



California Museum of Photography at UCR ARTSblock

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artsblock.ucr.edu

CMP Projects: Penelope Umbrico

Master (pl. **Masters**) from Latin *magister*, probably related to *magis* 'more' (i.e., 'more important'); 1. a man who has people working for him, esp. servants or slaves; a man in charge of an organization or group; a male head of a household; a person who has dominance or control of something; the owner of a dog. 2. a title for a man of high rank or learning; having very great skill or proficiency; a great artist, esp. one belonging to the accepted canon. 3. an original movie, recording, or document from which copies can be made.

Mountain (pl. **Mountains**) 1. a large natural elevation of the earth's surface rising abruptly from the surrounding level; characterized by remoteness and inaccessibility. 2. a large pile or quantity of something or a large surplus stock of a commodity. PHRASES: move mountains 1. achieve impossible results. 2. make every possible effort.

Range (See also: **Ranger**) 1. a line or series of mountains or hills; a region where many such features are found. 2. a set of different things of the same general type. 3. the distance within which something can be reached or perceived; the maximum distance to which a gun will shoot or over which a missile will travel; open or enclosed area with targets for shooting practice; the distance between a camera and the subject to be photographed.

ALT. Ranger 1. a person or thing that wanders or ranges over a particular area or domain: rangers of the mountains 2. a series of nine American moon probes launched between 1961 and 1965—the last three of which took many photographs before crashing into the moon.

New Oxford American Dictionary 3rd edition © 2010 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

Penelope Umbrico (born in 1957 in Philadelphia) is a New York-based conceptual artist working with photography and new media. Her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the International Center of Photography, New York; Justine Barnicke Gallery at University of Toronto; Darling Foundry, Montreal; Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield; and Mark Moore Gallery, Los Angeles. Her work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including at The Drawing Center, Museum of Modern Art, Creative Time, Aperture Foundation Gallery, and P.S.1., New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art; MassMoCA, Massachusetts; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, among elsewhere. She was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2011, a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship in 2012, and a residency at Pilchuk Glass School, Washington in 2015. Umbrico earned her MFA at the School of Visual Arts, New York in 1989, and her BA at Ontario College of Art and Design, Toronto in 1980.

CMP Projects: Penelope Umbrico is on view from August 29 through November 28, 2015 at the California Museum of Photography, part of UCR ARTSblock in Riverside. **CMP Projects** is an ongoing exhibition series that features photo-based work by contemporary artists. This presentation is curated by Joanna Szupinska-Myers, CMP Curator of Exhibitions, and Kathryn Poindexter, Curatorial Assistant. The series is partially supported with funds provided by UCR's College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (CHASS) and the City of Riverside.

All works courtesy of the artist and Mark Moore Gallery

Master, Mountain, Range (and Rangers)

If you look closely, you are sure to encounter an air of familiarity: the whisper of Edward Weston, a trace of Ansel Adams. Indeed, these canonical Western masters of photography are present in Penelope Umbrico's project *Range* (2012-ongoing). For decades the works of these photographers and others have defined the ways in which we construct a picture of the natural world in our minds. For her part, Umbrico uses a smartphone to make pictures of photographs reproduced in photography books such as Aperture's "Masters of Photography" series of the late 1970s-90s.

Aiming her camera at sweeping mountainous landscapes, her photographs also catch the edges of pictures, and the glare on the surface of a page. Next she applies popular filter "apps" with names like Family Album, Daguerreo Grunge, 6x9 Instant Emulsion, and Cross Processing Holga Blue, bringing decidedly contemporary visual language to the seminal landscape photographs of the "masters." Her method is both translation and appropriation. Like Sherrie Levine's series "After Walker Evans" (1979) wherein Levine photographed reproductions from an exhibition catalog, Umbrico uses the platforms involved in her work to point to some of photography's defining principles: indexicality, reproducibility, and dissemination. Umbrico's works call attention to scarce—and therefore precious—master prints, as she sets them in tension with the many—therefore disposable—reproduced images we so often encounter. If we are a culture that values authenticity and authorship, Umbrico's project seeks to question these principles.

Also on view is Umbrico's *Mount Moran (Master Copy)* (2014), a two-part work based on *The Tetons and Snake River* (1942), an iconic photograph by Ansel Adams. *Mount Moran (Master Copy)* consists of an interactive digital model of Mount Moran, Wyoming, created with data from Google Maps, and a 3D printed sculpture of that model. Umbrico implies that Google has usurped the photographic master who is regarded as having captured a single, rarified moment of one of nature's primordially stable subjects. Using free software to map data accessible to anyone, the formerly singular mountain view is threatened by digital interpretations of our visible world.

Master, Mountain, Range (and Rangers) brings together the analog and the digital, the archetype of the twentieth century photographic master and the everyman capturing disposable moments, the solitary adventurer and the pervasive mediation of smartphones. It is in Umbrico's work that the two poles meet and shake hands: here photographs of aesthetic mastery come into contact with digital mediation tools, both in their own ways seeking the sublime.

Kathryn Poindexter