





Carmen Winant, *Body/Index* (2018)

If someone took a photograph you shot and posted to your social network, and then posted it on their own blog or profile page without crediting, mentioning or tagging you, would you call that stealing? Users of YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram manoeuvre through a virtual world where issues involving intellectual property are complicated. Even the judicial system regulating attribution and appropriation grapples with providing clarity on the matter.

Give credit where credit is due. In theory, we know this. In practice, nearly everyone clicks 'agree' when signing up to the latest social media site without realising that, in doing so, they may be handing over the rights to their material – assuming it is their material in the first place. Ethically speaking, sharing someone else's photograph as your own can be viewed as an act of fraud. Artistically, issues around appropriation are more complex.

'Appropriation' means borrowing ideas, sounds, objects and images from others to create art. Would we be able to listen to songs by Amy Winehouse if jazz music hadn't existed? The ancient Greeks could claim the intellectual property of the design of their columns when these elements reappeared in the 17th-century Palace of Versailles, if they weren't long perished by then. Both are clear cases of appropriation, yet deemed acceptable. It is impossible to create new styles in music, architecture and visual arts from a void, or without incorporating components from previous artworks and styles.

The concept of appropriation in 20th-century visual arts began with the cubists – the artists Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso who, from around 1912, were incorporating newspapers into their collages. French artist Marcel Duchamp took this further with his 'readymades' including *Fountain* (1917), the famous urinal, signed and presented as a work of art, and labelled 'the most influential modern artwork of all time' by 500 British art experts in 2004. Appropriation was also a characteristic of the dada movement, of which Duchamp was a member, in which artists such as Kurt Schwitters and Hannah Höch used everyday materials like newspaper scraps and photographs in their works. In the 1950s, artists such as Eduardo Paolozzi, Richard Hamilton, Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns widely used borrowed photographs and objects in their art. All four became known as early artists within the pop art movement.

Pop art was attracted to photography not because of its artistic abilities, but due to its lowly everyday status. Just as dada and cubism had before, pop art presented a challenge to the traditional visual arts in terms of high and low culture, and photography was a perfect medium for this. Pop art incorporates imagery from popular culture, such as comic strips and news and advertising images, often removed from the original context or combined with unrelated elements.

In a vast collage of 'found photographs', American artist Carmen Winant's 2018 installation *Body/Index* (opposite) consists of an array of images of women, taken from a series of posing reference guides for photographers. Freed from their context, meanings slide from view and the oddity of many of the photographs is brought to the fore. One is left wondering what Winant is attempting to show about women, what they are 'indexing' and why. The term 'found photography' suggests an element of chance, but in fact these images have been actively sought. In addition to the indexing of women, some images are also collaged together, making strange unrelated visual riddles in a site-specific installation.

Winant (born 1983) works with a quantity of vernacular images. She has commented on how the narratives of women's lives are often ignored in the history of art, and has explored subjects that have traditionally been seen exclusively as female experiences, such as birth, cooking and childcare, all in a similar process to that of *Body/Index*. The mass of archival photographs illustrates who is photographed and who is not. Attracted to the politics of the second-wave feminism of the 1970s, and also the photography of the same decade, Winant highlights the lack of diversity in the photographs of the time, especially in the representation of women of colour. With this ellipsis in mind, we are forced to ask what we think these photographs show us, and also what they do not or cannot.

Using images that are printed matter, and not taken from the internet, the histories that existed before the installation can be considered. These photographs have been touched and studied, and have physically moved through people's lives. This adds a particularly tactile element to the work, and knowing that these are the very same images that circulated with the intention of sharing a certain knowledge or

idea about women gives them a charge and agency – a metamorphosis occurs when they are reproduced in this new, very different context.

In the 1980s, artists such as Barbara Kruger, Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine also engaged in appropriation; Levine (born 1947) explicitly copied the work of famed male artists, as can be seen in *After Walker Evans: 4* (opposite, bottom). Here she has directly re-photographed somebody else's work (the titular Walker Evans), creating a photograph of a photograph. She did the same with famous paintings, criticising how, in her view, female artists in art history were traditionally regarded as second-rate. She even copied Duchamp's idea and made a bronze urinal sculpture entitled *Fountain* in 1991. By making reproductions, these photographers raise questions about what art is. Is it about authenticity? Originality? Or is it about choices and ideas? By copying artworks, photographs and advertisements, what they managed to do was create a completely new meaning, context and set of conceptual associations.

Technology has increased the number of techniques that can be used to create art – and also to appropriate. The ease with which images can now be reproduced, scanned, copied and shared has led to a situation where it is hard to find a museum or gallery anywhere in the world that does not show any photographs or artworks incorporating or alluding to previously made photographs, fine-art masterpieces, games, ads, Hollywood films, or objects from everyday life, let alone anything that can be ripped off the internet. Today's appropriation artists can combine conventional techniques such as painting with modern techniques like scanning and photo manipulation to transform found imagery into authentic works.

An example of this is the work of American artist Daniel Gordon (born 1980), such as *Pineapple and Shadow* (opposite, top). Typically, Gordon uses images

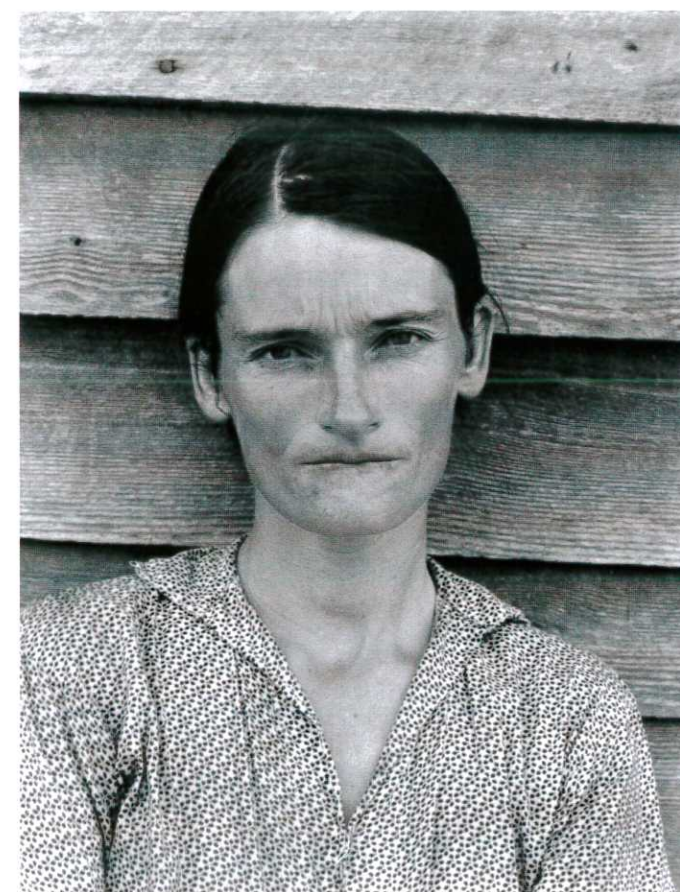
he finds on the internet to create a 'sculpture', which he then photographs. He also often references art history traditions and the symbolism of the still life. Gordon mimics reality but also adds obvious Photoshop techniques. He is appropriating, sampling, quoting, re-editing and recombining images and media. It can be questioned whether such strategies continue to challenge notions of originality and to test traditional definitions of an authentic work. Is it just accepted that contemporary art takes from everywhere – and who cares? As everything is available for anyone thanks to Google, the epigone's work itself can subsequently be reappropriated and spread for all eternity.

While appropriation is now a key element in contemporary culture, and copyright law has failed so far to provide watertight guidelines, judges may permit borrowing if the artist can prove that it is a case of 'fair use' – that is, where he or she has transformed the original art work with the objective to satirise, to criticise, or otherwise generally comment on it. Nevertheless, this tactic does not always work, and artists such as Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg have occasionally had to pay licensing fees. In more recent years, Richard Prince has been sued several times for using other artists' photographs. In one case, he had screengrabbed and enlarged selfies from the web.

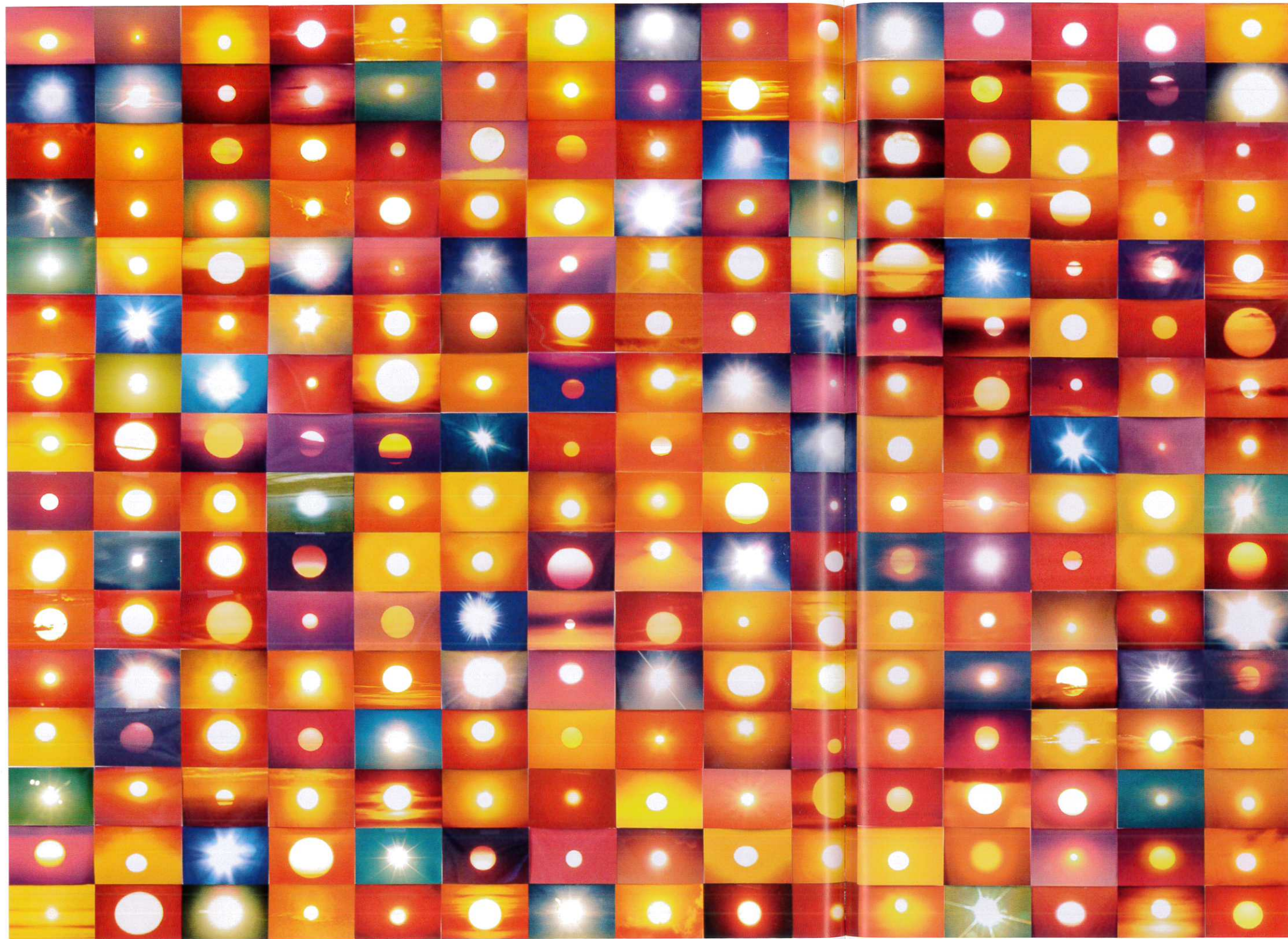
Any artist who is thinking about appropriating what isn't theirs can ask themselves whether they are respecting other people's property rights. Work can only be used in ways that the owners permit. If asking for permission is not possible, artists could ask themselves how they would want their own imagery to be used. If the ownership itself is unclear, one could ask what kind of damage using other people's material might bring about and whether one feels this is warranted. Or appropriate a loo like Duchamp and Levine did – preferably one that's not copyrighted.



Daniel Gordon, *Pineapple and Shadow* (2011)



Sherrie Levine, *After Walker Evans: 4* (1981)

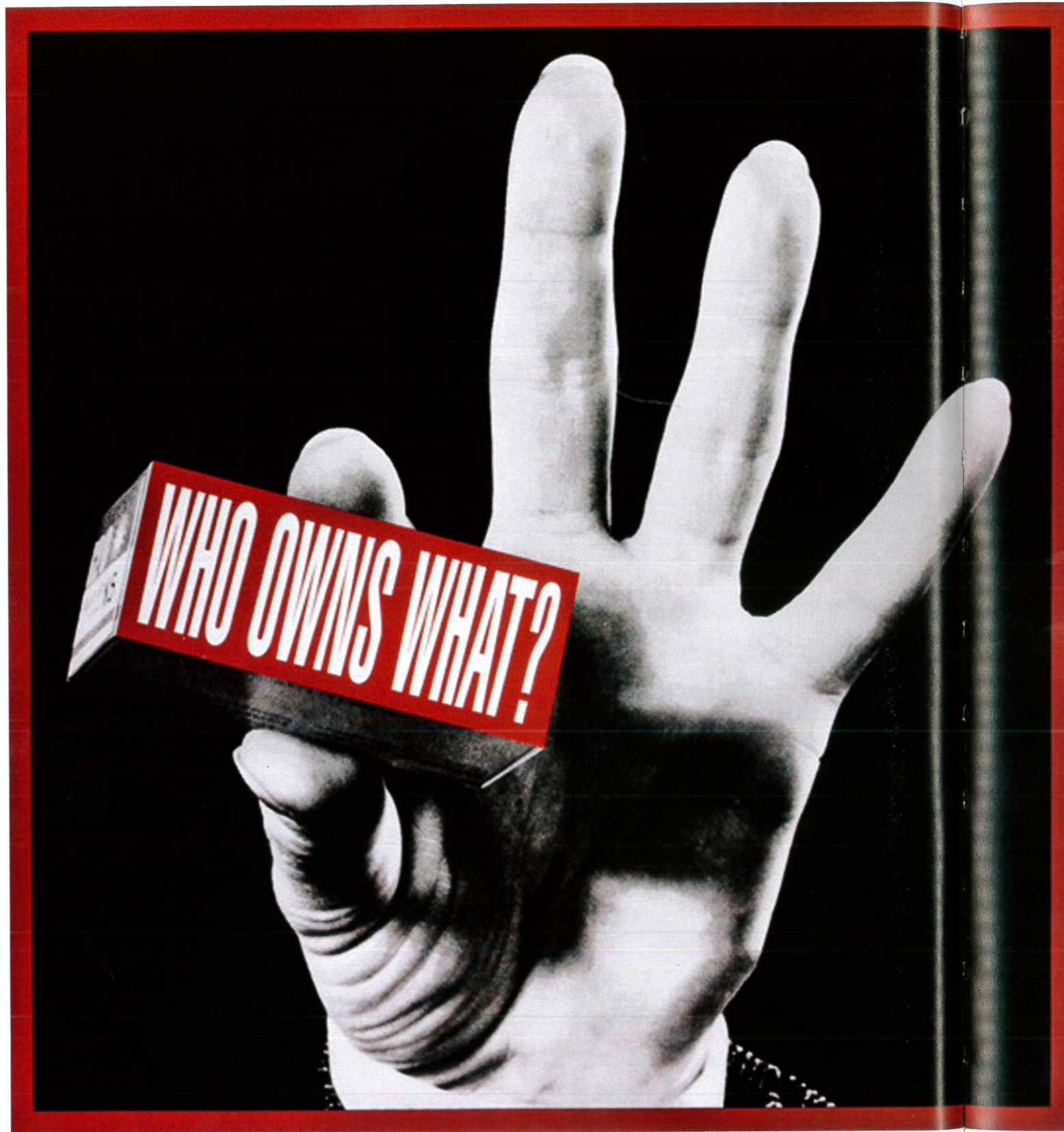


Penelope Umbrico (born 1957)  
*541,795 Suns from Sunsets from Flickr, (Partial)*  
01/23/06 (2006–ongoing)

What do you think is the most uploaded subject on image-sharing sites? Selfies? Food? Porn? Penelope Umbrico, an American artist who works primarily with found imagery, started this project while asking herself the same question. Looking for the most photographed subject matter uploaded onto Flickr on a certain day in 2006, she discovered that the answer – at least on this platform and this day – was sunsets.

Umbrico's art takes the form of site-specific installations, each created for the museum or gallery space that commissioned them, and varying according to the result of the number of hits she gets when she types in 'sunsets' to the search function on Flickr on a particular day. She carefully crops each of the photographs so that the sun is in the middle, and then prints it out on cheap photographic paper. Each picture is then combined together into a single large collage. The sun belongs to us all, but is it OK to take somebody else's picture of it, manipulate it and make it your own? The ownership of the constituent pictures is perhaps questionable after they have been cropped, printed and combined with others.

In Umbrico's first project from 2006, shown here, she received 541,795 hits for 'sunsets'. An installation created in 2011 was titled *8,730,221 Suns from Flickr (Partial) 02/20/11* and in 2016 she produced *30,240,577 Suns (from Sunsets) from Flickr (Partial) 03/04/16*. The increasing number of suns in the titles through successive installations is a clear indication of the ever-rising use of photo-sharing platforms and of the increasing access people have to them. It also illustrates that subject matter is becoming ever more pre-scripted on image-sharing sites, and that individuality and creative flair are often not the point.



Barbara Kruger (born 1945)  
*Untitled (Who Owns What?) (1991/2012)*

This picture aptly addresses the issues examined in this chapter. Although the question 'Who owns what?' speaks to larger issues of ownership and control (be that of wealth, bodies or power), it is also self-referential. Who does this picture belong to? Barbara Kruger, the American artist who created it, or the unknown photographer who took the shot she is using?

Kruger frequently uses found photography in her work, and can be understood as an artist of the postmodern generation of the 1970s and 1980s that used appropriation as a deliberate gesture or strategy in their work. On top of these images, Kruger adds text in a characteristic white-on-red font. The statements made and questions asked by her works are direct and provocative, their power due not only to the simplicity of the language but also to the graphic use of type, colour and imagery – features typically associated with advertising.

Because she uses commercial photography from some time ago, the original contexts of the photographs Kruger's works are based on have been lost, and the photographer, in any case, would often not have been credited in the first place. Thus, questions of appropriation are not so much about the ownership of legal rights of the image, but more about the moral rights. Kruger herself denies that such issues come into play: when used in a new context, the photographs are transformed, are given new meanings, and they are instantly recognisable as hers.

They also seem not to date. Many of the slogans Kruger adopted during her early career are just as relevant and powerful today – rather than feeling as though they belong to a certain era, as some of her postmodern contemporaries' artworks do.

Harold Edgerton (1903–1990)  
*Milk Drop Coronet* (1957)

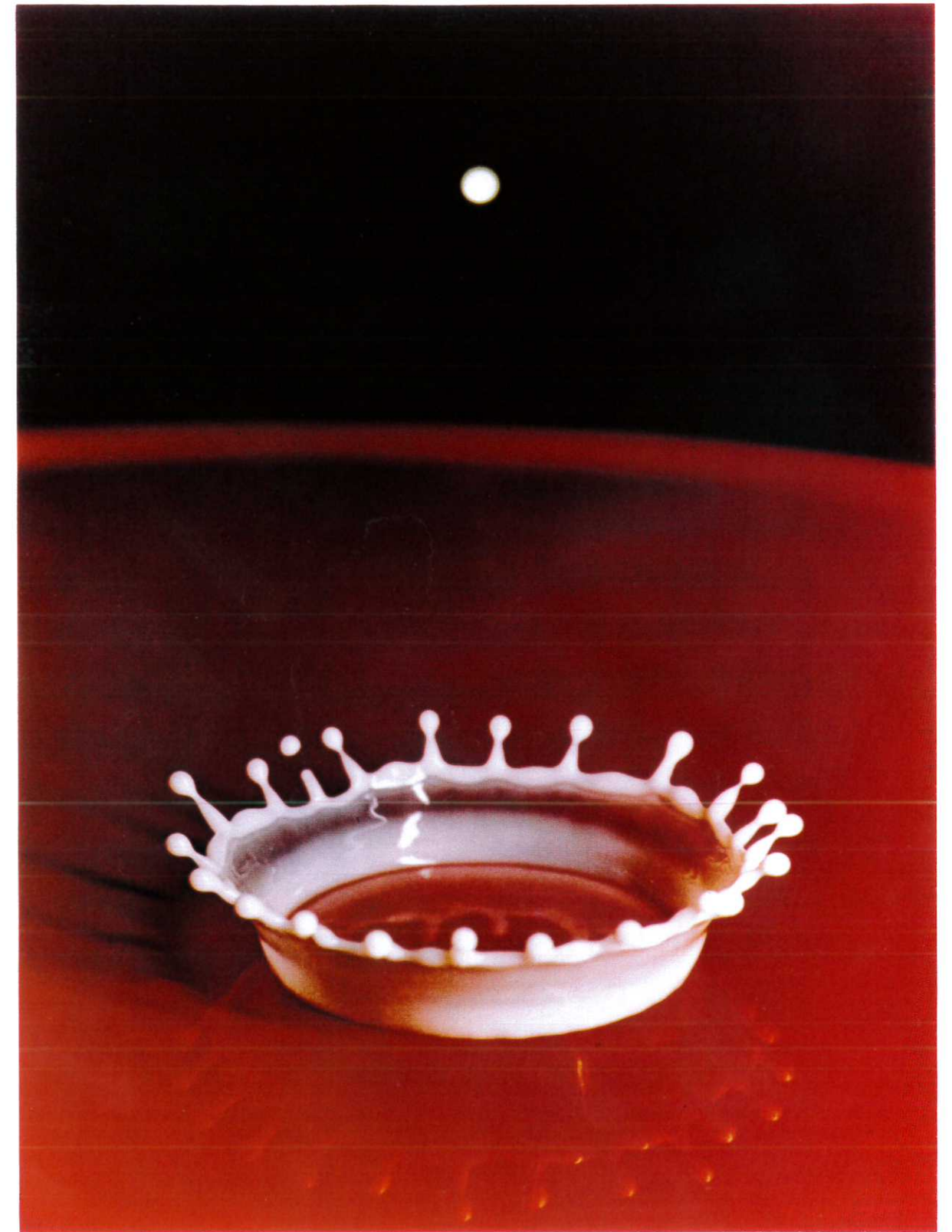
Advert for Nixon headphones (2009)

Everyone takes from everyone else. This we know. Original ideas and genius artists are rare, if not mythical. Influences come from everywhere and feed into, and off, various and varied parts of culture and society. The commercial/art crossover is an area that is particularly fertile. Once seen as polar opposites in terms of hierarchy and acceptability, the worlds of art and commerce cross-pollinate regularly – stealing and borrowing from each other constantly to produce the best works they can in their own contexts.

This phenomenon can especially be seen in contemporary art, where deconstruction, collage and appropriation of commercial imagery are regularly turned to, and advertising often uses tropes from classical and iconic artworks, and other well-known images. An example of a scientific photograph (albeit one with aesthetic qualities) clearly inspiring a commercial imitator is *Milk Drop Coronet* (opposite) by the American engineer and photographer Harold Edgerton, and an advertisement for Nixon headphones (below).

The famous milk drop was an example of Edgerton's groundbreaking use of stop-motion photography, which, like the pioneering work of Eadweard Muybridge (see page 104), showed actions that could not be seen by the human eye. Can you claim the right to the concept of an image? Once a photograph is out in the world, it is liable to be copied and referenced; its communicative power allows it to become part of the vocabulary and grammar of photography, and it can be rephrased or rewritten to become something else.

Here, the advert wants to convey that the arrival of the headphones has the same impact as Edgerton's now-iconic photo had. It is not literal imagery (headphones can't work when wet) but instead suggests modernity and dynamism; the impact the headphones will make. It aspires to the same wonder – the very technical ingenuity that the headphone brand hopes to radiate – as the first photograph to capture a drop of milk.





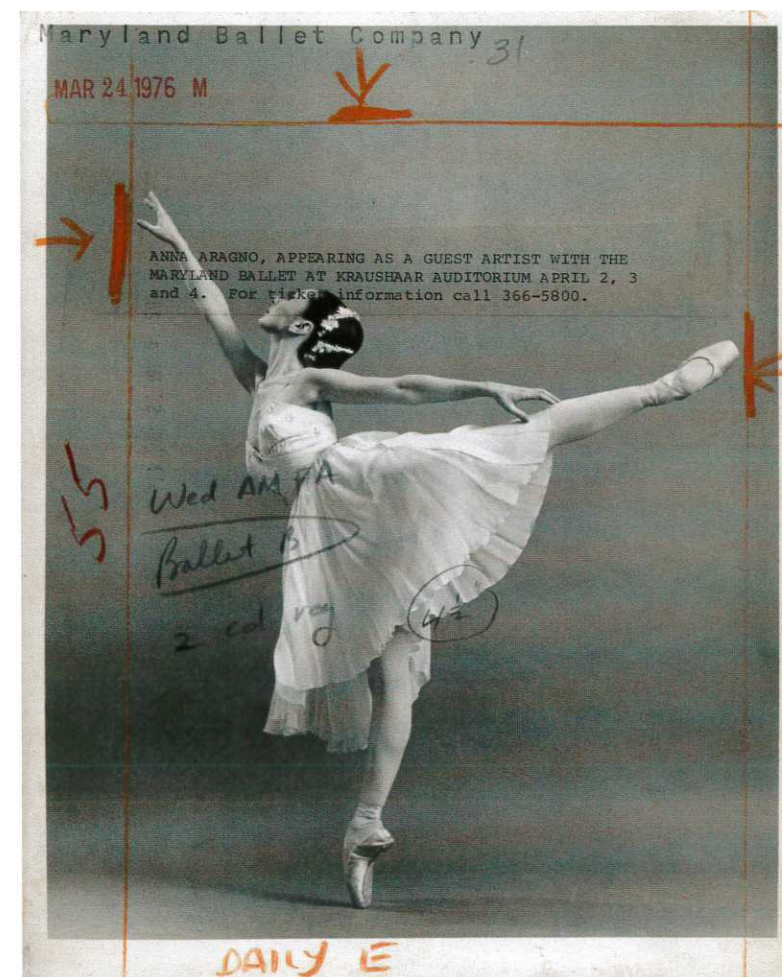
John Stezaker (born 1948)  
*Mask XIII* (2006)

The *Mask* series by the British conceptual artist John Stezaker is an example of using 'found' materials to create something original. What is intriguing about these images is that they look contemporary even though there is nothing contemporary about the imagery they are comprised of. Stezaker took publicity stills of actors from the 1940s and 1950s and overlaid them with photographs or postcards of landscapes, masking the face. He chose the landscapes meticulously, to give the appearance of faces (or, more accurately, skulls) when superimposed in this way; their crevices, cracks and crannies becoming the features of the face.

The technique of using obsolete imagery to contemporary effect was adopted by the surrealist artists of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp, by whom Stezaker is obviously influenced. The surrealists took up many

of the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud, among them his notion of the 'death drive' – the urge towards death and self-destruction buried in the human psyche. It is an idea that Stezaker also finds intriguing and which underpins his *Mask* series. The image here uncannily evokes death, not only through the skull effect, but also by the obliteration of the beautiful young starlet's face. The image acts as a memento mori, but there is also something sadistic about it – he has disfigured a woman's face. He is violently appropriating not only the photograph but also the woman's face and identity.

By using the techniques of a well-known artistic movement, as well as the impulses that drove many of those artists, Stezaker shows that appropriation can restore something – ideas as well as images – obsolete to relevance, so that it becomes new, and even original, once more, in its contemporary setting.



Thomas Ruff (born 1958)  
*press++30.47* (2016)

For his *press++* series, the German photographer Thomas Ruff bought American press photos dating from the 1920s to the 1970s via eBay and scanned the fronts and the backs. He put the two sides together in Photoshop, including the cropping lines, comments, stamps and smudges, and subsequently created one enlarged image.

Ruff's work has been described as 'typically German': distant and humourless. In relation to *press++*, the latter can be disputed: not only does he mock the commercialisation of art, which values single authorship and the one-off masterpiece, but also the practice of appropriation itself. After all, there can be no misunderstanding the previous authorship: the makers and copyright holders are now prominently stamped on the front of the work. Ruff also shows that one needs to look carefully: this photograph is not titled in a way that reveals

the artist's intentions. As with most images, the viewer can make their own associations and give substance to the work.

More importantly, however, Ruff is actually making another statement. While he searched out the most interesting pictures from the thousands of existing press photographs, time passed and the 'sea level' of images rose higher and higher. Instead of providing the world with even more new content, Ruff relocated images from the genre of press photography into art photography. With this act of photographic recycling, restoring the past to the present, he gave shape to the fact that already forgotten histories keep repeating themselves. Because nothing has really changed between the day the press photographer took his or her picture and the day Ruff presented it as an artwork. Wars are still being waged, and dancers continue to dance.



Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849)  
*Ejiri in Suruga Province* (1830–1832)

Jeff Wall (born 1946)  
*A Sudden Gust of Wind (after Hokusai)* (1993)

Canadian photographer Jeff Wall's large photographic tableaux have been described as complex, one-frame cinematic productions involving a crew, sets, models and a painstaking production process. The life-size scale fascinates Wall, as the focused photographic image can sharply convey all possible information that he wants to give.

Wall's model here is *Ejiri in Suruga Province* (left, top), a woodblock print by the Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai. In appropriating the scene, Wall wanted to imitate the dual nature he found present in Hokusai's work. He started by very carefully analysing its composition, drawing lines to discover how Hokusai had used a rectangular grid as the basis for ordering its elements. All the figures, the trees and every sheet of paper turned out to have been placed in specific sections of this rectangle, creating a classical composition which at the same time appears very natural, as if it could be a modern snapshot. Wall wanted his own restaging, too, to hover between two perceptual states: one in which the viewer believes that the scene could be spontaneously unfolding in front of his or her eyes, and the other in which she or he can appreciate it as the product of an elaborate process. To achieve this, he combined more than 100 individual elements in a digital composite (left, bottom).

Is it possible to see that this is an elaborately staged scene? A clue can perhaps be found in the slightly surrealistic details: the man looking up to the sky seems immaculately dressed, as though for an important meeting at the office, yet he wears sturdy outdoor boots that are more suitable for walking the dog on a windy autumn day. The fact that the man thought of wearing his long hair in a bun, and the electricity poles echoing the shape of Japanese characters, are intelligent details that add to the homage.