



MARK MOORE GALLERY | STATEMENTS

PENELOPE UMBRICO

"Penelope Umbrico is looking for traces of that other, formerly real world, the one being digitally superseded, looking for evidence of anterior life exposed on the internet and beyond that of the forms of desire that animate that life. There is no romance involved in this quest, no discovery of secret places untouched by discourse, for what she finds is already mediated, clichéd, and stereotypical."

—Lyle Rexer, *Foam Magazine*

PENELOPE UMBRICO

STATEMENTS

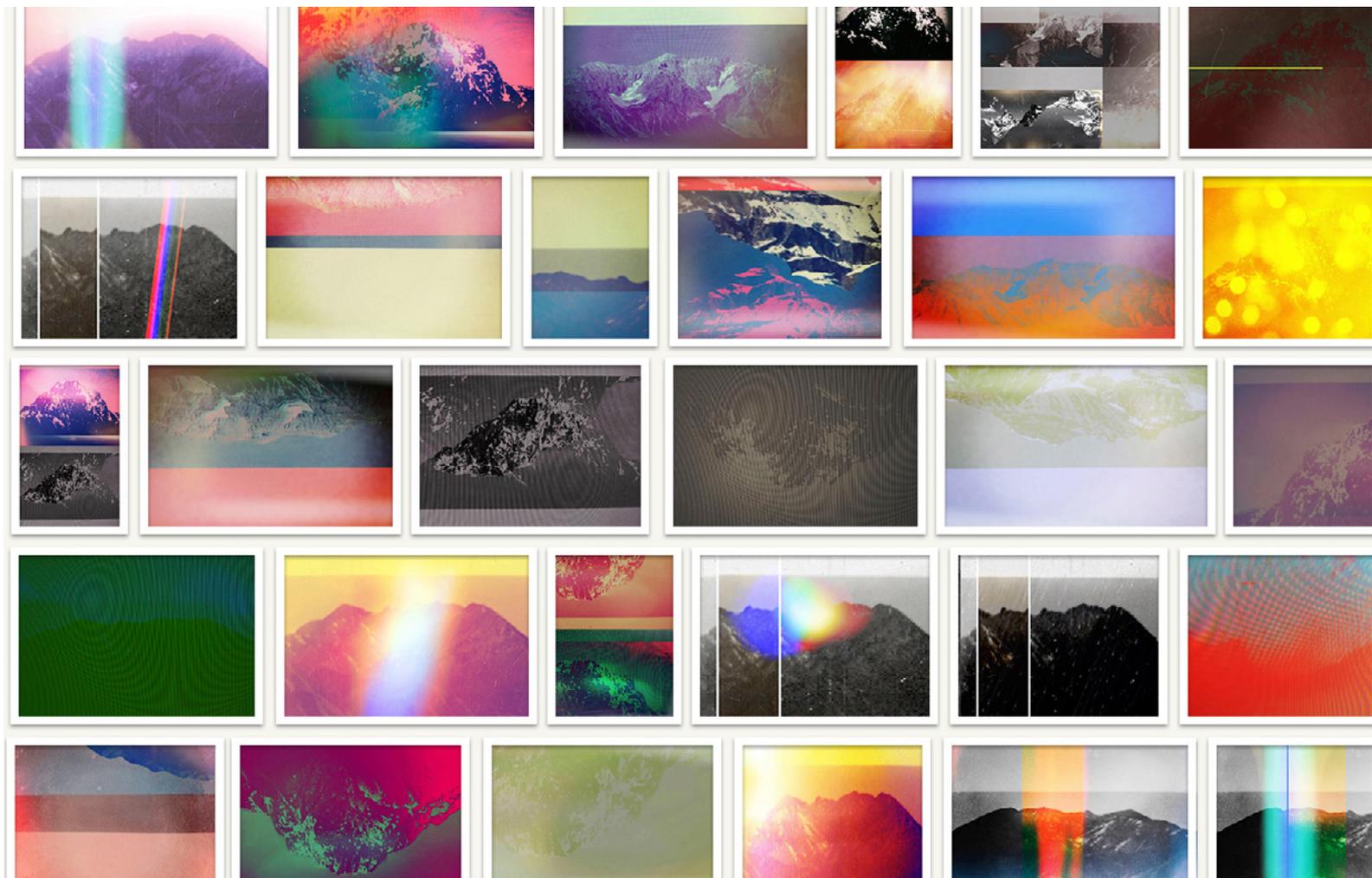
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Mark Moore Gallery: Statements introduces a featured gallery artist through images and candid interview. From noteworthy early examples to present bodies, the works featured in Statements act as an overview of the varying practices and movements implemented by a given artist in tandem with their thoughts and interpretations.

Penelope Umbrico offers a radical reinterpretation of everyday consumer and vernacular images. Umbrico works “within the virtual world of consumer marketing and social media, traveling through the relentless flow of seductive images, objects, and information that surrounds us, searching for decisive moments—but in these worlds, decisive moments are cultural absurdities.”

She finds these moments in the pages of consumer product mail-order catalogs, travel and leisure brochures; and websites like Craigslist, EBay, and Flickr. Identifying image typologies—candy-colored horizons and sunsets, books used as props—brings the farcical, surreal nature of consumerism to new light.

Penelope Umbrico (born in Philadelphia, 1957) graduated from the Ontario College of Art and Design in Toronto, and received her MFA from the School of Visual Arts, New York. She has participated extensively in solo and group exhibitions, including at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and PSI Contemporary Art Center, New York. Umbrico is core faculty in the School of Visual Arts MFA Photography, Video, and Related Media Program. Selected public collections include the Guggenheim Museum (NY), International Center of Photography (NY), McNay Museum of Art (TX), Metropolitan Museum of Art (NY), Museum of Contemporary Photography (IL), Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego (CA), Museum of Modern Art (NY), and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (CA), Los Angeles County Museum of Art (CA), among others. She lives in New York City.



PENELOPE UMBRICO



Interview by: Nicole Lampl, Mark Moore Gallery

Now that smartphones have put cameras into everyone's pockets, the proliferation of photographs flood online platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Flickr – just to name a few. How has the evolution of contemporary photography and its 'democratization' impacted the way you approach your work?

Perhaps user-friendly mobile photography has liberated photography, by way of its users not having to be overly concerned with the technical end of things. And perhaps this has made anyone thinking seriously about photography more reflective on what is being said in a photograph... which is good for me, and the work I make.

I love these technologies as much as anyone, but I take issue with the claim that they make photography and image authoring democratic. For one thing, not everyone has access, but for the majority that does, in many ways the illusion of choices we're given masks the actual limits of choices we really have. To me these technologies seem to be tyrannical, especially when they define in our own minds who we are, how we want to be seen, and how we see the world. "Big data" and big corporations aren't just targeting us through marketing, they are giving us visual scripts for how they want us to see the world and giving us platforms on which to project our images of them.

My work is often about the idea of the script – both in terms of software, as well as image content (i.e. sunsets and mountains).

A script is something we follow, something we already know - it's what we are looking for when we take a picture of something that we've already seen, because it's been photographed a million times before. Software tools give us all the pre-sets we need to re-make the photo-worthy world as we already know it... but better, of course. I guess this has always been the case with all technologies.

Does the commentary implicit in your work reach beyond photography and extend to larger societal critiques?

Photography is already a deeply social medium, so it will always have the potential to engage larger societal critiques. For me, the current abundance of any and every type of image taking adds up to an inadvertent collective self-portrait of the world. Even the most individual images in this context become anonymous and decontextualized. As an archive of material, if you read it this way, it has the potential to reveal unexpected things about the world.

I am particularly fascinated by the individual need to assert a presence online, when in fact the very condition of this presence is a kind of individual erasure. In my mind, an image on Instagram, Facebook, or Flickr (that is made with a camera programmed to behave in predetermined ways) may have the look of subjectivity, but seen with all the rest, points directly to a question of what that subjectivity means when everyone is basically taking the same picture.

What are your thoughts on original authorship and copyright infringement, especially as it relates to photography?

I think maybe as soon as you have more than three images of the same subject, taken in the same way, you have a phenomenon: an inherent collective, rather than an individual expression. To understand your place in this is to let go of a sense of ownership, authorship, and to give in to that collective whole; to understand that your images are not your, but all of ours.

Of course, we are talking about those images that everyone takes. There are so many types of photography, so many different markets, so many different intents of production and use, and so many different contexts of reception... there's no simple way to think about authorship or copyright, but in general, I think that copyright laws are in great need of revision – the way they stand now, they don't help the creative world – they often hinder it.

What I do in my work always shifts the meaning of the images I use toward other contexts, other markets, and I use them with quite opposite intensions from the original source material. So I guess I always fall under the category of “fair use” legally speaking.

Much of your work reads like an archaeological survey and requires rather intensive visual research. Do you come up with an idea and then research it, or does it form more organically based on things you observe or see around you?

Definitely more organically – one thing always leads to another. I look at a lot of stuff and probably have more folders of collected images on my hard drives than anyone I know, but I am also very deliberate about what images I use, and how I use them... they have to provoke something in me that makes me come back to them again and again, that makes me want to spend a lot of time with them... quite the opposite to how we experience much on the web, actually.

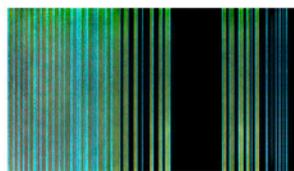
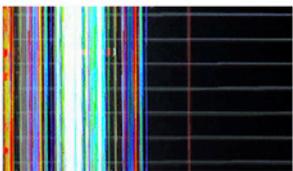
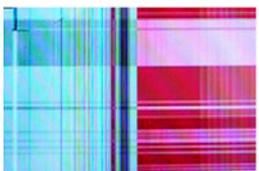
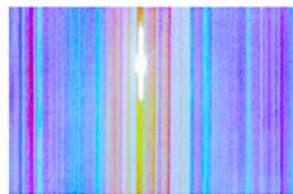
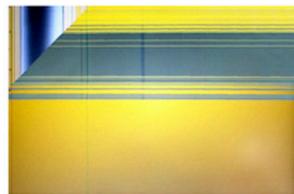
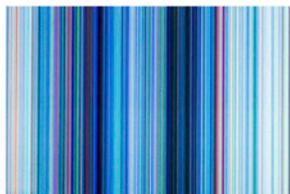
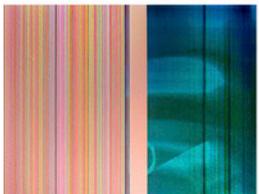
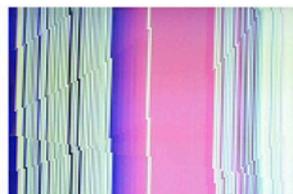
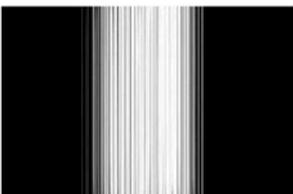
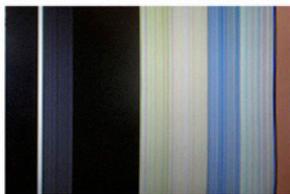
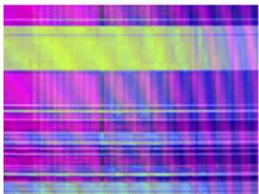
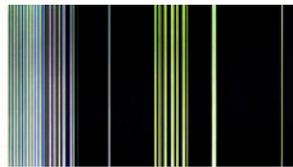
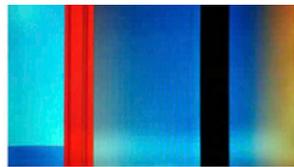
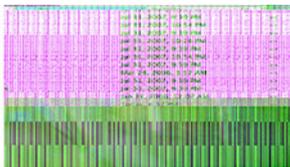
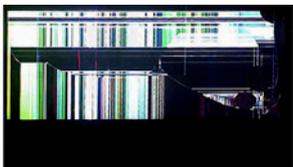
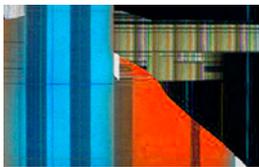
Besides the “Mountains, Moving” exhibition, do you typically manipulate the ‘found’ photographs in any way?

I have actually never manipulated any images until the “Moving, Mountains” project. Typically, I work with found images in a couple of ways. Sometimes, the simple fact that I can create an accumulation of a particular kind of image speaks to an issue more economically than anything I might do with it—so these images may remain as I find them, and I think of them as image collections. Sometimes I severely crop the images, or extract very small fragments. Sometimes it's a very long process, and the work goes through various iterations and forms before I understand what I am working with, or I feel the work is revealing something.

For me, the value lies in how the material I use can point to something else. It's important that the resulting work engages a critical dialogue with the original source material, and with other projects I happen to be working on at the same time.

Many of your projects seem like they continue ad infinitum. At what point do you feel like a work is finished? Do you ever return to a project long after you thought you were finished with it?

This depends on the specific project. “Suns from Sunsets from Flickr” and “Sunset Portraits from Flickr Sunsets” need to go on forever. They are about the continuous collective practice of photographing the sunset and our presence within this context. The way I title the installations with the number of returns I get for a search for “sunset” on Flickr each time I install the work, implies that this could go on for as long as we have the sun, or can make photographs of it setting. I have fantasies that I will give this project to someone else to continue after I can't do it anymore. For “Sunset Portraits from Flickr Sunsets,” though, I may have to stop because point-and-shoot facial recognition technology now exposes correctly for the subjects in the photograph, rather exposing for the sun.



For some, I just keep finding new and better pictures – TVs from Craigslist, for example, started out in 2008 with very pixelated pictures of the flashes reflected in the screens of TVs I found for sale on Craigslist. They had hints of the private spaces of the seller, but not much else was visible. Five years later, digital point-and-shoot technology is so much better that I tend to find images that inadvertently reveal private spaces (unmade beds, incredible messes) and bodies in various states of undress.

What role does repetition play in your work?

I would say that the “multiple” plays a large role, and with multiples you have a lot of repetition. Oftentimes, it’s the mere numbers of something that I can find that make a project work – the fact that there are 22,756,367 images of sunsets on Flickr today (9/28/14) is insane... you can’t conceive of that many photographs. I could title one image with that number, and try to imagine how many that is, but if I want to feel the immensity of it, I need to have more images than I can take in at one time.

Do you feel that our increasingly digital world connects or disconnects us from each other?

I think both—but it’s more interesting to me to think about the disconnections. That’s largely the subtext of what my work has been about for the past 15 years—ideas that center around identity-erasure, atomization, autism, and subjectlessness. I can’t help thinking that in a lot of the images I find (images of TVs for sale on Craigslist, portraits in front of sunsets) there’s a kind of collective, unconscious plea for attention and intimacy that is profoundly lacking otherwise—an existential anxiety produced by a felt lack of empathy, engagement, or real attention.

The majority of your most well known work employs appropriated images. Do you ever use a camera to capture your own photographs?

Well, of course I take the kinds of images that everyone else takes (though I don’t often share them and I don’t consider them my work). But aside from those, I recently photographed the miniature cameras I came across in the photography collection at the Smithsonian Institute, during my Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship. Once revolutionary tools (like the smart phone is now), in their current state, the tiny cameras seemed so inanimate and obsolete. They were all carefully tagged and archived, closed away in their little coffin-like boxes. I applied the “Old Style” Photoshop filter so that they would appear as actual faded cameras entombed within the vitrine I present the prints in.

How has your work evolved, and what is different about this new body of work?

I think with this work I gave myself permission to be more painterly. I’ve been sort of obsessed with these smart phone camera apps and the really dumb filters they have for some time! So I was excited to find the perfect subject, the mountain, to use with them: in my mind, the mountain’s material stability and the “master” photographs I find of them, are perfect material to be considered by the camera app’s digital instability. Particularly fascinating to me is the overwhelming number of “light leak” and “chemical burn” filters. They are the simulation of light (the first and foremost element of all photography) in the form of the mistakes of analog film photography, made within the vacuum of a chip where there is no light, no liquid, no space, or perspective.

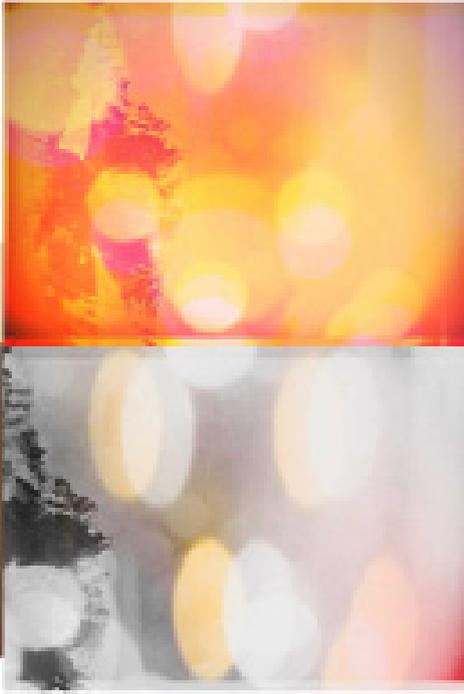
What projects are on the horizon for you?

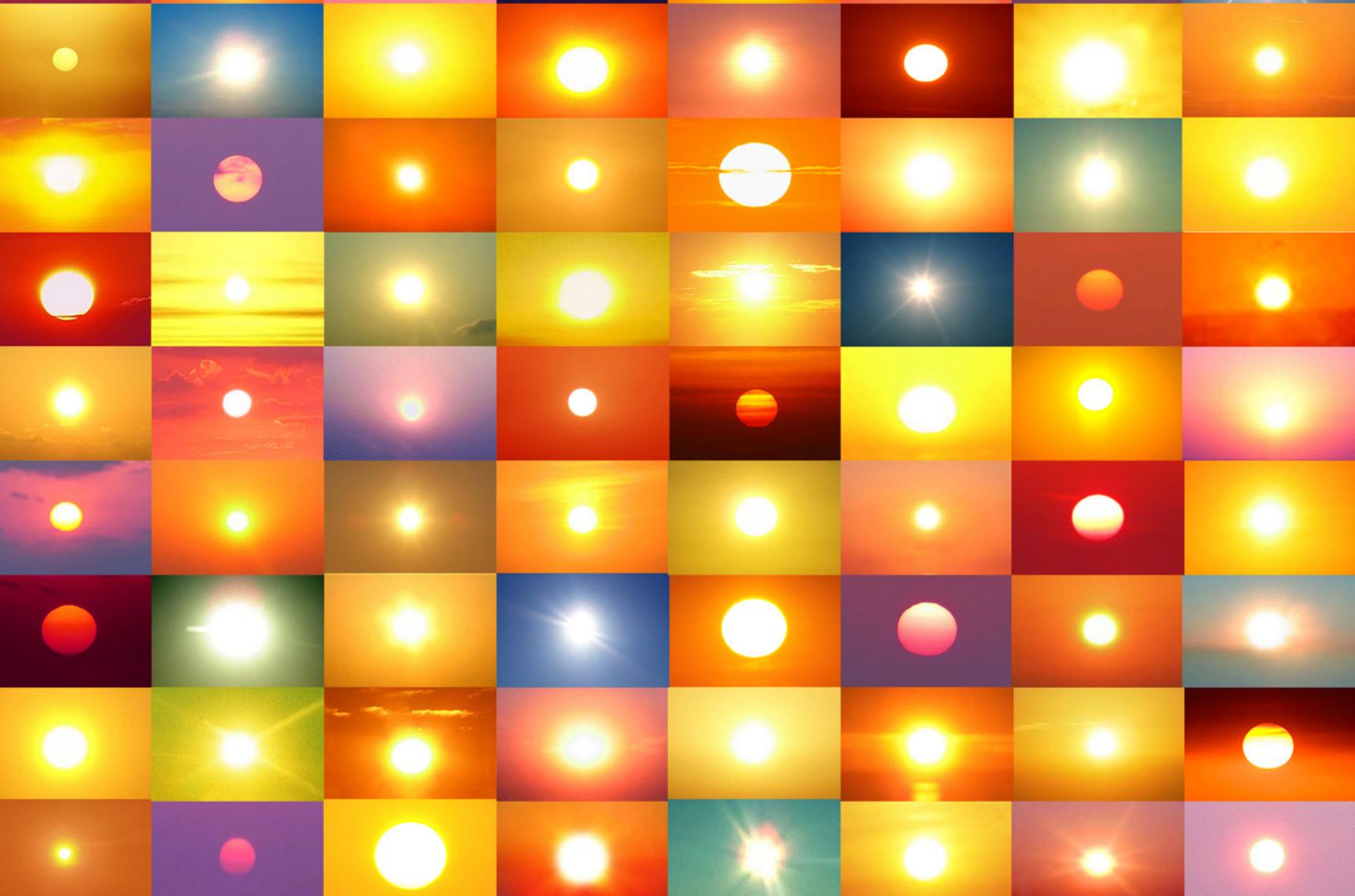
I'm doing a project with the Photographers Gallery in London with a few videos. One video I'm working on is called Sun/Screen, which is comprised of photographs of images I've found online of the sun (our original light source) re-photographed from my computer screen with my iPhone (the screen as the light source). Here the pixel grid of the iPhone camera sensor clashes with the pixel grid of the computer display screen, creating a moire pattern. Assembled into a single digital video with a slow dissolve between each image, and the iMovie "Ken Burns" effect, a third set of moire patterns is created. It's a sort of meditation on simulated light, activated to produce images of natural light (the sun) derived from digital images found online; or, another way to put it: it's a dialogue between analog and digital; natural and simulated light; surface and screen; projection and reception; material and immaterial.

I'm also publishing a limited edition book with the Mountains, Moving project. Called RANGE, it will be available in a couple weeks – stay tuned for that!





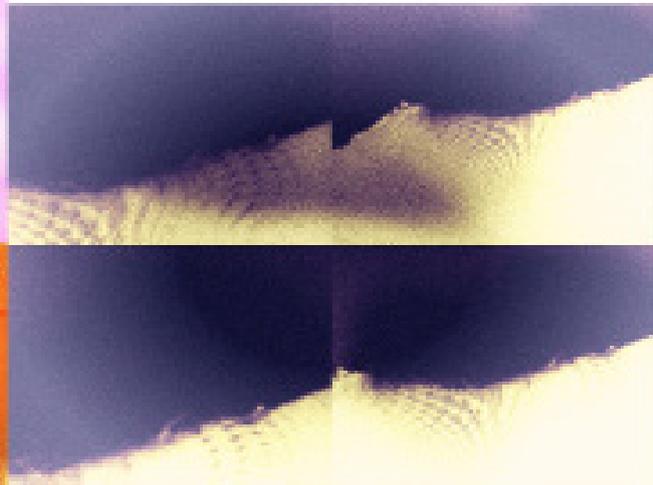


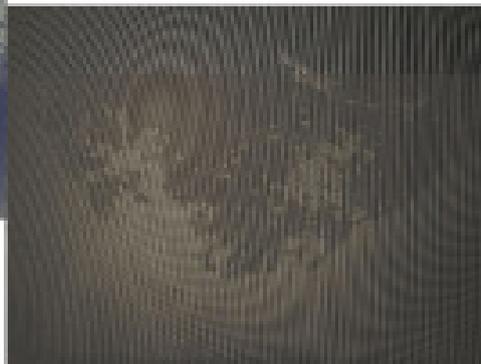
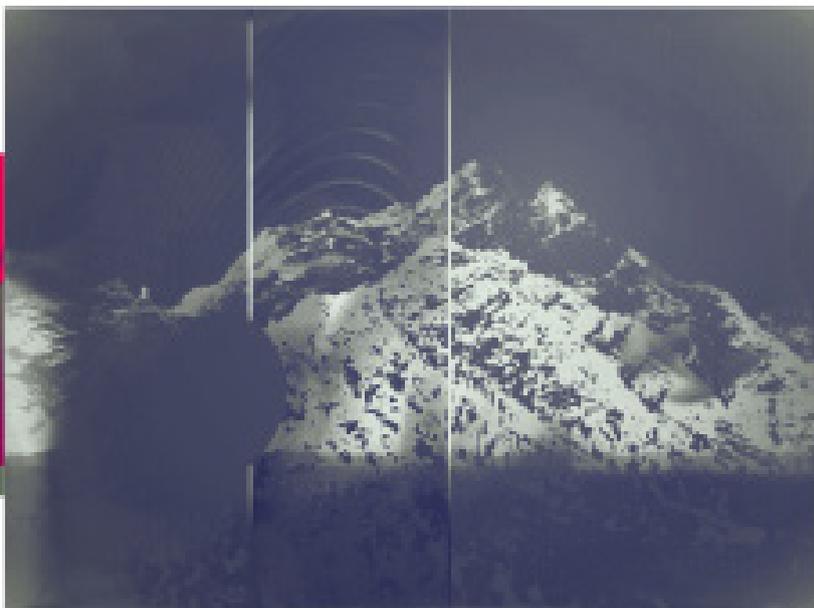
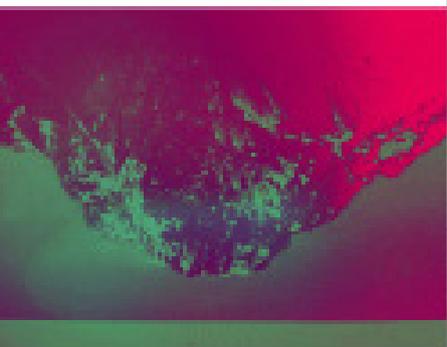




"Penelope Umbrico's work is a testament not only to our obsession with sunsets, but our desire to preserve these liminal moments as a social experience. The fleeting spectacle of sunset seems to remind us of our place in the solar system. It rouses a primordial sense of wonder."

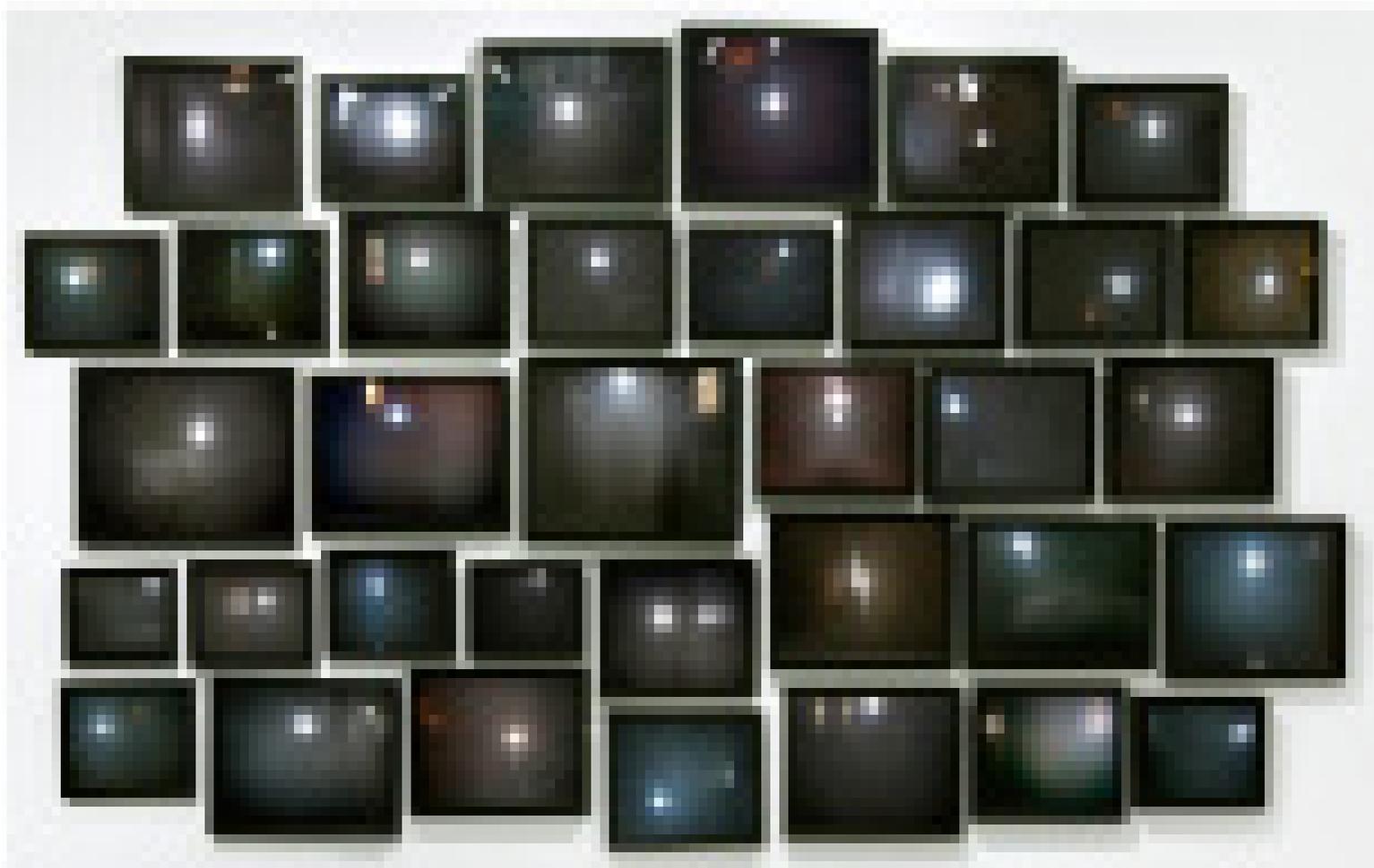
—Johnny Weeks, *The Guardian*









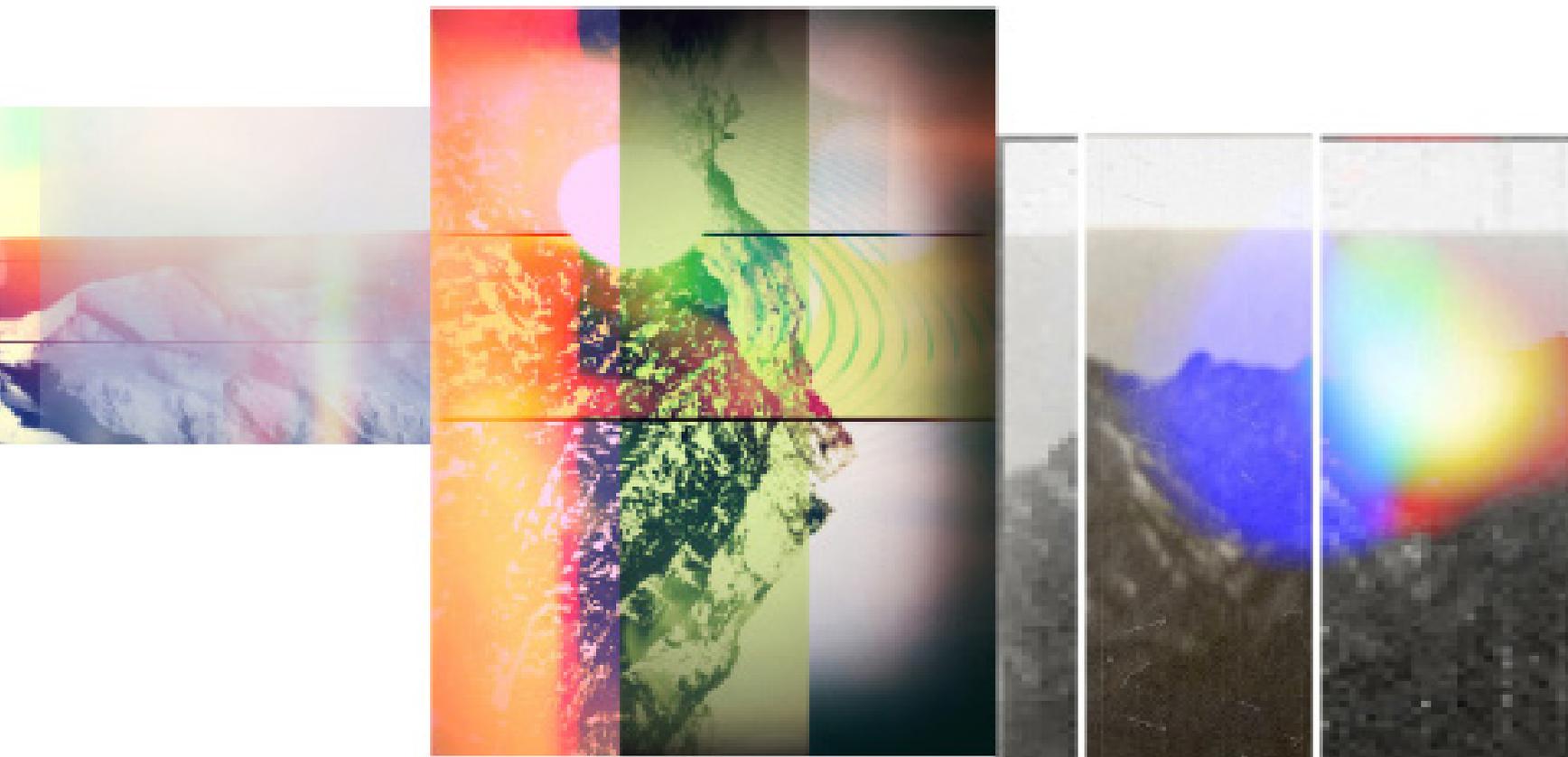


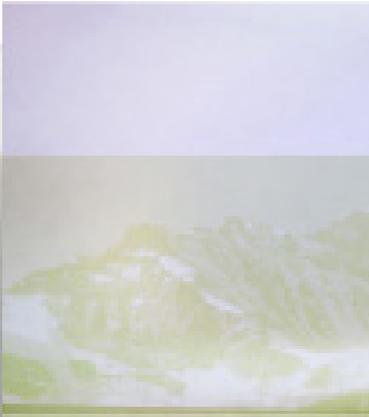
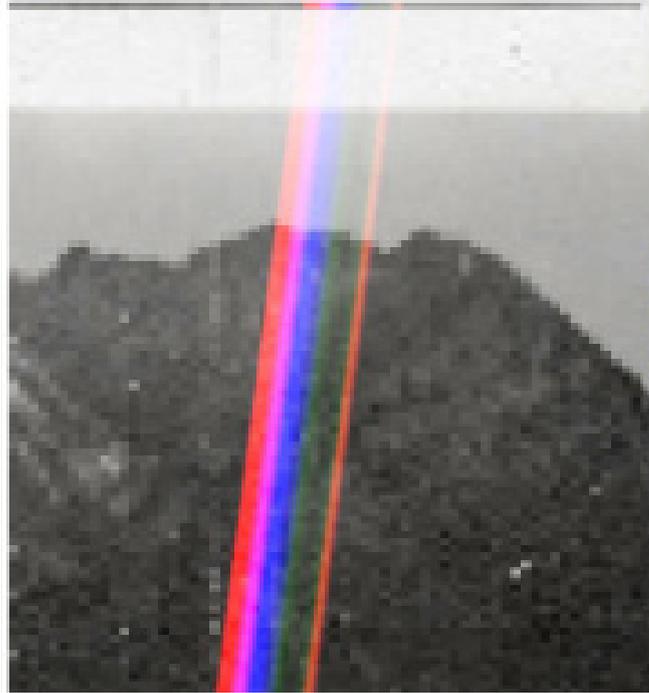
"Umbrico's work *TVs* (from *Craigslist*) gradually illuminates a vast array of unintentional private interiors. The pieces are at once abstract and representational. The camera flash on each black-framed black print is blinding; but once your eyes adjust and focus, the subtle, hidden images of living rooms, garages, bedrooms, and their occupants become clear."

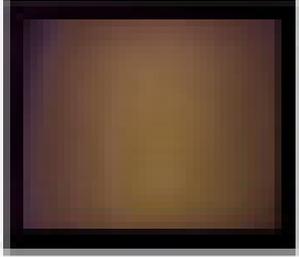
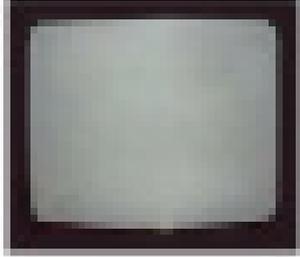
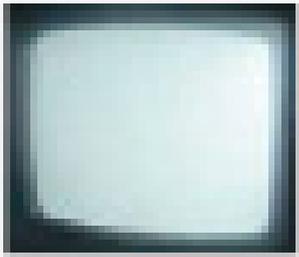
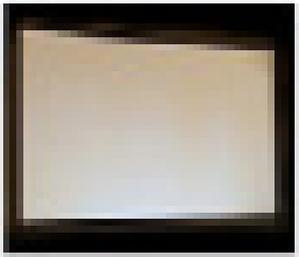
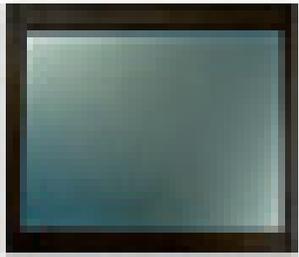
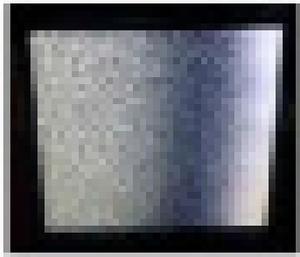
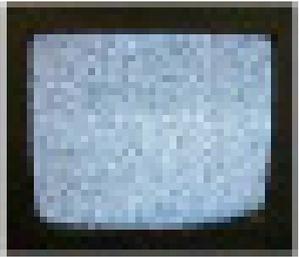
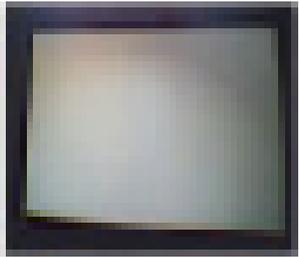
—Barry Johnson, *Oregon Arts Watch*







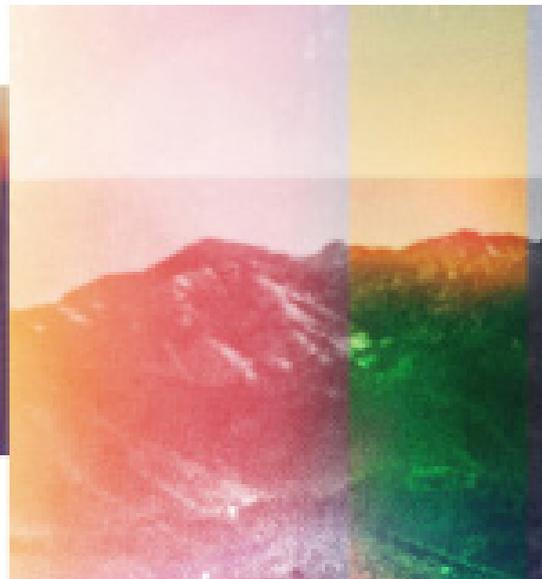
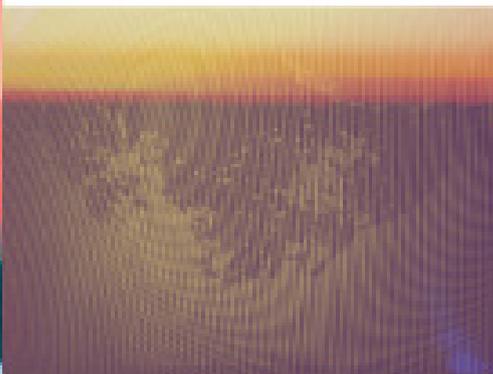
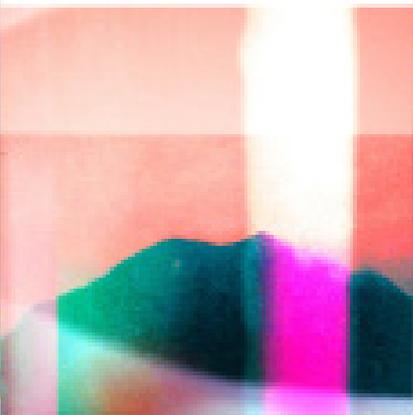


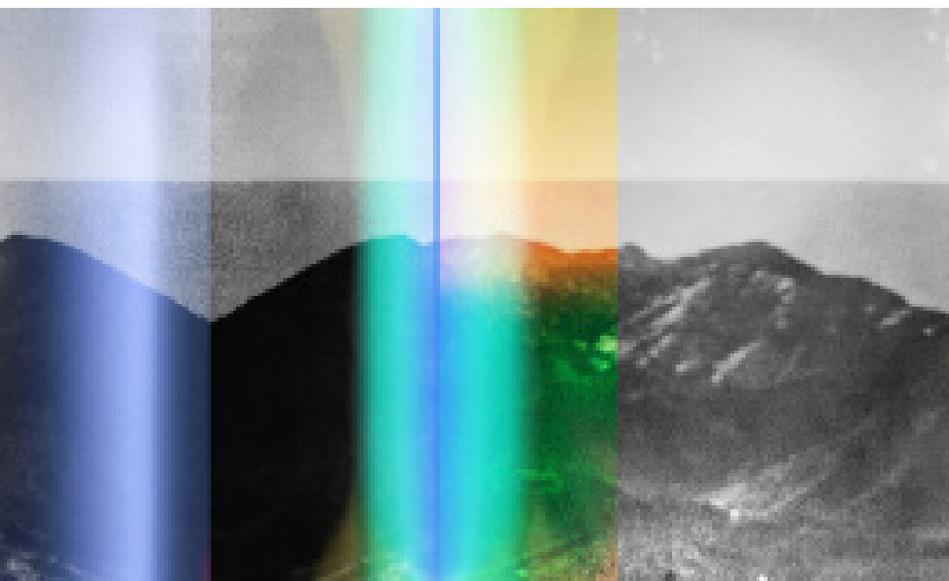


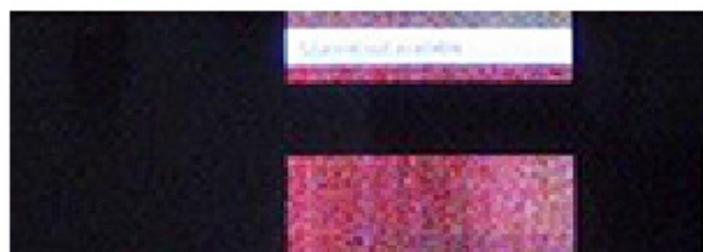
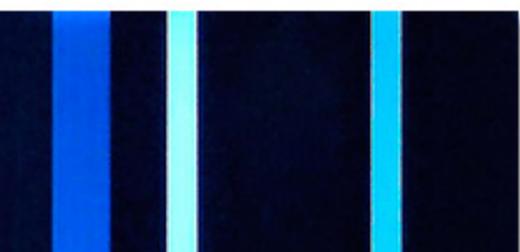
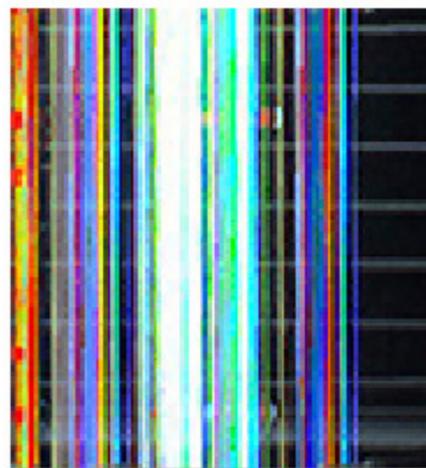
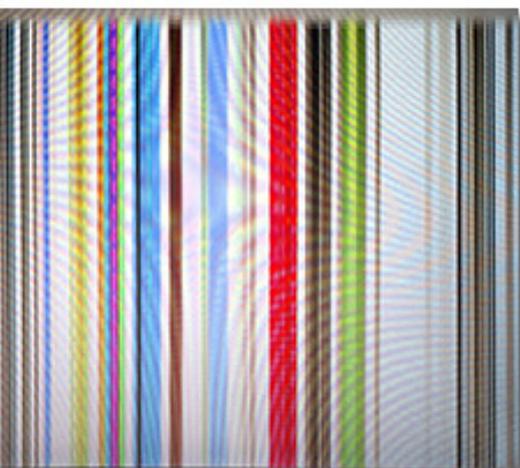
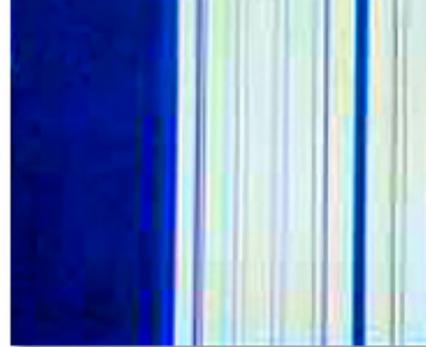


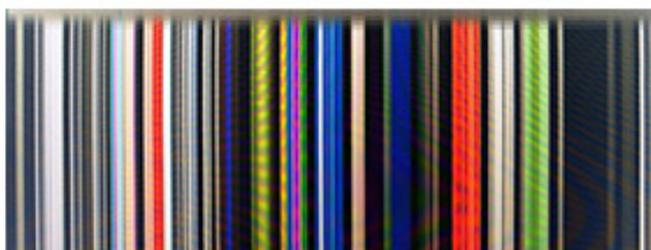
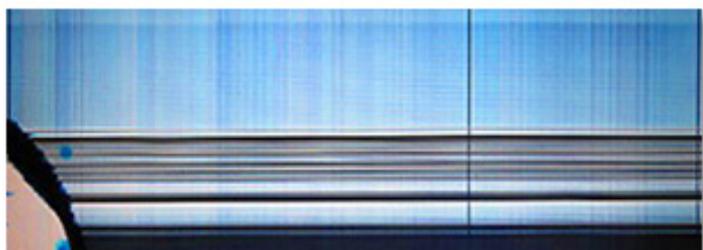
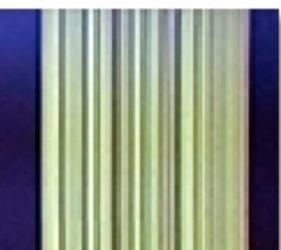
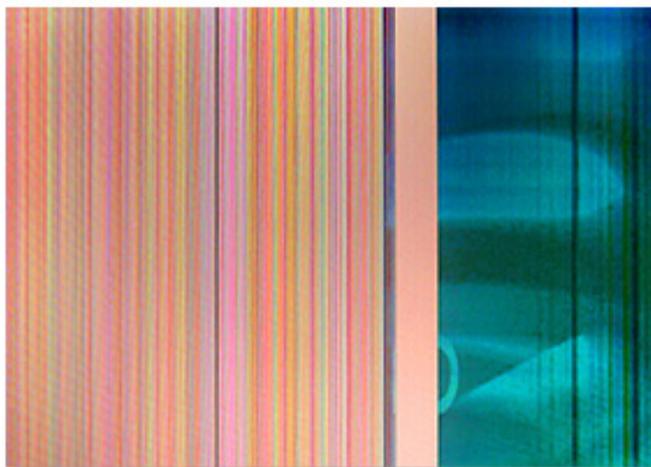
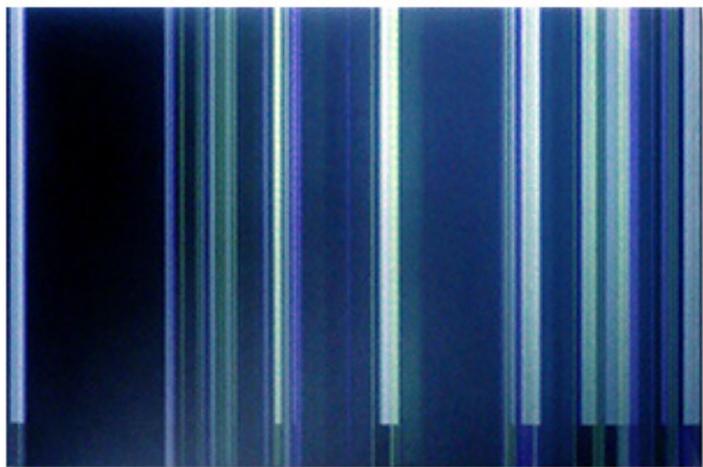
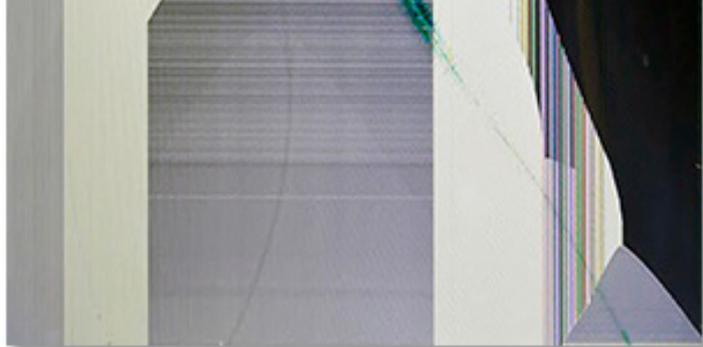
"In her various installations, Umbrico seems to be playing with magnitude. She won't let us forget that the wholesale consumption of nature through the camera is a form of mass hysteria, which leeches memory and meaning from experience and turns our inner lives into inert things. And yet the wall-size scale of several versions, surprising but comprehensible, keeps the work in touch with a more persistent not to say primordial source of attraction to the form, something genetic, transhuman, original."

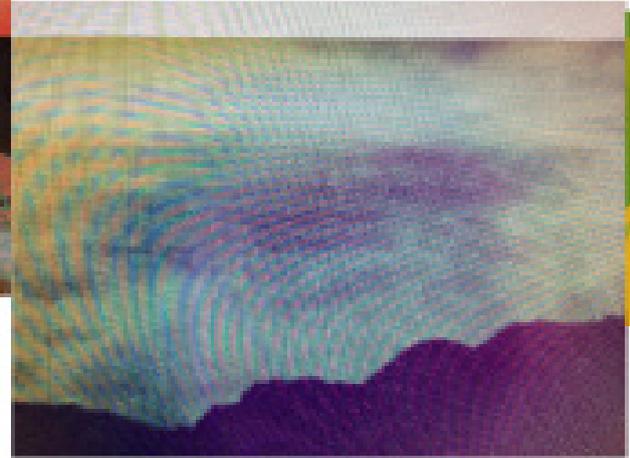
—Lyle Rexer, *Foam Magazine*

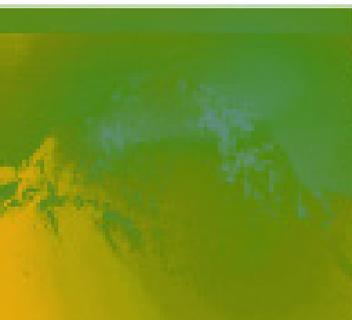












I / Plate 12

BIO

PENELOPE UMBRICO

Born in Philadelphia, PA
Lives and works in New York, NY

Education

1989 MFA, School of Visual Arts, NY, NY
1980 BFA, Ontario College of Art, Toronto, Canada

Solo Exhibitions

2014 Mountains, Moving: Light Leaks, and Chemical Burns,
Mark Moore Gallery, Culver City, CA
Dallas Biennial, Oliver Francis Gallery, Dallas, TX
2013 Slide Show, LMAKprojects, New York, NY
Darling Foundry, Le Mois De La Photo Montréal, Canada
Olson Gallery, Bethel University, St Paul, MN
2011 Discovery Award Exhibition, Rencontres d'Arles, France
2010 LMAKprojects, New York, NY
P/M Gallery, Toronto, Ontario
2007 Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston, MA, May
2005 P/M Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, November
2004 Bernard Toale Gallery, Boston, MA
2002 Julie Saul Gallery, New York, NY
1998 Julie Saul Gallery, New York, NY
1997 Montgomery Museum of Fine Art, Montgomery, AL
1995 Julie Saul Gallery, New York, NY
1993 Julie Saul Gallery, New York, NY
1992 International Center of Photography, New York, NY

Selected Group Exhibitions

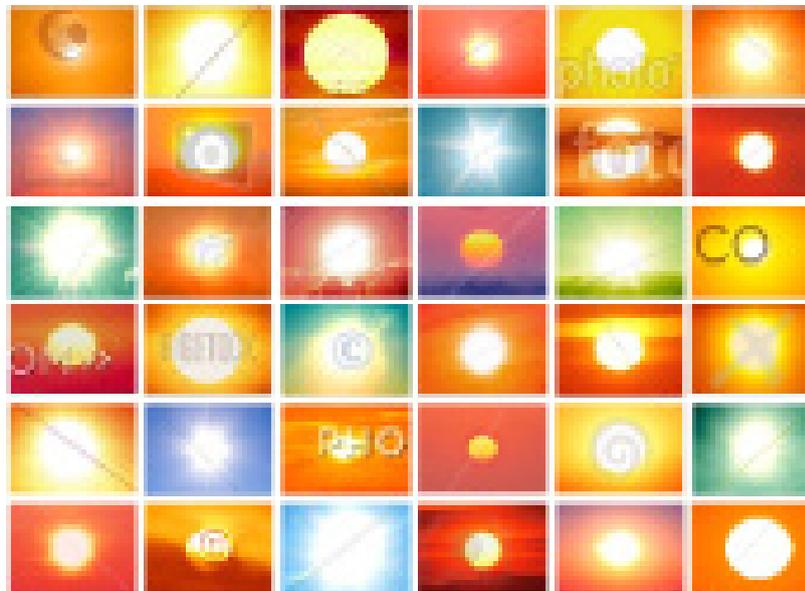
2014 Neumeitser Bar-Am, Berlin, Germany
XPO Gallery, Paris, FR
BRIC Arts Media, "Brooklyn Biennial," Brooklyn, NY
Florida Atlantic Univ., "Alterations," Boca Raton, FL

Aperture Foundation, "Aperture Remix," New York, NY
Robert Koch Gallery, "Web on the Wall," San Francisco, CA
Museum of Modern Art, "A World of its Own," NY
2013 Mois de Photo, "Drone: The Automated Image," Montreal
"Offline Art: Hardcore", Kasseler Kunstverein, Kassel, Germany
Somerset House, "Landmark: Fields of Photoy," London
"Grand Central Terminal Centennial," New York, NY
Centre d'Art, "From Here On", Barcelona, Spain
Foto Colectania, "Artwork as Collection", Barcelona, Spain
Louisiana Art and Science Museum, Baton Rouge, LA
2012 Aperture Foundation Gallery, "Aperture Remix", New York
319 Scholes Gallery, "Collect the WWWorld", Bushwick, NY
Daegu Photo Biennale, "Repositioned Personal" Korea
Foto Museum, "From Here On", Antwerp, Belgium
Photographers' Gallery, "The Animated GIF", London, UK
Galerie West, "Let Us Keep Our Noon", The Netherlands
Work Gallery, "Critical Dictionary", London, England
Benton Museum of Art, "Screenshots", Univ. of Connecticut, Storrs, CT
2011 Pace Gallery, "Social Media", New York, NY
Paraty Em Foco, "Future", Paraty, Brazil
Hagedorn Foundation Gallery, "The New Photograph", Atlanta, GA
Rencontres d'Arles, "From Here On", Arles, France
Public Surface, "Un Place", Stockholm, Sweden
MassMoCA, "Memery," North Adams, MA
2010 Voorkamer, "Meer", Lier, Belgium
Galerie West, "Carry-On," The Hague, The Netherlands
Carpenter Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
American Univ. Museum, "One Hour Photo", Washington, DC
2009 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA
PS I Contemporary Art Center, "Between Spaces", NY
Pingyao International Photography Festival, Pingyao, China
Kunstverein Ludwigshafen, "Collecting Images", Germany

- 2008 Aperture Foundation Gallery, "The Edge of Vision", New York, NY
 Special Projects, Pulse-Art Fair, New York, NY
 Rotunda Gallery,
 "In/formation", Brooklyn, NY
- 2007 KS Gallery, "Psychotic Reaction", New York, NY
 The Photographic Resource Center "Ad / Agency," Boston, MA
 Gallery of Modern Art, "The Leisure Class", Brisbane, Australia
 The Drake, "Looking The Other Way", curator Mia Nielsen, Toron

Selected Collections

- Los Angeles County Museum of Art (CA)
- Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY
- International Center of Photography, New York, NY
- McNay Museum of Art, San Antonio, TX
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
- Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, IL
- Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego
- Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
- Norton Museum of Art, FL
- San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
- Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, FL
- Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA
- Orange County Museum of Art, Orange County, CA
- Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN



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Cover (from left to right):

10_IMG_0024, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 36 x 48 inches
11_IMG_0053, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 30 x 40 inches

Page 4:

Range, 2014, set of 36 archival pigment prints on Hahnemuhle paper from the book "Range" (2014), 54 x 65 inches overall

Page 7:

Broken Sets (eBay), 2009-ongoing, each 30in x 40 inches, light-jet c-prints on metallic Kodak paper

Page 9:

01_IMG_6432, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 53.33 x 40 inches

Page 10-11 (from left to right):

02_IMG_6403, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 21 x 28 inches
03_IMG_7634, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 30 x 40 inches
04_IMG_7548, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 30 x 40 inches
05_alt+, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 18 x 24 inches
06_IMG_9825, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 30 x 20 inches

Page 12:

21,887,750 Suns from Sunset from Flickr (Partial) 6/27/2014, 2010, 49.75 x 50.5 inches framed, c-prints assembled with archival tape

Page 13:

Sunset portraits, 2010-ongoing, c-prints assembled with archival tape

Page 14-15 (from left to right):

12_IMG_6468, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 40 x 53.33 inches
13_IMG_5616, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 24 x 32 inches
14_Photo31120513, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 17 x 23 inches
15_IMG_6666, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 30 x 40 inches
16_IMG_9584, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 18 x 24 inches

Page 16-17:

136 Mini Film Cameras in the Smithsonian Institution History of Photography Collection..." archival pigment prints on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag paper, 36 x 84 inches, Permanent Collection of the Minneapolis Institute of the Arts

Page 18:

TVs from CL, 2008 – ongoing, each 11 inches x variable widths, light-jet c-prints on metallic Kodak paper

Page 19 (from left to right):

Universal Remotes (eBay), 2008-ongoing, c-prints, dimensions variable

Page 20:

Mirrors (From Home Decor Catalogs and Websites), 2001-2007, c-print face mounted to laser cut plexi, dimensions variable

Page 21:

Embarrassing Books, 2011, c-prints, dimensions variable, Collection of The McNay Museum of Art (San Antonio TX)

Page 22-23:

17_IMG_6547, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 18 x 24 inches
18_IMG_6697-a, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 40 x 30 inches
19_weston_lightleek4_IMG2192, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 36 x 48 inches
20_weston_lightleek5_IMG2192, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 36 x 48 inches
21_IMG_6351, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 20 x 30 inches

Page 24-25:

Signals Still, 2011, each 8.5 in x 11 in, light-jet c-prints on metallic Kodak paper

Page 26-27:

21_IMG_6351, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 20 x 30 inches
22_Umbrico_Westonwith35mmMediumFormatandVintageInstant5+Lightleak, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 20 x 20 inches
23_IMG_9596, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 18 x 24 inches
24_IMG_2242, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 28 x 36 inches
25_IMG_2240, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 28 x 36 inches
26_IMG_6543, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 40 x 53.33 inches

Page 28-29:

Broken Sets (eBay), 2009-ongoing, each 30 x 40 inches, light-jet c-prints on metallic Kodak paper

Page 30-31 (from left to right):

26_IMG_6543, 2014 / Fuji Crystal Archive paper / 40 x 53.33 inches

27_IMG_6549, 2014 / Fuji Crystal Archive paper / 22 x 30 inches

28_IMG_9997, 2014 / Fuji Crystal Archive paper / 22.5 x 30 inches

29_Photo31104025, 2014 / Fuji Crystal Archive paper / 15.5 x 19.5 inches

30_photo 1, 2014 / Fuji Crystal Archive paper / 30 x 25 inches

31_IMG_6414, 2014 / Fuji Crystal Archive paper / 33 x 44 inches

Page 33:

36 *Copyrighted Suns*, Screengrabs, 2009-2012, each 5 x 7 inches, digital c-prints

Back cover (from left to right):

07_IMG_9568, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 17 x 22 inches

08_IMG_6628, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 30 x 40 inches

09_IMG_8949, 2014, Fuji Crystal Archive paper, 23 x 17 inches

