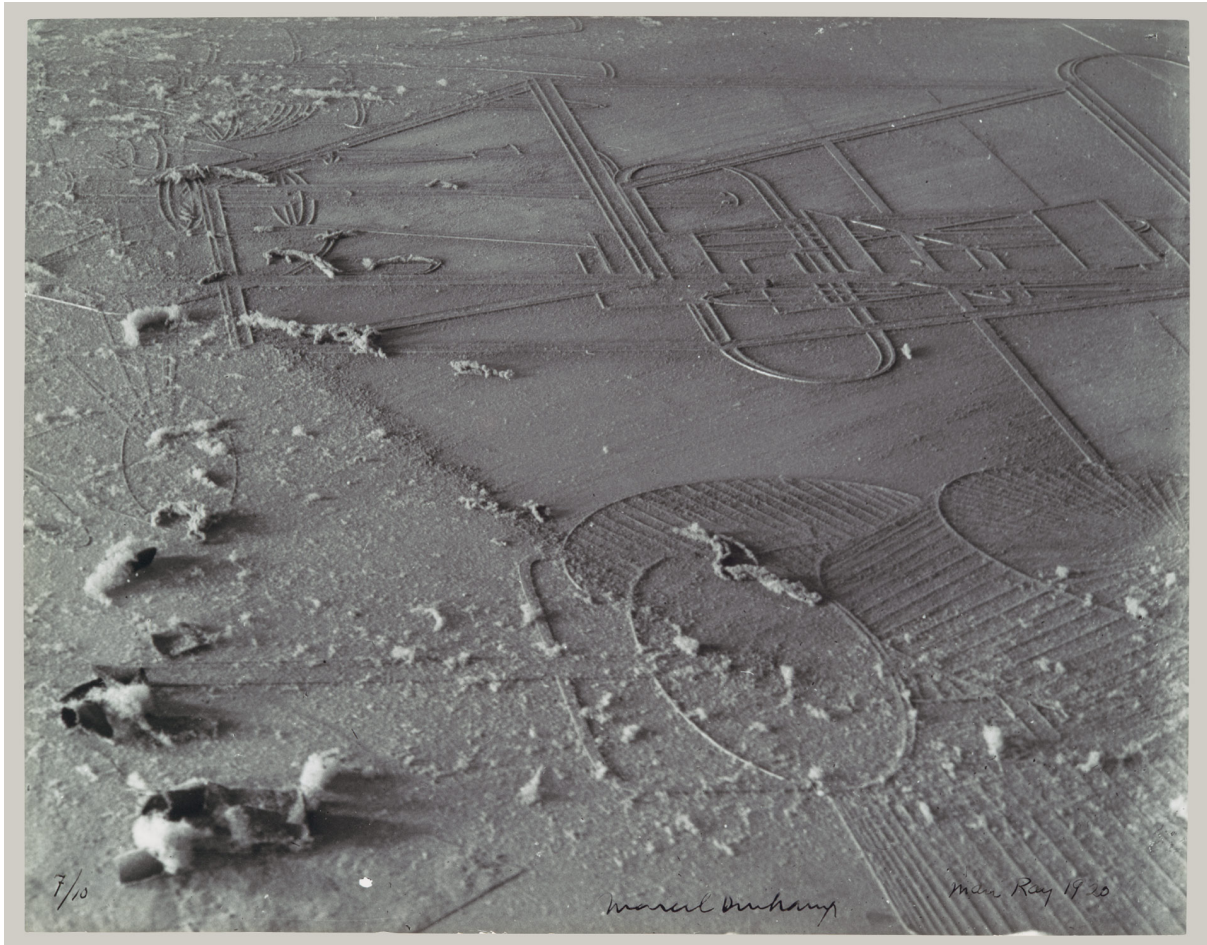
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/vacuum-cleaner-market#>



Anna Ancher, *Helga ved Bord*, c.1900



Vilhelm Hammershøi, *Dust Motes Dancing in Sunbeams (Støvkornenes dans i solstrålerne)*, c.1900



Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp, *Dust Breeding*, 1920