

Sebastian Stadler

Pictures, I think

Manor Art Prize St. Gallen

16 November 2019 – 16 February 2020

Exhibition texts

Sebastian Stadler (*1988, St. Gallen) is the recipient of the 2019 Manor Art Prize St. Gallen. His work spans the media of photography and video and addresses the particularities of his environment as well as the question of images of reality. In the exhibition *Pictures, I think* he creates a cinematic and photographic conglomerate of images. These run along a multifaceted and fragmentary course as a tracking down of reality along a variety of observations on media as well as social and cultural issues. He translates his divergent experiences thoughtfully, strikingly, and also subversively into dramatically polished works.

Sebastian Stadler studied photography at the Zurich University of the Arts and the Ecole cantonale d'art de Lausanne. The exhibition at the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen focuses on his work in film and combines current videos and photographs from the series *L'apparition*, which he partly recreated for the exhibition.

Pictures, I think, 2019

In the work *Pictures, I think*, from which the exhibition in St. Gallen takes its title, an algorithm generates constantly changing new exhibition titles for the presentation. An image recognition program uses a pool of photographs that are uploaded at irregular intervals from the artist's iPhone. The computer program produces a description of the image and displays it on two monitors without revealing the image it is based on. For example, it shows descriptions such as "A close-up of a person, I think." If the contents of the photograph are not recognized by the program, it displays the phrase "Pictures, I think." Thus, the image analysis in the work depends on the ability of a computer program to recognize and describe the image.

Travellings, 2013–2015/2019

In *Travellings*, Sebastian Stadler uses escalators in shopping malls, railway underpasses, and public buildings for his tracking shots. Architectural particularities alternate with trivial details and draw our attention to ceiling coverings and constructions: to things unknown as well as familiar. The postmodern museum extension by the St. Gallen architect Marcel Ferrier becomes part of the work.

Swimming Pool, 2019

The work *Swimming Pool* (2019) shows a swimmer apparently concentrating on carefully searching for something in a pool on the roof of a building. While the swimmer is absorbed in the act of searching, young people practice various competitive disciplines on the neighboring athletic field. This action by the actors, who are focused on what they are doing without being aware of being observed, is characteristic of Stadler's videos.

We see the whole picture, 2017/2019

On seven small-format LCD screens, we look at images uploaded to the Web from the Finnish transport authority, which show the road conditions in northern Scandinavia. Stadler downloaded thousands of still images from webcams in a sparsely populated area of Finland, which are only visible for a short time online before being deleted. Stadler deliberately composes the digital image sequences in *We see the whole picture* in order to condense the flood of images into subtle, narrative everyday moments. He succeeds in wresting images with surprising insights out of this supposedly barren landscape.

Welcome to Disneyland, 2017

"Welcome to Disneyland" rings out of the loudspeakers in the huge parking lot of the Parisian amusement park of the American dream factory. Tour buses and cars are lined up on parking spaces marked with well-known Walt Disney animal characters. For his tracking shot, Stadler uses the moving walkway in the parking lot, which transports visitors to the entrance of the amusement park. With familiar film music playing in the background, we are confronted with the absurdity of our own leisure activities. The banal and strange "spectacle" of a parking lot passes by our eye like a static parade. The cinematic tool of the tracking shot continues in an endless loop, generating tension.

Lumi/ei lunta, 2011

Snow/no snow: this is the theme of the video *Lumi/ei lunta*. Life in rural northern Finland, far away from the cities, is determined by the change of the seasons and especially by snow. Stadler's first video from 2011 begins with a slow camera movement. Static film images showing interiors and exteriors in stunning natural scenery alternate with contemplative moments and scenes with a documentary character. We follow everyday life in Finland, which, besides work, is characterized by leisure activities and waiting.

Vos Travaux, 2016

A lightbox, a magnifying glass, an envelope with photographs, film strips . . . With a camera zoom from a nearby building, Stadler films scenes unobserved in a well-known Parisian photo lab. We follow customers as they take the developed photographs out of the envelope, examine, sort, compare, and tear them up—hastily, carefully, cautiously. We witness a brief personal moment and simultaneously become voyeurs of gestures and facial expressions, following the curious gaze of strangers at their personal photographs.

Drummer, 2019 and Trumpets, 2019

Female students from a Japanese music school wearing school uniforms perform their exercises outdoors to the beat of a metronome. At regular intervals, a student bangs her batons on a pad. Two students practice scales in an endless loop.

L'apparition, 2015–2019

The title of the photo series *L'apparition* points to the act of making visible or recognizable as well as the appearance of a phenomenon that results from a photographic process. This process is based on the double exposure, which is seldom recognizable as such at first glance and initially disorients the viewer. Two levels of exposure are superimposed on the analogue film strip and combine the two images into a transparently overlapping image. The series started in 2015 and is ongoing.

Obama, 2019

A bus parking lot in the town of Obama on the coast of Japan is superimposed with steam from the local hot springs.

Titel, 2019

The two-channel projection *Titel* is based on an algorithm: the complete list of 60,000 e-books from the freely accessible digital library gutenberg.org as well as a selection of archival images from the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen are combined. Reproductions of artworks from the collection as well as exhibition views of past presentations at the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen and the art area of the Lokremise are analyzed by a computer program. The keywords resulting from this analysis are then compared with the digital library, and in a matter of seconds an excerpt from one of the available texts is projected. Once again, the image analysis is handled entirely by a computer program. Thus, the image and text result in a kind of algorithmic intelligence: literary quotations describe the images from the archive of the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen.

Curator: Nadia Veronese