



Twenty-five photographs from Penelope Umbrico's series "Broken Sets / eBay," 2008-11, C-prints on metallic paper, 20 by 30 inches each.

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It is true, although not new, that technological imagery is made to be mailed around and to replicate itself. The blizzard of the 1920s has melted into a torrent in the 2010s, and no doubt there are those who will view this progression as a metaphor for global warming. But the spectrum that runs from tableau to webcam is not the only axis of orientation for makers of photographs. There is, importantly, the printed page, including "print-to-screen," and also the social environment, implicit in the idea of a sender and a receiver (or 10 million receivers) of a given image.

The possibilities of photography as communication, and of exhibitions as theater, are revitalized in

the digital age. Photography is in any case hard to delimit, either as an image field or a field of art. That has long been the case. But perhaps this porosity, as Roxana calls it, is only newly apparent to art enthusiasts. I am a fan of porous conditions as well. I worry only about the implications for critical thought of a technological apparatus that expresses all historically differentiated forms as convertible and ultimately recursive electronic signals. Image/music/text is now nothing more than a set of file extensions, or a constellation of touch-screen squares on an all-purpose telephone. When I match my words to pictures or sounds by others, it can feel like getting stuck in the import/export business.

PENELOPE UMBRICO

Artist

Pictures are not still anymore—no longer tied to any particular substrate (or file extension), they're constantly moving and forever changing. The image torrent is actually alive, emergent and perhaps more indexical than photography has ever been in the past. The sheer quantity and accessibility of digital images neutralizes the personal, particular, individual, and transforms the local into the impersonal, abstract, collective and global.

All images (artful, authored, pedestrian or unauthored) become unassignable and anonymous in this unlimited exchange of visual information, and function as a collective visual index of data that represent us—a constantly changing and spontaneous auto-portrait. The index has shifted from visually descriptive truth to accumulative visual data. When I wander this abstracted world as though a documentary photographer on a quest for meaningful subjects, I find them.