

The digital age affords our modern society with unprecedented access to the world's history of art and culture almost instantaneously. The works we produce today reflect this: sampling and interpolation is at the forefront of musical creative works, and many visual pieces rely on remixes of easily recognizable contemporary symbols and pieces in the fine art canon. These creative works are piecemeal, with artists taking their favorite aspects of other works to create something wholly fresh. Our access to means of production and streams of distribution have increased alongside our consumption. The rise of social media platforms and other online digital distribution platforms, such as Instagram, Flickr, and Tumblr, has introduced an easy and plentiful (and possibly disposable) way of sharing any and every idea that comes to users' minds. This creates an impenetrable density of content that, despite its culturally archival influences, is ironically difficult to curate and archive. The Instagram "Explore" page, for example, provides an infinitely-scrolling digest of images and videos related to your interests (as determined by its algorithm), an impossibly numerous collection of works and authors that disappears just as easily as it is generated with a refresh of the page or a close of the app, a permutation never to be seen again.

It is this phenomenon of content density that can both proliferate and erase stories and self-representation. Following the proper channels (such as giving credit, sharing original posts, and maintaining metadata) affords creators a greater platform to share their work and can lead to an audience much greater than ever before in history. By the same token, the instant-shareability of digital works often overlooks the meanings and metatexts of works, leaving works shared as a stripped, less contextual (albeit more "pure") version. This leads to an appropriation of the work, often divorced from the author's original intention, as well as a literal sampling of the work as it faces compression through screenshots and file-sharing resampling.

This shift in digital distribution represents a cycle from the pedagogical to the performative and back again. Early Web 1.0 sites were static, presenting information as dictated by single entities, corporations, or webmasters. Art was shared in great numbers, but presented in an organized way: little came in terms of direct interaction with works and messages, so audiences were meant simply to observe. The advent of Web 2.0 and dynamic webpages brought along a boom of user-created and user-shared content, expanding the web and the number of works that reside on it exponentially. Social media meant users could post and share anything to their heart's content, and this paradigm was virtually infinite in its possibilities. As the novelty of Internet experiences has worn off, the amount of content on the Internet seems to have reached critical mass. The common Internet usage seems to have returned to spectatorial, with users inundated with apps touting unlimited content vying for attention. Even if more works of art are being produced and distributed than ever before, the sheer density of content and difficulty to sort makes the general experience appear observational.

I believe it was this notion of digital life that Penelope Umbrico explores in her ongoing series regarding Flickr sunset and moon photos. Her printed works mirror the sentiments of the digital space, dissolving all individuality and personality of specific photos into an amorphous blob of photos, each equally as observable but cancelling out each other's appeal. In my own work, I attempted to explore the same notion but expand upon it by sourcing direct-link photos in real-time. By doing so, the pieces in totality cancel out any inherent individual intentions or meanings, removing the authors' agency in representation. However, stripping this meaning, the images can serendipitously form completely new meanings through their juxtaposition.