



Sebastian Stadler *Drift*

Sebastian Stadler's (*1988, St. Gallen) photographic practice unfolds as a sustained attempt to make sense of the contemporary world—shaped by visual excess, technological mediation, and ever-shifting systems of knowledge. Moving attentively through everyday environments, Stadler creates images that appear familiar yet subtly unsettled, capturing moments and situations often overlooked. His work does not seek immediate clarity, but invites a slower, more reflective mode of looking, questioning how we perceive, interpret, and orient ourselves within a reality that is increasingly fragmented and mediated.

Combining still and moving imagery, this exhibition brings together earlier and recent bodies of work, allowing ideas, motifs, and processes to *drift* across time and form. Rather than presenting a linear narrative, the works enter into dialogue, revealing how Stadler's concerns and practice evolve through repetition, duration, and chance. Finished, framed photographs are shown alongside unfinished test prints, foregrounding the artistic process itself—from one visual idea to the next, and from conceptual exploration to the physical act of printing. Photography appears not as a fixed result, but as a mutable, experimental medium.

Stadler's distinctive conceptual documentary style resonates closely with the core intentions of the Art Vontobel Collection, dedicated to photography and image-based art as a means of exploring the human experience in a rapidly changing world. Testing the limits of the medium while remaining grounded in its material and historical foundations, Stadler poetically probes how contemporary photographers seek new visual languages—and how machine-generated image-making subtly reshapes perception.

A central thread through his practice is an investigation of pictorial space and the conditions of seeing. In the series *L'apparition* (2015–2022), Stadler employs analogue double exposures—exposing thousands of negatives from which only a few are selected—to overlay landscapes, urban scenes, and architectural spaces with images drawn from digital screens. The polished surface of the digital image dissolves into its constituent pixels, lingering as virtual traces embedded within the physical world. The photograph becomes a space where material and immaterial realities intersect, and where the viewer's gaze oscillates between depth and surface.

In his most recent works, *New Archaeologies*, Stadler continues this strategy of chance-based combinations and double exposure, introducing AI-generated elements. Fictitious measuring tools—structures that suggest systems of control or knowledge yet reveal themselves as nonsensical upon closer inspection—stand in stark contrast to natural environments. These images neither celebrate nor condemn technological systems; instead, they hold open a space of ambivalence, reflecting both how scientific frameworks shape our understanding and the promise, as well as uncertainty, embedded in artificial intelligence as a visual and conceptual collaborator.

Originally conceived as an objective medium, photography is here reimaged as a space of collision and inquiry. By combining AI image-generation techniques with traditional photographic processes, Stadler responds to the omnipresent flood of images and expanding possibilities of manipulation. As we drift through the works, we are invited to reflect on how we see and understand the world, on human and artistic authorship, and on how artificial intelligence may quietly, and gradually, be shaping future archaeologies.