

**Andri Stadler**

«2+2 = 5»

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During vacations as a child, Andri Stadler's parents took him regularly from Aadorf in the Swiss canton of Thurgau to Ardez, where his mother grew up. From the broad plains, the route led across the Flüela Pass to the Lower Engadin, and even then he was fascinated by the high mountain landscape at the height of the pass that marked the transition to a different region in terms of language and culture.

For the photographic project *Übergang* – Passagi, which he began in 2018, Andri Stadler has been photographing various passes, large and small, along the Alpine divide with his mobile studio, returning to experiences from his childhood. These passes interest him not just in a geographic and cultural sense; the Alpine landscapes and forces of nature also attract Stadler's attention.

In the passes, a kind of "zero zone," as the artist calls them, the forces of nature set the tone. They can be magical, powerful, or even threatening. As revealed in earlier studies, like those created in Scotland (2014) or on the snow-covered Gotthard Pass (2016), Stadler is intrigued by remote, difficult to reach, frequently lonely places that can trigger a sense of being abandoned. Stadler looks for and finds landscapes and locations that touch him, perhaps even make him shudder, and motivate him to stop and position his camera.

In his first exhibition at Galerie Mark Müller Andri Stadler presents two photographs that were taken at smaller adjacent passes near the Lukmainer Pass with the evocative names Passo dell'Uomo and Passo delle Colombe. The delicate gradients of color, gentle transitions, dense overlaps, and blurs lend the two photographs a captivating painterly effect. Instead of with the lens, Stadler experiments with light, with optical tools and filters, leading to an extraordinary experience of color. For the artist, the camera becomes a brush, as it were, with which he creates visual compositions *en plein air*. Here, as in all of Stadler's works, the reduction of visual stimuli is key. With his precise gaze, he captures numerous impressions of nature, superimposes them on top of one another, overlapping layers and thus crystallizing an essential aspect of various visual experiences in the landscape that goes far beyond a depiction of reality. The images evoke a notion of landscape and awaken associations but remain ultimately ungraspable and cannot be placed despite their titles. The issues of subjective perception and doubt regarding the clarity of the photographic image have concerned Andri Stadler from the very start in his work.

The two C-prints are complemented by two works executed in ink on paper. With their dark, opaque surfaces, they form an interesting contrast to the highly glossy surfaces of the photographs. For Stadler, working with black ink on handmade paper takes his photographic process a step deeper. Based on the digital "pre-images," which he examines in his studio on the computer screen, he then translates the photographs to a new medium, examining them in light of formal and compositional aspects, reduced and abstract. And then something

happens in the encounter between photography and ink painting that perhaps could be called a conversation. This dialogue can also be heard in the exhibition: it might be the productive, invisible variable to which Stadler is referring in his exhibition title—"2+2=5," a quote from George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984* that can also be understood as a call to reflect critically on our perception.

It is demanding to engage with Andri Stadler's photographs; often, it is difficult to see anything at first, and depending on our viewpoint the glossy surfaces reflect back. But it is more than worth the effort to take the time necessary to immerse ourselves in a visual world far from all superficial pathos.

Patricia Bieder, trans. Brian Currid

Andri Stadler (b. in Aadorf, Switzerland in 1971) has lived in Lucerne for many years now and works in Emmenbrücke. He studied design and art at Hochschule Luzern from 1996-1999, and his work has been presented in numerous solo and group shows.