

MILLIONS OF MOUNTAINS, BILLIONS
OF FLOWERS

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*"Flower Fields," 2013.*

Growing up in Moscow, the photographer [Anastasia Samoylova](#) was exposed, from a young age, to the work of the Russian Romantic poets, whose ecstatic descriptions of nature helped form her early impressions of Russia's geography. "Mountains were embedded into my memory before I ever saw them in real life," she said. But an equally influential source of nature imagery came from the cheesy stock photos of rainbows, waterfalls, and beaches from the built-in screensaver on her personal computer. "I could experience all those majestic vistas on the screen while being surrounded by the typical city landscape made of concrete and glass in real life," she said.

Samoylova's series "Landscape Sublime" adopts and transfigures the clichés of nature imagery. To make her pictures, Samoylova starts by sifting through the millions of landscape photos that are freely available on Web sites like Flickr. She then prints the images, molds them into three-dimensional forms using props like mirrors and iridescent wrapping paper, and photographs her tableaux. The resulting images, each of which focusses on a single landscape feature—from tree blossoms to desert mirages—turn commonplace source material into complex geometric abstractions that have more in common with the experimental photography of Matt Lipps or Jessica Eaton than with the representational splendor of a traditional landscape photograph. Yet something of nature's joyfulness and spontaneity is retained. "Just like a landscape photographer waits for the right shadows to occur, I build the space and stop to photograph it when the moment is right," Samoylova said. "It is always a surprise."