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Mirror Images: Penelope Umbrico's Mirrors (from Home Décor Catalogs and Websites)

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Mirror Images:

Penelope Umbrico's *Mirrors* (from *Home Décor Catalogs and Websites*)

by

Jeanie Ambrosio

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a concentration in Modern and Contemporary Art
Department of Art and Art History
College of the Arts
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ABSTRACT

As the artwork's title suggests, Penelope Umbrico's *Mirrors (from Home Décor Catalogs and Websites)* (2001-2011), are photographs of mirrors that Umbrico has appropriated from print and web based home décor advertisements like those from Pottery Barn or West Elm. The mirrors in these advertisements reflect the photo shoot constructed for the ad, often showing plants or light filled windows empty of people.¹ To print the *Mirrors*, Umbrico first applies a layer of white-out to everything in the advertisement except for the mirror and then scans the home décor catalog. In the case of the web-based portion of the series, she removes the advertising space digitally through photo editing software. Once the mirror has been singled out and made digital, Umbrico then adjusts the perspective of the mirror so that it faces the viewer. Finally, she scales the photograph of the mirror cut from the advertisement to the size and shape of the actual mirror for sale.² By enlarging the photograph, she must increase the file size and subsequent print significantly, which distorts the final printed image thereby causing pixelation, otherwise known as "compression artifacts."³ Lastly, she mounts these pixelated prints to non-glare Plexiglas both to remove any incidental reflective surface effects and to create a physical object. What hangs on the wall, then, looks like a mirror in its shape, size and beveled frame: the photograph becomes a one-to-one representation of the object it portrays. When looking at a real

¹ Toward the end of the decade, Umbrico updated the series by both adding to and replacing some of the catalog based mirrors with their digital counterparts as noted in the author's studio visit with the artist, March 15, 2018, Brooklyn, NYC.

² "*Mirrors (from Catalogs and Home Improvement Websites)*, 2001 – 2011" Penelope Umbrico, Accessed November 15, 2018, <http://www.penelopeumbrico.net/index.php/project/mirrors-from-catalogs/>

³ Daniel Palmer, "The Rhetoric of the JPEG," in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, ed. Martin Lister (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 151. In addition, JPEG stands for Joint Photographic Experts Group, for more information on the invention and origins of this file type see: <https://jpeg.org/about.html>

mirror, often the viewer is aware of either a reflection of the self or a shifting reflection caused by his or her own movement. However, the image that the *Mirror* ‘reflects’ is not the changing reflection of a real mirror. Nor is it a clear, fixed image of the surface of a mirror. Instead the *Mirrors* present a highly abstract, pixelated surface to meet our eyes. The *Mirrors* are physical objects that merge two forms of representation into one: the mirror and the photograph, thus highlighting similarities between them as surfaces that can potentially represent or reflect almost anything. However, in their physical form, they show us only their pixelation, their digitally constructed nature.

Penelope Umbrico’s *Mirrors* are photographs of mirrors that become simultaneously photograph and mirror: the image reflected on the mirror’s surface becomes a photograph, thus showing an analogy between the two objects. In their self-reflexive nature, I argue that Umbrico’s *Mirrors* point to their status as digital photographs, therefore signaling a technological shift from analog to digital photography. Umbrico’s *Mirrors*, in altering both mirrors and photographs simultaneously refer to the long history of photography in relation to mirrors. The history of photography is seen first through these objects by the reflective surface of the daguerreotype which mirrored the viewer when observing the daguerreotype, and because of the extremely high level of detail in the photographic image, which mirrored the photographic subject. The relation to the history of photography is also seen in the phenomenon of the mirror within a photograph and the idea that the mirror’s reflection shows the realistic way that photographs represent reality. Craig Owens calls this *en abyme*, or the miniature reproduction of a text that represents the text as a whole.⁴ In the case of the mirror, this is because the mirror within the photograph shows how both mediums display highly naturalistic depictions of reality.

⁴ Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” 75.

I contend that as an object that is representative of the photographic medium itself, the shift from analog to digital photography is in part seen through the use of the mirror that ultimately creates an absent referent as understood through a comparison of Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656). As Foucault suggests that *Las Meninas* signals a shift in representation from the Classical age to the Modern period, I suggest that the *Mirrors* signal the shift in representation from analog to digital.

This latter shift spurred debate among photo history scholars related to the ontology of the photographic medium as scholars were anxious that the ease of editing digital images compromised the photograph's seeming relationship to truth or reality and that it would be impossible to know whether an image had been altered. They were also concerned with the idea that computers could generate images from nothing but code, removing the direct relationship of the photograph to its subject and thereby declaring the "death" of the medium. The *Mirrors* embody the technological phenomenon with visual addition of "compression artifacts," otherwise known as pixelation, where this representation of digital space appears not directly from our own creation but as a by-product of digital JPEG programming. In this way they are no longer connected to the subject but only to the digital space they represent. As self-reflexive objects, the *Mirrors* show that there has been a technological transformation from the physically made analog photograph to the inherently mutable digital file.

INTRODUCTION

“Coincidentally, and on a more personal level, when I was beginning to work on the mirror images, my own bathroom mirror broke and I neglected to replace it for some time. It was [an] odd experience, you stand at the sink and throw water on your face, wipe yourself dry with a towel and then look up. You expect to see your reflection looking back at you but you’re not there. So the result of this domestic laziness began to inform the work for me—in a sense it was this visceral experience that drove the work.”⁵

- Penelope Umbrico

“But the mirror image, itself a double, is redoubled by the photograph itself.”⁶

- Craig Owens

As the artwork’s title suggests, Penelope Umbrico’s *Mirrors (from Home Décor Catalogs and Websites)* (2001-2011) (fig. 1) are photographs of mirrors that Umbrico (b. 1957, Philadelphia, PA) has appropriated from print and web based home décor advertisements like those from Pottery Barn or West Elm. The mirrors in these advertisements reflect the photo shoot constructed for the ad, often showing plants or light filled windows empty of people.⁷ To print the *Mirrors* for the catalog portion of the series, Umbrico first applies a layer of white-out to everything in the advertisement except for the mirror and then scans the home décor catalog. In the case of the web-based iteration, she removes the advertising space digitally through photo editing software. Often, the mirror in the advertisement is perspectively skewed within the space so as to not show the anonymous photographer. Once the mirror has been singled out and made

⁵ Penelope Umbrico, “Penelope Umbrico,” interview by Mark Alice Durant, *Saint Lucy*, accessed February 24, 2018, <https://saint-lucy.com/conversations/penelope-umbrico/>.

⁶ Craig Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” *October* 5 (Summer 1978): 81.

⁷ Toward the end of the decade, Umbrico updated the series by both adding to and replacing some of the catalog based mirrors with their digital counterparts as noted in the author’s studio visit with the artist, March 15, 2018, Brooklyn, NYC.

digital, Umbrico then adjusts the perspective of the mirror so that it faces the viewer. Finally, she scales the photograph of the mirror cut from the advertisement to the size and shape of the actual mirror for sale.⁸ By enlarging the photograph, she must increase the file size and subsequent print significantly, which distorts the final printed image thereby causing pixelation, otherwise known as “compression artifacts”.⁹ Lastly, she mounts these pixelated prints to non-glare Plexiglas both to remove any incidental reflective surface effects and to create a physical object. What hangs on the wall, then, looks like a mirror in its shape, size and beveled frame: the photograph becomes a one-to-one representation of the object it portrays. When looking at a real mirror, often the viewer is aware of either a reflection of the self or a shifting reflection caused by his or her own movement. However, the image that the *Mirror* ‘reflects’ is not the changing reflection of a real mirror. Nor is it a clear, fixed image of the surface of a mirror. Instead the *Mirrors* present a highly abstract, pixelated surface to meet our eyes. The *Mirrors* are physical objects that merge two forms of representation into one: the mirror and the photograph, thus highlighting similarities between them as surfaces that can potentially represent or reflect almost anything. However in their physical form show us only their pixelation, their digitally constructed nature.

When looking at Penelope Umbrico’s *Mirrors*, I am perplexed: neither the photograph nor the mirror fit within my understanding of how either should function. Despite the object’s resemblance to a mirror, I do not see myself and thus I’m made aware of the absence of my reflection. Yet neither do I experience the photograph as I would a standard, in-focus image,

⁸ “*Mirrors (from Catalogs and Home Improvement Websites)*, 2001 – 2011” Penelope Umbrico, Accessed November 15, 2018, <http://www.penelopeumbrico.net/index.php/project/mirrors-from-catalogs/>

⁹ Daniel Palmer, “The Rhetoric of the JPEG,” in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, ed. Martin Lister (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 151. In addition, JPEG stands for Joint Photographic Experts Group, for more information on the invention and origins of this file type see: <https://jpeg.org/about.html>

because the plants, windows or décor objects reflected in the *Mirrors* are frustratingly pixelated. As implied by her statement in this essay's epigraph, Umbrico's interest in creating the *Mirrors* series was partly related to the psychological implications of not seeing her reflection in her bathroom mirror.¹⁰ She described this experience as "visceral" because the lack of her reflection conflicted with her daily routine. Although Umbrico was struck by her lack of reflection, instead when I saw these objects for the first time I was distracted by the variation in image quality of the *Mirrors*. Some were so pixelated that all I could see were the jagged squares emblematic of the degradation of the digital image. In other *Mirrors*, while the images were not blurred to full abstraction, they were still blurry enough to be irritating, leaving me to desire more photographic sharpness to their forms. When I saw the degraded quality of the objects and the jagged forms, what came to mind was the digital ontology of these images and their connection to photography as a medium. In addition, I questioned the indexical relationship of the mirror in these photographic objects.

Penelope Umbrico's *Mirrors* are photographs of mirrors that become simultaneously photograph and mirror: the image reflected on the mirror's surface becomes a photograph, thus showing an analogy between the two objects. In their self-reflexive nature, I argue that Umbrico's *Mirrors* point to their status as digital photographs, therefore signaling a technological shift from analog to digital photography. Umbrico's *Mirrors*, in altering both mirrors and photographs simultaneously refer to the long history of photography in relation to mirrors. The photograph's similarity to the mirror was noted as early as the invention of the daguerreotype in 1839,¹¹ which was hailed by Oliver Wendell Holmes as a "mirror with a

¹⁰ Penelope Umbrico, Studio Visit with the artist, March 15, 2018, Brooklyn, NY.

¹¹ Prior to the official date of invention or the date of the patent of the daguerreotype in 1839, there were several experiments and scholars speculate that the photograph was actually invented toward the beginning of the 1800s.

memory,” both because of the reflective surface of the daguerreotype and because of the highly realistic quality of the medium.¹² The daguerreotype was compared to a mirror both because of the reflective surface which mirrored the viewer when observing the daguerreotype, and because of the extremely high level of detail in the photographic image, which mirrored the photographic subject. The relation to the history of photography is also seen in the phenomenon of the mirror within a photograph and the idea that the mirror’s reflection shows the realistic way that photographs represent reality. Art critic and historian Craig Owens calls this *en abyme*, or the literary term for the miniature reproduction of a text that represents the text as a whole.¹³ In the case of the mirror, this is because the mirror within the photograph shows how both mediums display highly naturalistic depictions of reality. With the mirror’s reflection made into a photograph, I contend that as an object that is representative of the photographic medium itself, the shift from analog to digital photography is in part seen precisely through the use of the mirror and noticeable pixelation. The mirror ultimately creates an absent referent as I analyze through a comparison of the *Mirrors* to the mirror in Diego Velázquez’s *Las Meninas*, 1656. As Foucault suggests that *Las Meninas* signals a shift in representation from the Classical age to the Modern period, I suggest that the *Mirrors* signal the shift in representation from analog to digital photography.

This latter shift spurred debate among photo history scholars related to the ontology of the photographic medium. Scholars were anxious that the ease of editing digital images

For example, Nicephore Niépce’s *View from his Window at Le Gras*, ca. 1827 is considered by many to be the first photograph predating the 1839 date by twelve years. For more information on the founding of photography see: Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography: From 1839 to the Present* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1982); Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2007); and Michel Frizot, *A New History of Photography* (Köln: Könemann, 1998).

¹² This quote is cited frequently in a number of sources that discuss the daguerreotype. See: Olivier Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,” in *Soundings from the Atlantic* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864), 129.

¹³ Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” 75.

compromised the photograph's seeming relationship to truth or reality and that it would be impossible to know if an image had been altered. They were also concerned with the idea that computers could generate images from nothing but code, removing the direct relationship of the photograph to its subject and thereby declaring the "death" of the medium. The *Mirrors* embody this technological phenomenon with the editing and manipulation of the photograph in Umbrico's process as articulated above. In addition, the visual presence of "compression artifacts," otherwise known as pixelation, where this representation of digital space appears not directly from our own creation but as a by-product of digital JPEG programming. In this way they are no longer connected to the subject but only to the digital space they represent. As self-reflexive objects, the *Mirrors* show that there has been a technological transformation from the physically made analog photograph to the inherently mutable digital file.

Literature Review and Contextual Analysis

Umbrico's appropriative strategy stems from the European modernist collages of the '20s, the Pop artists of the '60s, and the '70s and '80s post-modernist movements including, specifically, the 'Pictures generation.'¹⁴ A common understanding of appropriation is that the artists are critiquing the very sources that they draw their material from such as popular culture, advertisements, politics or the news.¹⁵ As appropriation practices extend into the contemporary moment, scholars such as Lesley Martin, Kate Palmer Albers and Lyle Rexer have generally considered Umbrico's work to fit within the practice of artists' whose borrowed images criticize

¹⁴ The Pictures generation is known for the appropriation of famous photographers like Cindy Sherman or Richard Prince who use images from film and advertisements to make their work.

¹⁵ Lesley A. Martin, "The Anxiety of the Ubiquitous," in *Lay Flat 02: Meta* (New York: Lavalette, 2010), 11.

not just the original source but the overall proliferation of digital photography as aided by the internet.¹⁶

Other scholars have focused on Umbrico's projects that involve collaboration with individuals, or the public through social media or websites such as Craigslist or Google Images. Daniel Palmer's recent publication discusses the collaborative aspects of photography from the late 1960s onward. In reference to Umbrico's work, Palmer considers projects in which she culls together numerous photographs from online sources, sometimes involving a collaboration with the public. In some instances one series can contain thousands of images. The fact that Umbrico has not taken these images herself leads Palmer to argue that she is subverting the idea of an individual author and instead is identifying photography as a collective practice, made by everyone.¹⁷ The quantity of images paired with the variety of mostly anonymous, non-professional or amateur authors has led many scholars to consider Umbrico's work as a commentary on the digital abundance of images in contemporary society.

However, I suggest that analyzing the *Mirrors* through the transition from analog to digital photography is more fitting to evaluate this series given the presence of print and online sources in the series. By considering the recent contemporary moment of 2001-2011 in which the works were created, I contend that they are not necessarily about the abundance of images online, but rather about the technological shift of the photograph's transition into digital space. By contextualizing Umbrico's *Mirrors* within the discourse of photography theory in the early 2000s regarding the shift in photographic technology from analog to digital, we begin to

¹⁶ See: Martin, "The Anxiety of the Ubiquitous," *Lay Flat 02: Meta*; Kate Palmer Albers, "Abundant Images and the Collective Sublime," in *Exposure* 46, no. 2 (October 2013): 4-14; and Lyle Rexer, *The Edge of Vision: The Rise of Abstraction in Photography* (New York: Aperture, 2009).

¹⁷ Daniel Palmer, *Photography and Collaboration: From Conceptual Art to Crowdsourcing* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

understand that the shift to the digital was more than an update to photographic technology. It was also a shift to the understanding of the photographic medium's relationship to culture and truth as digital images are considered to be easily manipulated and therefore no longer directly connected to reality.

Umbrico's work with physical advertising catalogs began in 1990. Her appropriated imagery never used the technique of a direct cut-and-paste; instead she usually alters her sources to display technological aspects of photography. For example in *From Catalogs*, 1998 (fig. 2), one of her first projects using print catalogs, she intentionally created distorted and blurred photographs of pages from jewelry catalogs. While this strategy is in part a comment on the typical clarity of the photographic image, the work also negates the act of choosing and buying objects from catalogs since the objects themselves are too blurry to be seen. The works from this series were presented at Julie Saul Gallery in New York in Umbrico's 1998 exhibition *From Catalogs*. Critic Robert C. Morgan wrote an essay for the exhibition which places Umbrico's work at the intersections of conceptual art, pop art and minimalism. Morgan states of the series, "these appropriated images retained the ability to function like advertising by making one space deflect or contradict another within the same frame, thereby inciting a lack of resolution and a concomitant frustration about the nature of representation."¹⁸ What Morgan is implying is that representation—no matter how faithful it may be to the original form—always refers to the absence of what is shown because of it reminds the viewer that the actual object depicted is not present. In addition, he suggests that the objects' blurriness will negate the consumer's desire to possess the item. The pixelation of the *Mirrors* offers a kind of abstraction that distorts the

¹⁸ Robert C. Morgan, "Penelope Umbrico: Signs Within the Inventory," in *From Catalogs*, New York: Julie Saul Gallery, 1998.

typically sharp image of the mirror and photograph. The pixelation not only ruptures the realistic quality of the photographs but also shows their digital ontology.

In her catalog essay for the exhibition *Out of Place: Mirrors and Doors from Catalogs*, curator Sheryl Conkelton provides an assessment of the works within their contemporary reception in December 2001 (fig. 3). She discusses the way that Umbrico's work ruptures our relationship to both the object depicted in the advertisement and to the photograph itself through their overall distortion and strangeness. Conkelton states that this results in a shift in traditional forms of representation "of reflected and excerpted imagery rather than a direct picturing," that ultimately causes confusion and anxiety.¹⁹ Her statement addresses the fact that Umbrico's *Mirrors* produce an overall different form of representation, one that complicates the standard representation of photographs. I elaborate on the complicated representation of the mirror and photograph in the *Mirrors* series. These two essays by Morgan and Conkelton were published in commercial gallery exhibition catalogs and their concepts have not been fully fleshed out through an in-depth scholarly engagement with the work. In addition, to date there has been no scholarship dedicated to the question of how Umbrico's *Mirrors* replicate the history of photography and what this might reveal about her practice which is above all, *about* photography.²⁰

In her consideration of different forms of photographic representation, Umbrico explains that her interest in home décor catalogs in part stems from the way that the media presented real

¹⁹ Sheryl Conkelton, "Out of Place," in *Out of Place: Mirrors and Doors from Catalogs*, New York: Julie Saul Gallery, 2001.

²⁰ When discussing her series *Suns from Sunsets from Flickr* during an artist talk at the Girls' Club Collection in Fort Lauderdale, Umbrico indicated clearly that the subject of the work is about photography and not the sunset. This concept prevails in all of her series. Author notes from artist talk on January 28, 2015 given in conjunction with the exhibition *Altarations: Built, Blended, Processed* at the University Galleries, Florida Atlantic University. *Altarations* was co-curated by the author and by the director of the University Galleries, W. Rod Faulds.

world events like the 9/11 attacks. She wondered why her twin teenage daughters needed to watch the airplanes crashing into the Twin Towers on TV when there was debris and real evidence of the disaster outside their home in Brooklyn.²¹ In questioning why (and what) technology or media sources provide us in comparison to actual experiences, Umbrico is asking what effect the media has on our understanding of current events through images. Additionally, Umbrico observed that the news media was also promoting a general culture of “hibernation” and “cocooning” surrounding the events on 9/11 and suggested that the public stay indoors. Umbrico cites the fact that while much of the stock market fell, home crafts saw a spike in interest.²² The correlation between the tragedy and the rise in home improvement and crafts led Umbrico to look closer at the mail-order home décor catalogs that arrived at her house. She noticed the odd way that objects were presented, such as stacks of books being used as decoration or books displayed spine-in on their cases.

Many of Umbrico’s projects from the late 1990s to early 2000s utilized home décor catalogs often by singling out objects that suggest the strangeness of these spaces. Such series include but are not limited to: *All the Embarrassing Books (from home décor magazines)* (2007), *Pillow/Gutter* (2007), *Instances of Books Being Read* (2007) or *Instances of Casually Flung Clothing* (2007)—each of which imply a presence of someone actively using the space,

²¹ Penelope Umbrico, “Self-ness-less: On Art-and-Crafts, Kitsch, Home Décor, Avatars and Ghosts,” in *Cultural Production in Virtual and Imagined Worlds*, ed. Tracey Bowen and Mary-Lou Neimac (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 57.

²² Penelope Umbrico, “Our New Library,” *Rethinking Marxism* 21:2 (2009): 196. In a 1992 analysis of the nostalgic properties of advertising text, Barbara Stern uses the same term of “cocooning” and similar term “nesting” to products that provide comfort. She states, “They speak to the consumer’s ideal self-concept, that imaginatively reconstructed state of perfection associated with childhood.” Between the longing for a time other than the present and the longing for an idealized self, the desire to sink into these mail-order sources during the tragic time in the nation seems highly plausible. What Umbrico may also be commenting on with the *Mirrors* is the fact that the nostalgic aspects of the advertisement became more effective during 9/11. See: Barbara B. Stern, “Historical and Personal Nostalgia in Advertising Text: The Fin de siècle Effect,” *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (December 1992), 19.

revealing the strategic moves of the advertisers to allow viewers to imaginatively enter into the constructed home space. Examples of this are: a door that is cracked open, open books with glasses lying on top, or clothing that has been tossed onto the corner of the bed or chair as though someone has just left the room for a brief moment. Each of these moments show the advertisers' attention to even the smallest details of the image in order to make the space believable. For Umbrico, the mirror is a form of escape related to the windows and doors of these spaces.

Umbrico elaborates:

...in these contexts, the viewer is invited to voyeuristically move through these idealized, fictional spaces...[i]magine: you are at home (probably there are dishes in the sink, dirty laundry on your bedroom floor, piles of paperwork on your table). You go online, and now you are looking into a screen. You navigate to a home-décor site (perhaps you are looking for an armoire to help organize your mess); there, in a new window, is a perfectly appointed room. You have now left behind those dishes...[t]he mirrors reflect perfect interior settings: artfully arranged flower bouquets on wooden side tables, candles burning delicately...[y]ou are free to wander around. Where are these ideal spaces?...[y]ou have gone from the real to the virtual, through a number of windows, and now you can look out through the virtual window views that were certainly never remotely 'real.' This is the promise—the promise of escape—suggested by those sites.”²³

The *Mirrors* relate to Umbrico's other catalog-based series not necessarily by suggesting that someone has been using the mirror but by carefully reflecting the space of the advertisement. The reflection of the mirror must have been considered so as to not picture anything that would reveal the entire advertisement to be a fabrication—such as the photographer or interior designer. This is often why the mirror is angled in the first place, so the construction of the image does not show. Instead, the reflection of the perfectly appointed room confirms the lie. It repeats the fabrication that the space the consumer is looking at is a real space or one that is attainable. The sensation of “voyeuristically moving,” is in part what the *Mirrors* series subverts through the

²³ Penelope Umbrico, “From Narcissus to Narcosis: Some Notes, Questions, and Responses,” in *Penelope Umbrico* (New York: Aperture, 2009), 5.

removal of the home décor space, addition of the pixelation on the surface of the photograph and perspectival shift made by Umbrico so that the mirror may face the viewer. In Richard Paul's article for the first issue of the *Philosophy of Photography* journal, he provides insight into the decisions made by advertisers by explaining in part the difficulty of reflective surfaces for advertisers. He states, "Photographers (particularly studio photographers) find reflective surfaces problematic. They have the potential to reveal the construction of the image, its fictional status. But reflective surfaces are the sirens of the commodity image and a vast range of products are made or finished with them."²⁴ As both an asset and a hindrance, the mirror shows the way in which advertisers must consider each and every aspect of the location and placement of the object—particularly if it is reflective. Despite the universal understanding that advertisements are largely false, their known "fictional status" is mostly hidden from view. Umbrico highlights this fabrication through the construction of her *Mirrors*. In showing the pixelation and blur of the image within the mirror, this reflected surface becomes a source of imperfect tension once again.

Of the projects mentioned above, the *Mirrors* is most fitting and significant in attempting to discuss the shift from analog to digital photography because of the relationship that the mirror shares with the medium. The *Mirrors* represent the complicated relationship of the mirror and photograph. As an object representing this analogous association, the *Mirrors* show first and foremost that there has been a shift within the photographic medium by representing the pixelation which is emblematic of digital technology. In this capacity, the pixelation on the *Mirrors* represent the fear of photo history scholars that digital photography would not hold the indexical relationship to the object or subject depicted. The relationship between mirrors and photography and the idea of truth in relation to photography began with one of the founding

²⁴ Richard Paul, "On reflection," *Philosophy of Photography* 1, no. 1 (2010): 102.

mediums—the daguerreotype. In the following section I explore one of the initial suggestions that photography may hold a relationship to truth or the “thing itself” and the physical properties of the daguerreotype that correspond with this claim in order to understand how Umbrico’s *Mirrors* are subverting this idea.²⁵

²⁵ The notion of “truth” in relation to photography has been complicated from its origins. One of the early inventors of photography Hippolyte Bayard, made a photograph entitled *Self Portrait as a Drowned Man* (1840) which depicted him as a victim of drowning. He made this photograph upon hearing about the award of the daguerreotype patent to Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre in 1839. In addition, when we refer to photography as “truth” it is a belief mostly held by Western and European practitioners of the medium. For alternative approaches to the medium see: Allison Moore, “Toward an Ontology of African Studio Portraiture,” in *Photography and Failure: One Medium’s Entanglement with Flops, Underdogs, and Disappointments*, ed. by Kris Belden-Adams (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) and Olu Oguibe, “The Substance of the Image,” in *In/Sight: African Photography* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Art, 1996), exhibition catalog.

SHIFTING REFLECTIONS OF EARLY PHOTOGRAPHY

What a strange effect, this silvery glimmer and mirror-like sheen! Held toward the light, all substance seems to vanish from the picture: the highlights grow darker than the shadows, and the image of some gentlemen in a stock or some lady in bonnet and puffed sleeves appears like a ghostlike vision. Yet as soon as it is moved away from the light and contemplated from a certain angle, the image reappears, the mere shadow of a countenance comes to life again.²⁶

The description by photography critic and poet Sadakichi Hartmann illustrates the interaction between the portrait and the mirrored surface of the daguerreotype. The photographic figure is at once present but with a sleight of hand is just as quickly absent from view. The shifting image is in part caused by the “silvery glimmer and mirror-like sheen” discussed by Hartmann above.

Photography scholar Alan Trachtenberg observes that the image of the small handheld daguerreotype requires the viewer’s involvement to be viewed. He explains that to see the image, there must be a “specific triangulation of viewer, image, and light.”²⁷ Depending on the exact angle by which the daguerreotype is held, the triangulation may not only reflect the portrait but a reflection of the self, superimposed on the ghostlike figure. Within one object are two forms of realistic representation: the reflective quality of the daguerreotype literally grants a mirror’s reflection of the self and of a photographic portrait at the same time because of the angle and movement required to see the image. Additionally, the daguerreotype was often a “lateral

²⁶ Sadakichi Hartmann, “The Daguerreotype,” in *The Valiant Knights of Daguerre: Selected Critical Essays on Photography and Profiles of Photographic Pioneers*, ed. Harry W. Lawton and George Knox (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 142. Also quoted in Alan Trachtenberg, “Likeness as Identity: Reflections on the Daguerrean Mystique,” in *The Portrait in Photography*, ed. Graham Clarke (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd., 1992), 174.

²⁷ Alan Trachtenberg, “Likeness as Identity,” 180-81.

reversal” or literal mirror image of the object because of the way that the subject was projected onto the reflective, light sensitized plate inside the *camera obscura*. This distortion was only corrected if a mirror was placed inside the *camera obscura* itself.²⁸ In some respects, this is similar to the way that single reflex cameras work today as the mirror inside the camera “flips” the image onto the film or sensor. The images of the *Mirrors* are also laterally reversed like the daguerreotype, harkening back to the origins of the invention of photography.

In addition to the physical qualities of the daguerreotype, the other aspect of the mirror and photograph analogy is that the photograph was so highly realistic that it was thought to be a form of “truth.” The *Mirrors* subvert the idea that the photographic medium can be a form of truth because of their overall blur and pixelation which shows the alteration to the photograph itself. While they are examples of the way that an image reflects on the mirrors’ surface, they are far from the “mirror with a memory” as Oliver Wendell Holmes, S.R. declared of the daguerreotype approximately twenty years after its invention.²⁹ His poetic description refers to the daguerreotype’s renowned high level of detail which he equated to the mirror’s reflection. The “memory” portion of Holmes’ quote signifies the desire to “fix” an image onto a surface. Fixing the representation was at the origin of the issue that plagued early photography. Since the early nineteenth century, devices that were aides to drawing from life such as the *camera obscura* and the *camera lucida* were available to artists. However, these devices could not stabilize the image onto a surface and the pencil drawing was deemed insufficient; for, “fever for

²⁸ For more information see: Naomi Rosenblum, *A World History of Photography* (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2007), 15 and “The Daguerreotype Medium” Library of Congress, accessed November 13, 2018, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/daguerreotypes/articles-and-essays/the-daguerreotype-medium/>.

²⁹ This quote is cited frequently in a number of sources that discuss the daguerreotype. See: Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,” in *Soundings from the Atlantic* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864), 129.

reality was running high.”³⁰ When the inventor of the daguerreotype, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre was finally successful in fixing the image onto the mirrored surface of the daguerreotype with the help of his business partner, Nicéphore Niépce, the public was entranced by the realism of this newfound medium.³¹ For example, Philip Hone, who was a previous mayor of New York, expressed this quality of the daguerreotype:

Every object, however minute, is a perfect transcript of the thing itself; the hair of the human head, the gravel of the roadside, the texture of a silk curtain, or the shadow of the smaller leaf reflected upon the wall, are all imprinted as carefully as nature or art has created them in the objects transferred; and those things which are invisible to the naked eye are rendered apparent by the help of a magnifying glass.³²

The comparison to the “thing itself” is considered significant by photo history scholar Richard Rudisill because it distinguished the daguerreotype from other representational media. Rudisill was one of the first to make the analogy between the mirror and photograph, and conducted extensive research on the daguerreotype in America in his publication *Mirror Image: The Influence of the Daguerreotype on American Society* (1971). Hone’s reference to the “thing

³⁰ This quote by Newhall is continuous with his explanation that the realistic images created by the *camera obscura* and *camera lucida* inspired practitioners to develop a method for fixing the image of reality rather than recreating the image as a pencil drawing. Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1982), 11.

³¹ Daguerre began a partnership with Nicéphore Niépce who helped him to develop the right set of chemicals to fix the image in France. Sadly, Niépce died before he could see the final result of their experiments—the daguerreotype. The term “fixing” the image was coined by William Henry Fox Talbot who was developing his technique for stabilizing the image simultaneously in England. His “sunprints” or what came to be known as “calotypes” or more specifically, the first photographs on paper, involved the direct contact of objects to the light sensitized paper. While considered much more blurred than their daguerreotype counterparts, some images still tricked the contemporary public by mistaking the representation for the real object. In asking if his friends if his photograph of lace was a good representation, friends of Talbot claimed that they would not be fooled by the “piece of lace” held out in front of them. Prints of lace were often made by placing the lace directly onto the light sensitized sheet of paper therefore creating a direct physical contact with the object. This anecdote is mentioned in: Geoffrey Batchen, “Photogenics,” in *Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2001), 160. For more information about Daguerre and Niépce see: Newhall, *History of Photography*; for more information about Talbot see: Geoffrey Batchen, *William Henry Fox Talbot* (London and New York: Phaidon, 2008).

³² Originally published in *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851*, ed. Bayard Tuckerman (New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1889) 391-92. Quoted in Richard Rudisill *Mirror Image: The Influence of the Daguerreotype on American Society* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), 53.

itself” implies that the image was seen to be truly realistic and was more than simply a representation.

The conflation of the representation with the actual object is also related to the process by which the daguerreotype is made. With the daguerreotype process, as with many forms of analog photography, part of the veracity of the medium comes from the perceived physical contact of the object and image. To describe the process for the daguerreotype: after a sheet of copper is plated with silver, polished, then made light sensitive, it is placed inside a *camera obscura*. Within the dark box the lens cap is removed and the image is projected onto the plate. The plate is then placed in another box where it is exposed to mercury and then “as the mercury settle[s] on the portions of the plate’s surface which had been affected by light, the image appear[s].”³³ The way the image seems to make direct contact with the mirrored plate is partly what made the daguerreotypes seem like truth because the image is created by projecting onto the light sensitive plate. Here is where the image is a lateral reversal, unless adjusted by a mirror. Additionally, the mercury physically settles only on the points where the light touched the plate. Furthermore, many other forms of analog photography were presumed to have this perceived physical contact. This was part of the concern of photography scholars in the shift to digital as there would no longer be the indexical physical relationship between the image and the object pictured. Instead of the image burning itself into emulsion or appearing from mercury, the digital image is made of computer code. In many ways Umbrico’s *Mirrors* picture this physical concern with the inclusion of the “compression artifacts” because they are showing the coded aspect of JPEG technology that is not normally visible. During the early 2000s the computer code of the digital file was not perceived to have the physical indexical relationship of the analog image. Rather, the

³³ Rudisill, *Mirror Image*, 48.

code was considered fictional, made only by the computer generating the image. The pixelation on the *Mirrors* makes present the fear of the ontological status of the digital, showing the shift into a new type of photography.

The Analogous Relationship and Mirror in Velázquez's *Las Meninas*

Beyond the physical relationship of the mirror and photograph as found in the reflective property of the daguerreotype, the mirror's reflection as represented in a photograph also connects to the history of photography. The mirror's reflection within the photograph becomes a photograph in itself and shows the process of representing reality. Similar to the entirety of the home décor space, the image reflected on the mirror's surface has been carefully composed by the photographer or designer and then fixed by the photograph.³⁴ Because Umbrico's *Mirrors* come from home décor advertisements, where there is a mirror within a photograph, I provide an analysis of Craig Owen's description of the relationship between photography and mirrors which he explains in detail in his 1978 article "Photography *en abyme*." Owens argues that a mirror within a photograph both duplicates the subject and is a reference to the photographic process in itself because the mirror is a "reduced, internal image of the photograph." He continues, "The mirror reflects not only the subjects depicted, but also the entire photograph itself. It tells us in a photograph what a photograph is—*en abyme*."³⁵ Owens defines "*en abyme*" as a term from

³⁴ Notably, Umbrico was not the first to fix or flatten the experience of the shifting nature of the mirror's reflection. In the home décor advertisement, the mirror is shown on the wall, often reflecting the space of the advertisement. Similarly, as photography scholar Geoffrey Batchen explains, early engravers found ways to reproduce the daguerreotype to be distributed in print sources. This required that the unique and highly detailed daguerreotype be etched into and ultimately ruined. He states, "doubly alienated by processes inherent to capitalism, we are prevented from having anything like an authentic relationship with the products of our own culture." See Batchen, "Double Dissemination," in *The "Public" Life of Photographs*, ed. Terry Gervais (Toronto, Canada: Ryerson Image Centre; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 40-41.

³⁵ In addition he links the representation of a representation (or a photograph within a photograph) to Derrida's deconstruction and the "abyss" of absence. Owens also draws connections to the linguistic theories of Jakobson and

literature as “any fragment of a text that reproduces in miniature the structure of the text in its entirety.”³⁶ The term is used by him to refer specifically to the small image reflected on the mirror within a photograph. By reflecting just a small portion of the image, Owens states that the mirror’s reflection is repeating the photograph because it shows the way that the photograph represents reality. It does this through life-like replication of the surrounding scene and because it reflects a piece of the photograph itself. I suggest Umbrico’s *Mirrors* both show this analogy of the mirror and photograph but are no longer *en abyme* as Umbrico has removed them from the space of the advertisement. They are not representing the self-reflexive property of the mirror with a photograph so much as they *are* photographs of mirrors that embody this self-referential nature. This self-reflexive property of the mirror subverts the traditional notion of the photograph as a direct producer of reality. Unlike the belief in the daguerreotype’s reflective image, Umbrico’s *Mirrors* do not represent reality or the “thing itself” as suggested by Philip Hone. Instead, they represent their own self-reflexive nature and their digitally derived source. In their inability to represent reality in part because of their pixelated and sculptural form, they are demonstrative of the concerns of scholars that the digital image would no longer hold the direct indexical relationship to the subject. The *Mirrors*’ reflection shows a space that is not our own and does not depict reality.

An example of the mirror and photograph analogy and the self-reflexive property of a “photograph within a photograph” can be understood in Owens description of an image by Victorian photographer Lady Clementina Hawarden (fig. 4). In the photograph, a woman—most

Levi-Strauss however for this purposes of this paper I will only focus on the direct connections he makes with the mirror and the photograph. Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” 75.

³⁶ Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” 75.

likely one of Hawarden's eight children—stands before both a mirror and a window.³⁷ Owens suggests that it is less that she is using either as a source for contemplation than that the image itself is “becoming self-reflexive.”³⁸ He states more clearly, “the window and the mirror [restate] a structural tension within the medium—between photography as extrovert, a view onto the material world, and the photograph as a self-enclosed image of its own process... The mirror functions not only to reflect the subject; it also quite consciously pictures that metaphor which defines photography as a mirror image.”³⁹ Within the photograph by Hawarden, the reflection of the woman in the mirror is itself another image. The realistic quality of the internal mirror reflection mimics the overall realistic property of the whole photograph. The image of the woman in the photograph is just as sharply rendered as her reflection in the mirror which shows how both the mirror and the photograph are devices for representation. The reflection in a real mirror of course changes but when the image on the mirror's surface is captured by the photograph, it becomes a photograph. Then in the case of Umbrico's *Mirrors*, when the digital file of the mirror is expanded, the shift into the digital form of photography is then made visibly understood.

Umbrico's *Mirrors* are emblematic of this self-reflexive relationship between the photograph and the mirror as we are not meant to contemplate our reflections in these objects but become aware of our absent reflections. However, they differ from the Hawarden example in that, with the *Mirrors*, the viewer is denied the pictorial space that would show the metaphor that Owen's clearly describes. There is no image of a young woman in supposed contemplation,

³⁷ The Victoria and Albert Museum in London states that their collection houses 90% of Hawarden's photographs. They provide biographical and art historical resources regarding her life and artwork. See “Lady Clementina Hawarden Biography,” Victoria and Albert Museum, Accessed September 10, 2018, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/l/lady-clementina-hawarden/>.

³⁸ Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” 79.

³⁹ Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” 80.

rather the *Mirrors* are simply photographs of mirrors in themselves, purposely made obvious only by their title and the bevel inset within the mirrors in the series. Umbrico uses mirrors with beveled edges precisely to retain their objectness: “I only collected images of mirrors that had bevels so that when you cropped them out, they still looked like mirrors. Otherwise they would just look like images of the thing [that they are reflecting].”⁴⁰ Umbrico includes the bevel to retain the likeness of the mirror-as-object. The bevel also indicates the inherent self-reflexive relationship between the mirror and the photograph in the *Mirrors* series. The bevel shows the analogy of mirror and photograph because without it, the image and the *Mirrors* would simply be photographs of blurred home décor objects. If the source of the image were hidden, if the viewer was not aware that the images were actually photographs of mirror’s reflections, then they could not become aware of the self-reflexive analogy of the mirror and photograph relationship created by Umbrico. Similar to the Hawarden photograph, the *Mirrors* are not necessarily meant to be contemplated, but instead reveal the act of photographic representation in itself. In illustrating the photographic medium with the mirror form, the variation of quality of the *Mirrors* (some more pixelated than others) shows the continuously shifting nature of the medium.

In the example of Brassai’s photograph, *Group in a Dance Hall* (ca. 1932),⁴¹ Owens states that the desire to identify with or draw narratives of the individuals represented in the image is obstructed by the presence of the mirror. Instead, he claims that what is more interesting is the relationship between the figures and the duplication of their reflection. The fact that the mirror makes some figures “present only in reflection” and thereby “dispossessed of their corporeal beings,” relates in many ways to the single product advertising images from which

⁴⁰ Penelope Umbrico, Skype Conversation with the author, August 28, 2017.

⁴¹ A reprinted version is included in the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. A reproduction of the work can be viewed here: <https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/ST2001.0001> (accessed October 18, 2018).

Umbrico appropriates her mirrors.⁴² Oftentimes Umbrico takes the original mirrors from single-product photographs, which are images that feature the product alone and not within the staged domestic setting. The significance of the fact that she uses the single product images and not the entire space of the room is that the domestic objects like plants or windows in the reflections of some of the mirrors are often not repeated in the main pictorial space of the photograph. Like the figures that have been “dispossessed of their corporeal beings” in the Brassai photograph, the objects in the single product images are often only represented by the mirror alone and are not in the visible space of the advertisement. The mirrors within the single product images are structurally similar to the Brassai photograph in that the mirror reflects something outside the main pictorial space. However they are different in that Brassai is creating a continuous loop of doubling with the repetition of the back of the figures, whereas the advertisers are simply attempting to improve the aesthetic quality of the bathroom by reflecting a potted plant in the mirror. The use of the mirror to reflect what is outside the pictorial space will be discussed more in depth through a comparison to the mirror’s function in *Las Meninas*.

For example, in looking at the original source image (fig. 5b) for *Master-AFC016-2 from Mirrors (from Home-Improvement Websites)* (2011) (fig. 5a), the potted plant is not within the photographic space but is only reflected on the surface of the mirror. The significance of this is that in *Mirrors*, the actual object is doubly absent, as repeated from the second epigraph: “the mirror image, itself a double, is redoubled by the photograph itself.”⁴³ The redoubling is what has created this extra element of absence within the representation of the mirror in the photographic space. The mirror in itself pictured in a photograph reveals the double absence of representation. Scholars concerned with the shift to digital photography were worried that there

⁴² Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” 73.

⁴³ Owens, “Photography *en abyme*,” 81.

would no longer be a connection to the referent or to the “real.” In the example of both *Master-AFC016-2* and the original source image, the potted plant is removed at multiple levels—once by the mirror, once by the photograph, and altered through the perspectival shift and enlargement of the photograph. Unlike the Hawarden example, it is not that mirror depicts another angle of the young woman but that the plant seems to appear from nowhere. The plant is entirely invented, placed there by the advertisers either physically or digitally—a fact we cannot be certain of but generally suspect that the image was altered onto the *Mirrors* surface. The complicated reflection of the *Mirror* generates suspicion in their representation of “reality” in part through their background as an advertising source and in part through their digital make-up. If the mirror in the photograph shows the photographic process, then the altered mirror in the photograph shows the photographic process of the ease of digital alteration.

In Foucault’s analysis of *Las Meninas*, he uses the example of the mirror to make the conclusion that by representing classical representation through the king and queen’s portrait in the mirror, the painting then reveals a new mode of modern representation. In addition, the system of representation by which the actual subject of the mirror’s reflection is not present within the original space of the image is a similar system that Foucault has determined occurs within the famous painting by the Spanish court painter Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez titled *Las Meninas* (1656) (fig. 6). The painting depicts the artist in his studio and is shown with the Infanta Margarita and her many maids of honor. Each of these figures is either tending to the Infanta or looking out toward the viewer. The gaze of the figures make the viewer feel present, though we later learn through the reflection of the mirror that it is really the king and queen for whom their eyes are directed. Behind this group is the deep space of the studio showing dark paintings, a mirror, a gentleman standing in the doorway and a couple whispering to each other.

Las Meninas is the first text in Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1970), originally published in France as *Les Mots et les choses* (1966). In analyzing the forms of representation and space of the painting, we can better understand the shift in representation and how this may relate to the shift from analog to digital. I draw connections between Foucault's argument that by representing classical representation *Las Meninas* signals a shift from classical to modern modes of representation; to the idea that as Umbrico's *Mirrors* represent the nature of photographic representation in the use of the mirror and pixelation, they signal a shift from analog to digital photography. I show how both arguments originate from epistemological questions related to representation and resemblance.

Similar to the way Umbrico has found the representation of objects (especially mirrors) in mail-order catalog advertisements strange, in the preface to *The Order of Things*, Foucault studies a passage by writer Jorge Luis Borges that examines the seemingly strange way that animals are classified in a Chinese encyclopedia. Within the Chinese encyclopedia the animals are not paired by their physical features but rather by their ownership, behavior or by other ideas that may appear abnormal such as whether or not the animal has just "broken the water pitcher."⁴⁴ Foucault is perplexed (and entertained) by the juxtaposition of the animals and questions the type of environment where this collection would be conceivable. The incomprehensible pairing of animals leads him to ask questions regarding the basis for which we classify or order anything from an epistemological standpoint. If the Western Classical age is based on classification through resemblance he states that this changes in the nineteenth century with the introduction of the modern age. Foucault states, "But as things become more reflexive,

⁴⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, "John Wilkins' Analytical Language," in *Jorge Luis Borges: Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. by Eliot Weinberger, Trans. by Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (New York: Viking, 1999), 231; also see: Michel Foucault, "Preface," in *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1994), xv.

seeking the principle of their intelligibility only in their own development, and abandoning the space of representation, man enters in his turn, and for the first time, the field of Western knowledge.”⁴⁵ In part, what Foucault is referring to is the reflexive way that a painting like *Las Meninas* appears to represent the act of representation. As mentioned, the mirror within a photograph and especially the *Mirrors* also show this self-reflexivity in their representational form. Both have abandoned the straight image to comment on their own painted or photographic source. If this act of representation referring to resemblance is related for Foucault to the shift from the Classical age to the self-referential character of the Modern age in its turn to man, then what does it say about the self-referential quality of Umbrico’s *Mirrors* and their capacity to represent only themselves as photographic objects and their pixelated form? Could it be that if Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* is the bridge from classical to modern modes of representation, are Umbrico’s *Mirrors* the visual exemplification of the photographic shift from analog to digital photography?

Considered a renowned master of painting, Velázquez is highly realistic in his style and Foucault alludes to this fact by using photography terminology. He states that the figures and foreground of the painting are only visible because of the “aperture” of the window toward the right hand side of the painting.⁴⁶ The “aperture” refers to the size of the opening of the shutter of a camera which helps to determine how much light will be shown onto the film or sensor that records the image. This allusion to photographic terminology suggests that the painting can gain the verisimilitude that is typically granted only to photographs. However, like the veracity of the

⁴⁵ Foucault, “Preface,” xxiii.

⁴⁶ Foucault, “Las Meninas,” 6. Art historian Svetlana Alpers also notes that travelers in the nineteenth century thought that the painting resembled an image from a *camera obscura* and that *Las Meninas* prefigured Daguerre. See: Svetlana Alpers, “Interpretation without Representation, or The Viewing of *Las Meninas*,” *Representations*, no. 1 (February 1983), 30.

photograph, the painting is not presumed to be synonymous with truth and the mirror shifts the viewer's notions of expectation and representation.

Foucault identifies several forms of representation within *Las Meninas* that run along a spiral form within the painting. It begins with the “aperture” or the window because the light that is shining into the room is what allows us to see the figures within the painting. He begins the actual spiral with the painters' gaze down to the tools of representation in his hand—the palette and brush. The painter, who is Velázquez himself, leans back from the canvas to look at the subject of the painting he is currently working on. Because Velázquez's gaze is directed out toward the canvas, it makes the viewer feel as though he or she is the subject being painted. However, the viewer is then refused the painter's in-progress image and can only see the back of the canvas. As the spiral extends toward the back wall of the studio, there appears to be several paintings along the wall whose content is barely discernable. As representations in themselves, they do not clearly show what they are presenting because the light from the window does not reach them. Rather, it is only the mirror within the group of paintings which seems to be visible through its own source of independent illumination. This bright mirror image however does not render our own likeness; instead, the king and queen glow from within the white outline of the beveled glass. The absence of the viewer and placement of the king and queen within the mirror's space shows the complicated nature of the role of the mirror within the painting, chiefly that it is showing classical representation and thereby is signaling a shift to modern representation as it points to representation in itself.

The spiral continues to the right of the mirror with the gentleman standing in the doorway. It is unclear as to whether he is leaving the room or stepping into the scene to observe the spectacle and Foucault contends that this figure comes from an outside space, a space outside

of the representation in the painting. As a “real” entity, the juxtaposition of the man with the mirrored king and queen provides an interesting parallel as the mirror is reflecting the supposedly “real” figure of the king and queen outside of the painting’s space. The man comes from outside of the representation as the king and queen are also reflected from outside of the traditionally represented space of the Infanta and her helpers. The spiral ends with the sharp perspective of the paintings toward the right of the room. The foreshortening of these paintings does not allow the viewer to see these representations either. Only the edges of the frames of the paintings can be seen, providing just enough information so the viewer knows they are a painting but denying the visual information that they contain. Finally the representation “dissolves” again in the light which is for Foucault, the “entire cycle of representation”.

Foucault explains that the mirror in *Las Meninas* does not function pictorially in the same way as mirrors of Dutch paintings like those of Hans Memling or Jan van Eyck.⁴⁷ In the works of those masters, the convex mirror reflects in perfect detail the backs of the figures standing in the foreground, expanding the space of the painting. In the case of Jan van Eyck’s *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife* (1434) for example, the convex mirror also shows a self-portrait of the artist. Instead, similar to the mirrors from the single product images, the reflection on the mirror in *Las Meninas* is one that reflects images from outside the pictorial space. Though the mirror reveals the king and queen, a representation we are denied in the rest of the painting, it also, as Foucault states, is “hiding as much as and even more than it reveals.”⁴⁸ As the viewer’s physical body is outside of this pictorial space as well, it would seem that the mirror might

⁴⁷ Foucault does not mention these painters specifically or that the perceived faithfulness to the mirror’s reflection of these painters was in part a result of the dedication to realism of the culture of Early Netherlandish painters. Craig Harbison provides a detailed account of van Eyck’s technical proficiency while looking to other cultural and social factors that may have played a role in his technique. See: Craig Harbison, *Jan van Eyck: The Play of Realism*, 2nd edition (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd., 2012).

⁴⁸ Foucault, “Las Meninas,” 15.

reflect ourselves or at least the artist himself. Both Umbrico's *Mirrors* and the mirror in *Las Meninas* hide their respective creators—the anonymous advertising photographer and Velázquez—so that the reflection can be considered in its own terms. The representation of the king and queen within the mirror reminds the viewer ultimately of their own absent reflection. Having been denied a representation of oneself and with the king and queen's double nowhere to be found in the pictorial space of the painting, Foucault declares that the mirror is “freed finally from the relation that was impeding it, [and] can offer itself as representation in its pure form.”⁴⁹ As this “representation in its pure form,” the mirror is not reflecting reality and the king and queen are not depicted from their actual likeness or the “relation impeding” in this purity. This is somewhat confirmed by the history of the painting as scholars have speculated that the work was not commissioned but was produced during Velázquez's free time and then offered to the king upon its completion.⁵⁰ *Las Meninas* represents representation and for Foucault this means that it is not a painting that focuses on resemblance to derive meaning as was the case in the Renaissance or Classical age. Like the self-reflexivity of the mirror's reflection in a photograph, *Las Meninas* signals for Foucault a shift into the modern age which does not necessarily rely on resemblance for meaning but relies on its own formal structure. It defines the time of the classical age and therefore goes beyond it to the modern age in that act.

The experience of not seeing your reflection within the mirror's space is repeated in Umbrico's *Mirrors*. The artist adjusts the mirror's perspective to face toward the viewer so that when the *Mirrors* are hung on the wall and the viewer stands before them, the space surrounding the viewer is not shown and there is no longer any pictorial space to ground the object. In this

⁴⁹ Foucault, “Las Meninas,” 16.

⁵⁰ Ann Sutherland Harris, *Seventeenth-century Art and Architecture* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005), 231.

capacity—in not showing or allowing the experience of seeing oneself or one’s space in the mirror but instead showing the pixelation or “compression artifacts”—the *Mirrors* are another example of “representation in its pure form.” The “compression artifacts” appear when an image is enlarged beyond its capacity. They show the expansion of compressed digital information and have been described as an “‘accident’ built into the program itself.”⁵¹ As simply a representation of digital space and not the indexical relationship to an object, the pixelation embodies the fear of photo scholars that the shift to digital photography would be more than a technological shift but one that changes how we understand the photographic medium. Similar to the artistic freedom Velázquez has to paint whatever he would like in the mirror of his painted space, digital photography makes it especially easy to alter the mirror to reflect anything, or absolutely nothing. Photography scholar Geoffrey Batchen elaborates:

The fact is that, whether by scanning in and manipulating bits of existing images, or by manufacturing fictional representations on screen (or both), computer operators can already produce printed images that are indistinguishable in look and quality from traditional photographs. The main difference seems to be that, whereas photography still claims some sort of objectivity digital imaging is an *overtly* fictional process. As a practice it is known to be capable of nothing but fabrication, digitization abandons even the *rhetoric* of truth that has been such an important part of photography’s cultural success. As their name suggests, digital processes actually return the production of photographic images to the whim of the creative hand (to the *digits*). For that reason, digital images are actually closer in spirit to the creative processes of art than they are to the truth values of documentary.⁵²

The inclusion of the “compression artifacts,” as I argue, signal the shift into a new way of understanding photography, chiefly that it is now a digital medium. As mentioned by Batchen, in many ways it is impossible to tell the difference between analog and digital images. In this way scholars felt as though they could no longer tell what was “real” and what was a fabrication. Like

⁵¹ Palmer, “The Rhetoric of the JPEG,” 150.

⁵² Geoffrey Batchen, “Ectoplasm: Photography in the Digital Age,” in *Over Exposed: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. by Carol Squiers (New York: The New Press, 1999), 15.

the mirror in *Las Meninas*, Umbrico's *Mirrors* reflect an invented or altered image. In reflecting objects outside of the pictorial space and not showing an expected image or reflection of the self, the mirror in both artworks signal a shift in modes of representation. For Foucault this meant that the mirror signaled a shift from the classical to modern age by showing the act of representation of painting. For Umbrico, because the works are photographs and are so closely tied to the photographic medium, they signal a different kind of shift. Their nonfunctionality and inclusion of compression artifacts indicates a shift into the realm of digital photography. While Umbrico's *Mirrors* identify themselves as digital images, they also acknowledge that the way of looking at and understanding photography has changed. Almost all of the images used and created today are digital. It is an epistemological difference that many of us take for granted and may not be aware of. We tacitly accept and understand that all images were altered in some fashion as they have passed through the inherently mutable digital realm. Because many digital images are indistinguishable from their analog relatives, it is useful to look to the photography scholarship surrounding this shift to understand why this largely imperceptible change matters. The scholars, and the subsequent debate it stirred within the photographic community from this time period articulates the cultural and epistemological changes to the photographic medium that were associated with the transition to digital modes of representation.

MIRRORS IN THE DIGITAL REALM

The *Mirrors* project begins in 2001 and ends in 2011. This time frame, beginning from the 1990s through early 2010s marks a point when the shift in digital photography caused a widespread questioning of the legitimacy and epistemology of the photographic image. While *Umbrico* may have begun by whiting out everything but the mirror within the catalogs, the scan of the image makes even the catalog based *Mirrors* digital. The ease of editing digital images was an issue for scholars and practitioners during this time. Scholars such as Sarah Kember, Lev Manovich and Geoffrey Batchen have identified the main changes between digital and analog photography as one that removes the “real” aspect of photography and thus disrupts the “cultural identity of photography” as an identifier of truth. The “real” in this case refers to the referent or indexical relationship of photography to the subject pictured. Despite the suspicion of the photograph’s connection to truth, the “cultural identity of photography” is that it is a medium that accurately depicts a subject before the camera. However, the aforementioned scholars have dismissed the predictions by other scholars such as WJT Mitchell and Fred Ritchin that “photography is dead” because of these shifts in technology that strip the medium of any connections to the “real” through the increased ease of manipulation.⁵³ Photo scholars such as

⁵³ Examples of texts from these scholars are as follows: many of the articles in Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001); Sarah Kember, *Virtual Anxiety: Photography, New Technologies and Subjectivity* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998); Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001); Timothy Druckrey, *Electronic Culture: Technology and Visual Representation* (New York: Aperture, 1996); Mitchell, William J. *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994); Fred Ritchin, *After Photography* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009); Abigail Solomon Goudeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); and Martin Lister, ed., *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013).

Batchen argue that there have always been many forms of photography whether analog or digital. Though for him, the digital does create this epistemological change of the photograph's relationship to the index, he considers it simply another form and another medium of the many *photographies*. Umbrico's *Mirrors* confirm that photography is now understood as a digital image. The physical appearance and sometimes indication in digital file title reveals that Umbrico's *Mirrors* come from at least three different kinds of digital image sources: scans from catalogs (digital file type), jpeg and WebP. This spectrum within one series of work is emblematic of the debates surrounding the photographic medium at the time because it shows the proliferation of digital media. In addition, the presence of multiple file formats reminds viewers that there is not just one form of digital photography, but many.

Far from the highly detailed representation of the daguerreotype image or even of the advertising photograph, Umbrico's *Mirrors* contain jagged edges around the bevels of the mirror and along the outlines of the flowers and plants which are often in the images. The rough quality of the images distract from the ability to identify with the objects. After spending a lot of time looking at these images at a small scale in print or online, I found it jarring to see their enlarged distortion in person. For example, my familiarity with *Mirror #18W from Mirrors (From Home-improvement Websites)* (2011) (fig. 7), when viewing the work online was that the image was poetic. Somewhat sentimental in nature, I thought the outline of the small picture frame next to the vase of red flowers made the objects appear like a small still-life on top of a dresser. I imagined that each day someone would grab a pair of socks from the top drawer of the dresser and see the image of a loved one in the small frame—smile gently at the picture then go on with their day. But what kind of reality is this? How do I even know that it is a dresser and if so, why are there socks in the top drawer? When looking at this image on the computer, or even from a

distance, I can invent a narrative in the way that an advertiser would want me to do. I was shocked and slightly repelled when I saw the pixelation of the small frame, bevel and bowl of red flowers in person because I desired clarity to their forms.

The compositional make-up of the *Mirrors* is easy to see from a distance, but when looking at them up close they deter the viewer from making connections with the objects that they depict. With the abstraction of Umbrico's *Mirrors*, I am denied access to the realistic forms of the photograph because I can no longer structure the image compositionally in my mind—the image is too blurred and pixelated. The images found online are typically scaled and sized for the web and often do not visibly reveal their digital status. When viewing Umbrico's *Mirrors*, I am reminded that digital images do not provide a sense of scale or physical quality. By making the digital into a physical form, Umbrico shows that the indexical quality of the digital image is really an index unto itself, showing only the digital form and not the narrative I invented.

What has caused this pixelation is primarily the interpolation that has occurred from Umbrico scaling the small digital file of the photograph of the advertised mirror to the actual size of the real mirror for sale. Even the images that were sourced from the mail order catalogs can be considered digital. With the physical catalogs, Umbrico would white-out all the surrounding information from the domestic space, leaving only the mirror.⁵⁴ Then she would scan the image and digitally adjust the perspective of the mirror so that the mirror would directly face the viewer. This process mimics almost exactly the description of early digital alterations of images as described by digital media scholar Sarah Kember. In language that feels antiquated twenty-years later, but reveals an aspect of technology we take for granted, she states in 1998:

The technical procedure for digitally manipulating photographs...involves scanning a photograph, translating it into digital information (or number codes) and feeding into a computer. Colour and brightness can be changed instantly, and

⁵⁴ Conkelton, "Out of Place," *Out of Place*.

areas of the photograph can be either deleted or cloned. The borders of the image can either be cropped or extended and other images of text can be seamlessly incorporated. Whereas retouching a photograph by conventional means is time-consuming and detectable, these changes are immediate and effectively undetectable.⁵⁵

Even though Umbrico's images were originally sourced from print catalogs, all of her *Mirrors* have passed through some form of digital space. The pixelation that occurs when a file is expanded is called specifically "compression artifacts," which photography scholar Daniel Palmer has written about in his aptly titled article, "Rhetoric of the JPEG." The title is a reference to Roland Barthes' 1964 "Rhetoric of the Image" in which Barthes seeks to identify the invisible cultural codes that underlie advertising images. In focusing on an underdeveloped topic such as digital coding, Palmer notes that digital coding is just as difficult to identify as the cultural connotations Barthes' distinguished. To briefly describe Barthes' argument, Barthes analyzes a Panzani advertisement and notes that the combination of items—fresh vegetables paired with the dry Panzani pasta—not only suggests that the can of sauce contains contents that are as fresh as the vegetables in the image, but the Panzani products alone will provide a full meal. In addition, there are multiple aspects of the image made to suggest Italian culture or as Barthes' refers to it *Italianicity*—such as the colors of the Italian flag in the bell peppers. This reading however is only made possible in part by the relationship between what Barthes refers to as the denoted and connoted aspects of the image—respectively the actual objects in the photograph and their symbolism.⁵⁶ The point is that the "cultural codes" or the placement of items to suggest these ideas are covered by the naturalness of the advertising image. In this capacity, the cultural codes are just as invisible as the digital codes of the JPEG. Umbrico's

⁵⁵ Sarah Kember, "'The Shadow Of The Object' Photography and Realism," in *Virtual Anxiety: Photography, New Technologies and Subjectivity* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 21.

⁵⁶ Roland Barthes, "The Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

Mirrors show not just digital space, but the digital space of capitalism. Umbrico's idea that they are an escape is the ideology of capitalism; the dream that makes the buyer believe. This space then becomes irritating, reminding us that this dream is just a dream and the image just a pixelated representation.

In analyzing the technological reasons why the *Mirrors* are so pixelated, I examine further Daniel Palmer's research of the JPEG image. He articulates, "the make-up of the image only becomes visible when the algorithms are pushed to their outer limits, typically in the form of cosmetic disturbances such as jagged edges."⁵⁷ Umbrico has reached the "outer limits" through the drastic increase in size from the home décor source to the size of the mirror advertised. As a compressed form of information, when the JPEG file is enlarged, fake "information" is added in the enlargement process and the pixelation is created. Palmer also describes "compression artifacts" as an "'accident' built into the program itself," explaining that the JPEG was created in a way that would "discard information that the eye cannot easily see," such as differences in shades of blue in the sky.⁵⁸ When the file is expanded, pixelated information takes the place of the data that was lost and the blue sky becomes "posturized."⁵⁹ This phenomenon was also seen in large swathes of color in Umbrico's *Mirrors*—neutral colored curtains or bedspreads appeared to be colorful and full of jagged small squares. For example in *Mirror #201W from Mirrors (from Home-Improvement Websites)* (2011) (fig. 8), the beige curtain to the left of the image was quite colorful. In an area of the image where you may expect to only see tones of the shadows, there is digital squares of several different colors creating

⁵⁷ Palmer's addition: In the early 90s, Thomas Ruff famously enlarged several images in his series *JPEGS* that showed extreme pixilation from images sourced from the internet. Daniel Palmer, "The Rhetoric of the JPEG," in *The Photographic Image in Digital Culture*, ed. Martin Lister (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 150.

⁵⁸ Palmer, "The Rhetoric of the JPEG," 153.

⁵⁹ Palmer, "The Rhetoric of the JPEG," 153.

multicolored striations on the curtain. In this *Mirror* in particular, there was also a jagged red line underneath the main leaf of the plant. This line may have once signified a shadow but now shows the alteration of digital programming.

When viewing a selection of *Mirrors* from Bruce Silverstein Gallery in New York City, there was a striking difference in quality among the *Mirrors*. Some appeared to have much more pixelation than others. The ones that had less pixelation had an overall blur or fuzziness to them with slight distortion in some areas. An example of this would be *Master-AFC016-2 from Mirrors (from Home-Improvement Websites)* (2011) (fig. 5a) which was only slightly blurred around the edges of the plant with the minimal presence of the “compression artifacts.” Given the series’ time span, between 2001-2011, perhaps the images that are less pixelated are a result of the graphic reformatting that Google underwent in 2010 called WebP. Palmer describes WebP as Google’s image overhaul as part of their “make the Web faster” effort by cutting down file sizes. However, crucially he states that, “WebP has a tendency to blur images rather than create a JPEG-like blocking.”⁶⁰ JPEG-like blocking refers to the square pixels that appear as groups on a digital image. The blur experienced in some of the *Mirrors* seems to fit this criteria, while other *Mirrors* are more characteristic of the standard JPEG “compression artifact” digital image file. In addition, my recent download of a few of these appropriated mirrors from home décor website www.hayneedle.com included the file extension “.webp” confirming that this could be the case for some of Umbrico’s images. The fact that some of the images Umbrico pulled had undergone this transformation while others did not (some were the standard jpeg format) is revealing of the way in which companies like Google can completely transform the way in which we view and understand images without any input from the consumer. Palmer warns, “We must never forget

⁶⁰ Palmer, “The Rhetoric of the JPEG,” 161.

that all the data around and embedded in online images is constantly mined and aggregated. The results can become valuable algorithms to be patented and used to direct the unpaid labour of online attention through which audiences provide the basis for the advertising economy.”⁶¹

Never has this statement felt more true in considering the fact that since I began researching Umbrico’s work, the advertisements I encounter on various web pages, social media feeds and even my email are all related to various mirrors I have looked at on websites of home decorating companies such as Pottery Barn, West Elm, Frontgate, IKEA, or Bed Bath & Beyond.

Around the time when Umbrico began culling through home décor magazine sources in 1999, photography scholar Geoffrey Batchen wrote about the introduction of computer images and the ethical implications that these images may pronounce. He states, “we are entering into a time when it will no longer be possible to tell any original from its simulations.”⁶² He adds to this statement that especially in advertising and photojournalism, “computerized image-making processes are rapidly replacing or supplementing traditional still-camera images.”⁶³ Transformed into a primarily digital space, Batchen’s statement feels prescient when considering the use of digital imaging technology that IKEA uses in its catalog. In an article published by the *Huffington Post*, Alexander Kaufman stated that through the use of CGI technology—or the 3D graphics used for special effects in TV and movies—IKEA no longer needs to photograph many of their home spaces or models. Due to the cost of shipping products to be photographed, their goal is to phase out photography all together. As of 2014, with a database of 25,000 images they may not have a hard time completing this task. IKEA cited that a striking 75% of single product images were computer generated. In addition, an App will now allow users to digitally insert a

⁶¹ Palmer, “The Rhetoric of the JPEG,” 161.

⁶² Batchen, “Ectoplasm,” 10.

⁶³ Batchen, “Ectoplasm,” 12.

couch or other product into their home using the camera on their cell phones.⁶⁴ While it is challenging to discern if all of Umbrico's *Mirrors* have been digitally altered in the way that IKEA's have, there are clear examples of image manipulation that can be found in the source material for the *Mirrors*. For example the source image from where Umbrico took *Master-DIN-119 from Mirrors (From Home-improvement Websites)*, 2011 (fig. 9a) reveals the alteration of images in order to fit within advertisers' standards. While the wicker chair and framed print reflected in the mirror appear normal, the next image (fig. 9c) is striking in the way that the photograph has been altered to remove any reflection at all. In this image, the reflection has been totally white washed with digital editing. The elimination of the reflection to include these abstract "mirror-like" surfaces suggests complete digital fabrication.⁶⁵ The fact that companies like IKEA are now openly dismissing the need for photographs of their products and hoping to *only* digitally create their home spaces is part of what concerned scholars about the shift from analog to digital. By Umbrico updating the series to replace and include digital forms of the *Mirrors*, she is indicating that this digital form is the new way of experiencing photography. It is true that we now currently live with the understanding that all images are fabricated to some degree. There is a general mistrust of the indexical relationship to the photograph and this has become the way of understanding photography.

⁶⁴ Alexander C. Kaufman, "Most of the Pic's in IKEA's Catalog are Computer Generated," *HuffPost*, August 29, 2014 (accessed April 15, 2018) https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/29/ikea-catalog-cg_n_5737386.html. Special thanks to USF MFA Candidate Pat Blocher for mentioning this fact in our brief conversation about Umbrico's work.

⁶⁵ Umbrico has also collected these "absent" abstractions of the mirror surface though to my knowledge none have been used for a series. One does function as the cover of her *Out of Place: Mirrors and Doors from Catalogs* catalog from her Julie Saul exhibition in 2001. She titled it, *Mirrors (mirrored)*, 2002.

CONCLUSION

As articulated by the many scholars who analyzed the traits of the shift from analog to digital photography, the digital photograph is complicated by the ease of alteration and reproducibility. The *Mirrors* show the ease of digital image manipulation in the traits of their make-up—the enlargement of the file beyond its limits, the perspectival shift to adjust the mirror toward the viewer, and the presumed digital alteration of the reflection on the mirror's surface. These alterations recall the history of photography and show the vast changes that have occurred within the medium. While the *Mirrors* reference the reflective image of the daguerreotype, they also show how the indexical relationship of the photograph to its subject is altered within the realm of digital photography. Per Craig Owen's argument, if the mirror's reflection holds an analogous relationship to the photograph, then the *Mirrors* are emblematic of the self-reflexive nature of the relationship between the mirror and image. The expansion of the mirror's surface, by Umbrico shows the ease of image manipulation in this digital age and illustrates the technological shift in the medium.

Unlike in *Las Meninas* where the viewer feels their own presence, or rather the presence of the king and queen—the viewer in front of the *Mirrors* is not aware of his or herself at all. Both the mirror in *Las Meninas* and Umbrico's *Mirrors* reflect an invented image that references objects outside of the pictorial space. The mirror in both of these artworks creates a self-reflexive object that asks the reflection to be considered in its own terms and not by the terms of the narrative subject it is reflecting. By not showing a reflection of the self and creating a self-reflexive object, the mirror in both artworks signal a shift in modes of representation. For

Foucault this meant that the mirror signaled a shift from the classical to modern age by showing the act of representation of painting. For Umbrico, because the works are so representative of the photographic medium itself, they signal a different kind of shift. Their nonfunctionality and inclusion of compression artifacts indicates a shift into the realm of digital photography.

A critical difference between *Las Meninas* and the *Mirrors* that could be explored in future scholarship is that the absent referent in the *Mirrors* is not seen once but several times over. There is not just one *Mirror* to show the technological degradation of the digital image but several. With the *Mirrors* as a series, the mass reproducibility of the photograph becomes a type of abstraction that then corresponds with the reproducibility of the physical mirror for sale and our absence from both of these objects. Furthermore, the *Mirrors* are beautiful in their form both online and in person from a distance. They incite desire and lure the viewer into their space. However, an up-close examination of these objects reveals the unpleasant truth of their digitally manufactured form. The space that they reflect is not your own and not one that can be recognized or identified. The viewer in front of the *Mirrors* becomes aware of empty capitalistic spaces that these objects reflect. Though these spaces are designed to be inclusive of everyone, instead we find that we do not exist in this capitalistic space. We are not reflected in the *Mirrors* space.

I conclude that the *Mirrors* most closely reference the photographic medium in their form as mirror made into photograph and connection to the history of photography. As self-referential objects like the mirror in *Las Meninas*, the presence of compression artifacts on the *Mirrors* make them important photographic conceptual artworks of the early 2000s as the pixelation shows the historical shift in representation from analog to digital photography. This shift spurred anxiety and debate among photo history scholars in regards to the destruction of the perceived

connection of truth in photography. These scholars articulated aspects of the epistemological changes of the medium that are largely unnoticed by everyday users of photography. Thus the *Mirrors* are the most pointed artworks of Umbrico's overall oeuvre which generally addresses the analog history of photo through digital contemporary strategies in order to reveal and critique ideologies about photography through their direct relationship to the photographic medium.

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APPENDIX A: FIGURES



Figure. 1

Mirrors (from Catalogs and Home Improvement Websites), 2001-2011
Digital C-Prints Face-Mounted to Laser-Cut Non-Glare Plexiglas, dimensions variable
(set of 28 works)

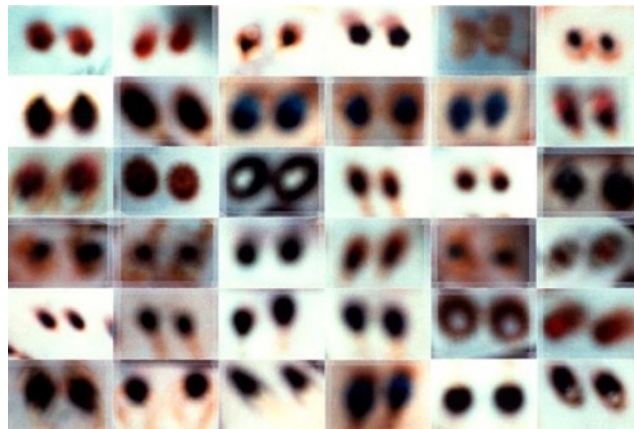


Figure 2.
Installation view of *From Catalogs* at Julie Saul Gallery, New York, 1998 and detail



Figure 3.
Installation view of *Out of Place* at Julie Saul Gallery, New York, 2002



Figure 4.
Lady Clementina Hawarden, *At the Window*, c. 1864



Figure 5a.

Master-AFC016-2 from Mirrors (from Home-Improvement Websites), 2011
Digital chromogenic print face mounted to non-glare plexiglas, 20 x 16 inches



Figure 5b.

Reprinted from “Afina Basix Recessed Medicine Cabinet - 24W x 4.5D x 30H in.”
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Retrieved:

<https://www.hayneedle.com/product/afinacontempobasixrecessedmedicinecabinet24wx45dx30hin.cfm>

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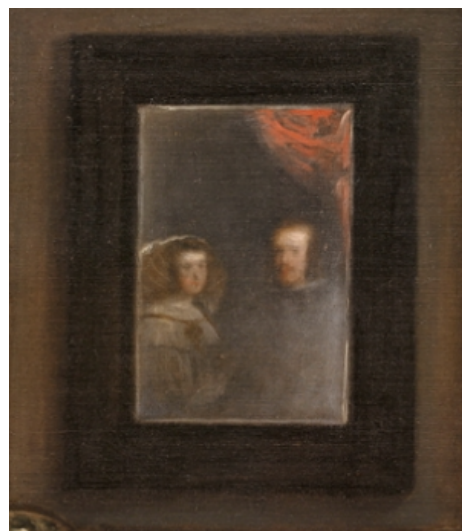


Figure 6.
 Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez
Las Meninas, 1656
 Oil on canvas
 318 x 276 centimeters
 Right (detail)

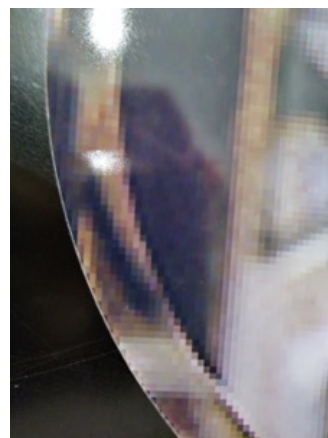


Figure 7.

Mirror #18W from Mirrors (from Home-Improvement Websites), 2011
Digital chromogenic print face mounted to non-glare plexiglas
24 x 18 inches

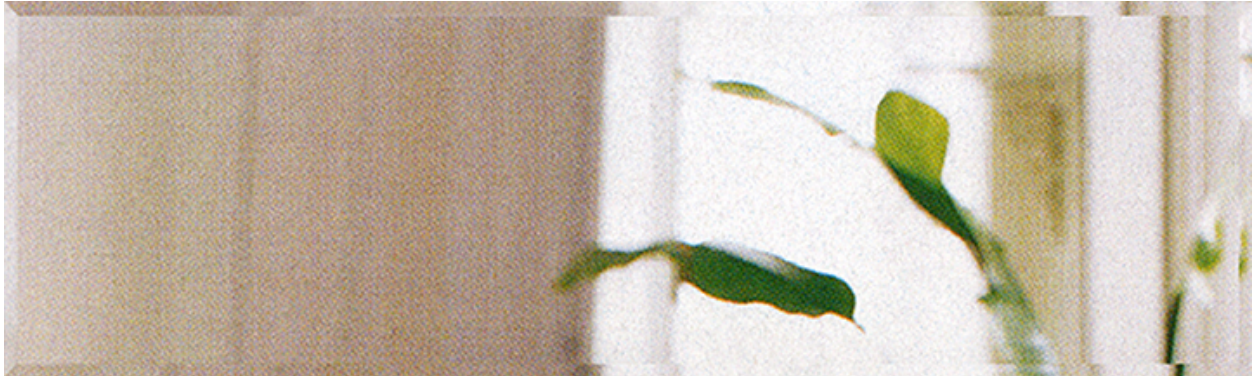


Figure 8.

Mirror #201W from Mirrors (from Home-Improvement Websites), 2011
Digital chromogenic print face mounted to non-glare plexiglas
12 x 40 inches



Figure 9a-c.

Master-DIN-119 from Mirrors (From Home-improvement Websites), 2011
 Digital chromogenic print face mounted to non-glare plexiglas, 27 x 17 inches

(**9a.** top left: Umbrico / **9b.** top right: source image /
9c. bottom: different view of mirror on same website)

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<https://www.hayneedle.com/product/mirageoctagonmedicinecabinet.cfm?rNtt=DIN119>.

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APPENDIX B: PERMISSIONS

October 19, 2018

Penelope Umbrico Studio
20 Jay Street, #720
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Dear Penelope:

As you are aware, I am completing a Master's thesis at the University of South Florida entitled "Mirror Images: Penelope Umbrico's *Mirrors* (from *Home Décor Catalogs and Websites*). I would like to request your permission to reprint the following images of your work in my thesis:



Mirrors (from Catalogs and Home Improvement Websites), 2001 - 2011



Installation view of *From Catalogs* at Julie Saul Gallery 1998 and detail



Installation view at Julie Saul Gallery 2002



Master-DIN-119 from Mirrors (From Home-improvement Websites), 2011
 Digital chromogenic print face mounted to non-glare plexiglas, 27 x 17 inches
 (this image is shown with the source image from Hayneedle.com,
<https://www.hayneedle.com/product/mirageoctagonmedicinecabinet.cfm?rNtt=DIN119>)



Master-AFC016-2 from Mirrors (from Home-Improvement Websites), 2011
 Digital chromogenic print face mounted to non-glare plexiglas, 20 x 16 inches
 (this image is shown with the source image from Hayneedle.com,
<https://www.hayneedle.com/product/afinacontempobasixrecessedmedicinecabinet24wx45dx30hin.cfm>)



Mirror #18W from Mirrors (from Home-Improvement Websites), 2011
 Digital chromogenic print face mounted to non-glare plexiglas, 24 x 18 inches



Mirror #201W from Mirrors (from Home-Improvement Websites), 2011
Digital chromogenic print face mounted to non-glare plexiglas
12 x 40 inches

The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my thesis, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the prospective publication of my thesis by ProQuest LLC (ProQuest) through its UMI ® Dissertation Publishing business. ProQuest may produce and sell copies of my thesis on demand and may make my thesis available for free internet download at my request. My thesis will also be made available online through the University of South Florida's Institutional Repository. These requested permissions will in no way restrict publication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own [or your company owns] the copyright to the above-described material.

If this sounds agreeable, please sign this letter and email back to me at jeaniem.ambrosio@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Jeanie Ambrosio

PERMISSIONS GRANTED FOR THE USE OF THE REQUESTED ABOVE:

Penelope Umbrico, Artist

Date: 11/06/2018

Fair Use Evaluation Documentation

Compiled using the **Fair Use Evaluator** [cc] 2008 Michael Brewer & the Office for Information Technology Policy,
<http://librarycopyright.net/fairuse/>

Name:	Jeanie Ambrosio
Job Title:	MA candidate, Art History
Institution:	School of Art & Art History, University of South Florida
Title of Work Used:	Three images of two medicine cabinets on hayneedle.com
Copyright Holder:	Hayneedle
Publication Status:	Unknown
Publisher:	Hayneedle
Place of Publication:	Hayneedle.com
Publication Year:	unknown
Description of Work:	Three images of two medicine cabinets on hayneedle.com https://www.hayneedle.com/product/mirageoctagonmedicinecabinet.cfm?rNtt=DIN119 https://www.hayneedle.com/product/afinacontempobasixrecessedmedicinecabinet24wx45dx30hin.cfm
Date of Evaluation:	October 11, 2018
Date of Intended Use:	November 2, 2018

Describe the **Purpose** and Character of Your Intended Use:

Images will be published in MA Master's Thesis on artist Penelope Umbrico who has appropriated these "Mirror" images in a transformative way. She uses the existing work for a new purpose in the creation of artworks (parody, pastiche, instructional materials, etc.). Transformative works are favored because the purpose of U.S. Copyright Law is to encourage the development and dissemination of new knowledge to benefit the public and thereby advance learning. In addition, proper links to the original websites are provided so that readers of the thesis may access the original information at any time.

[+] Use is for "criticism, comment, scholarship and research"

[+] Use is socially beneficial (promotes the creation of new knowledge, learning, etc.) in that the inclusion provides basis for understanding an artwork with little previous scholarship or research. By providing the basic foundation of where she obtains her "Mirrors" future scholars can use this information to develop further knowledge.

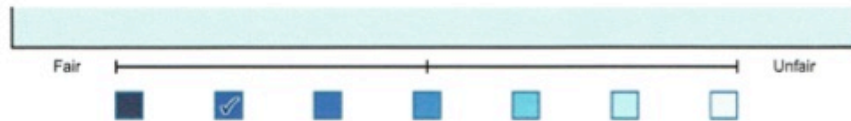
[+] Use is clearly defined and is restricted in scope, only to be published in master's thesis. It is only to show the relationship between the artists' work and the original source. It is not in any way to promote or use the success of Hayneedle to advance my thesis project. It is purely for scholarly and research purposes.

[+] Use is one-time

[-] Use creates a derivative work of the original (full translation, adaptation, abridged version, etc.)

[+] Use is not-for-profit

Page 1



Describe the **Nature** of Your Intended Use of the Copyrighted Work:

[+] Work to be used has been previously PUBLISHED in an online format.
 [+] Work to be used contains limited new knowledge, content, or creative expression (in relation to previously copyrighted works); the original image is used for the sale of medicine cabinets.
 [+] Work to be used is primarily of a factual nature within a Master's thesis



Describe the **Amount** of Your Intended Use in Relation to the Copyrighted Work as a Whole:

[+] Only limited and reasonable portions will be used
 [+] Only the amount required to achieve the stated, socially-beneficial purpose or objective will be used (be that educational, artistic, scholarly, journalistic, etc.). Only three images are used to show the nature of advertising images and relationship they have to Penelope Umbrico's work.



Describe the **Effect** of Your Intended Use on the Potential Market or Value of the Copyrighted Work:

[+] The work is NOT currently under commercial exploitation (out of print, no licensing available, etc.)
[+] Use of the work minimizes the potential for unauthorized use that could impact its value (i.e. steps are taken to ensure the content is not used outside of the stated purpose or audience)
[+] Proper attribution will be given with the intended use
[-] The work already has an established market, or the clear potential for a future market as it is being used



The Average **"Fairness Level,"** Based on Your Rating of Each of the 4

Factors, is:

[see tool disclaimer for important clarifying information]:



Based on the information and justification I have provided above, I, Jeanie Ambrosio, am **UNDECIDED** whether this use is fair under Section 107 of the U.S. Copyright Code.

Signature: Jeanie Ambrosio

Date of Signature: November 12, 2018

I also consulted with the USF Copyright and Intellectual Property Librarian through email correspondence in October 2018

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