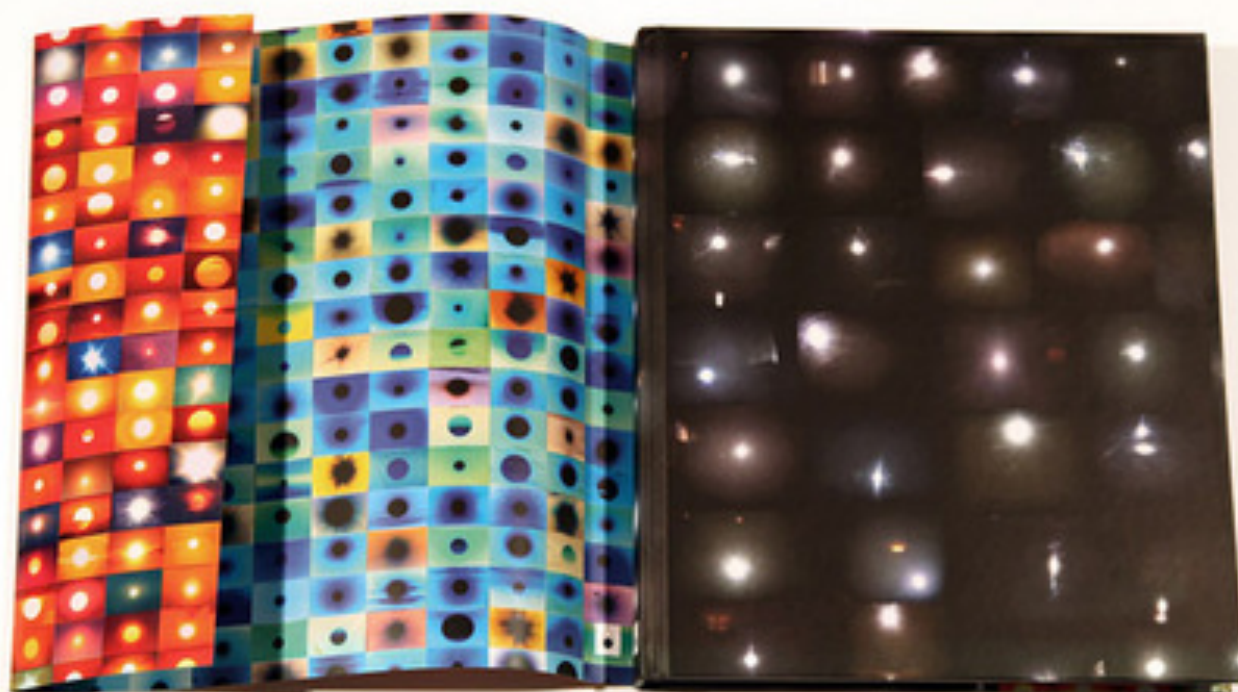


INTERVIEWS

PENELOPE UMBRICO

July 20, 2011 • Penelope Umbrico discusses her new book and recent work



Cover of Penelope Umbrico's *(photographs)* (2011).

Penelope Umbrico is a New York–based artist and recipient of a 2011 Guggenheim Fellowship in the category of photography. Her first monograph, (photographs), was recently published by Aperture. Umbrico's work will be shown on two occasions in the

Rencontres d'Arles Photography Festival in Arles, France: as part of "From Here On" curated by Clément Chéroux, Joan Fontcuberta, Erik Kessels, Martin Parr, and Joachim Schmid, and in the Discovery Award exhibition. The festival ends on September 18.

IT WAS INTERESTING FOR ME TO THINK ABOUT MY WORK IN A BOOK FORM because my work is most always installation-based. I didn't want the book to be a document of my installations, so it made sense to me to think about the book as architecture and to "install" the work onto its pages as I would in an exhibition space. The cover is a good example: I wanted it to have the tactility that the *Suns (From Sunsets) from Flickr* installations have—it shows the dimensionality of the material prints, bits of tape adhering the prints to the wall, some reflections of studio light, et cetera. And I've taken this image and inverted its hues on the reverse side of the dust jacket (black suns on blue-green hues), making a formal and conceptual narrative segue between the suns and the black television screens with camera flash on the hard cover. This echoes the narrative that moves through the entire book from beginning to end.

The book is in two parts. The first part contains the work along with scans of texts I felt created an interesting dialogue with the work. And there's a poem by Rob Fitterman at the beginning, which is actually the only piece written for the work in this first section. The second part of the book acts as an appendix: It has my descriptions of the work, my answers to questions about the work in the form of an interview by multiple people, and examples of source materials and installations. The distinction of voice between the two sections is important to me: While the "work" section takes the third person (I use other people's images, and published texts), the second section is written in the first person—it's *about* my work, the questions are asked to me, and I answer with "I." It is an attempt to address a relationship between collective experience and subjectivity.

For the exhibition "From Here On" I will show a large-scale installation of my project *Mirrors (From Home Décor Sites)*. If these mirrors are seductive, it's because they are derived from consumer media where they were originally designed to seduce. But while a mirror allows you to see yourself and the space you are inhabiting, these mirrors tell you what would be behind you if you were actually inhabiting spaces of a catalogue or website, and they replace your image with the seductive objects you are supposed to want there. It's

a common theme in my work—the idea of subjectlessness or erasure—an idea for which the terms have shifted exponentially in our current “postindustrial” culture.

Aperture’s director Chris Boot nominated me for the Discovery Award at Arles, for which I made a new body of work titled “Signal to Ink.” The process of working on my book actually inspired me to think about my work within a narrative structure, to tell a story through a sequence of separate but related projects. For “Signal to Ink” I address media, materiality and immateriality, and the idea of a screen as a surface on which something is projected and seen, as well as the medium through which things are sifted (let through or kept out): As a substrate on which one sees an image, the screen both sifts and registers the result of the sift. The exhibition begins with images I’ve found on Craigslist of TVs for sale pictured sideways—in profile they reveal how awkwardly monstrous they are (no wonder people are trying to get rid of them)—and then navigates through various conditions of the screen’s physicality, from the electronic signal behind the screen (without image), through reflections of people in various states of undress on the screen (with no signal), to the disrupted signal of broken screens. The project’s trajectory culminates in an offset-printed newsprint book of the TV screens, printed at 125 percent density so the ink rubs off on your hands as you handle it—and your handling registers on the book’s images.

— *As told to Irina Rozovsky*