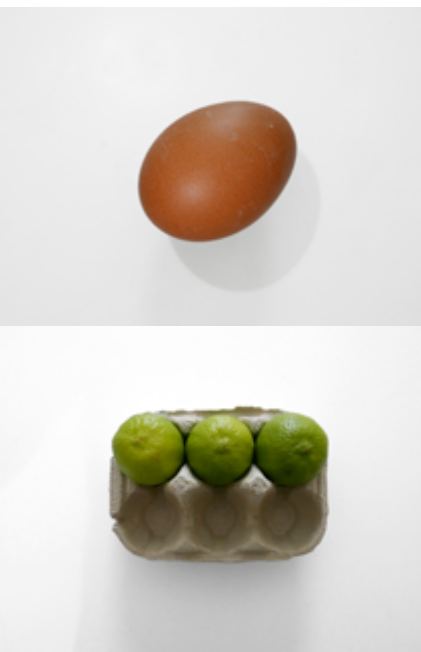
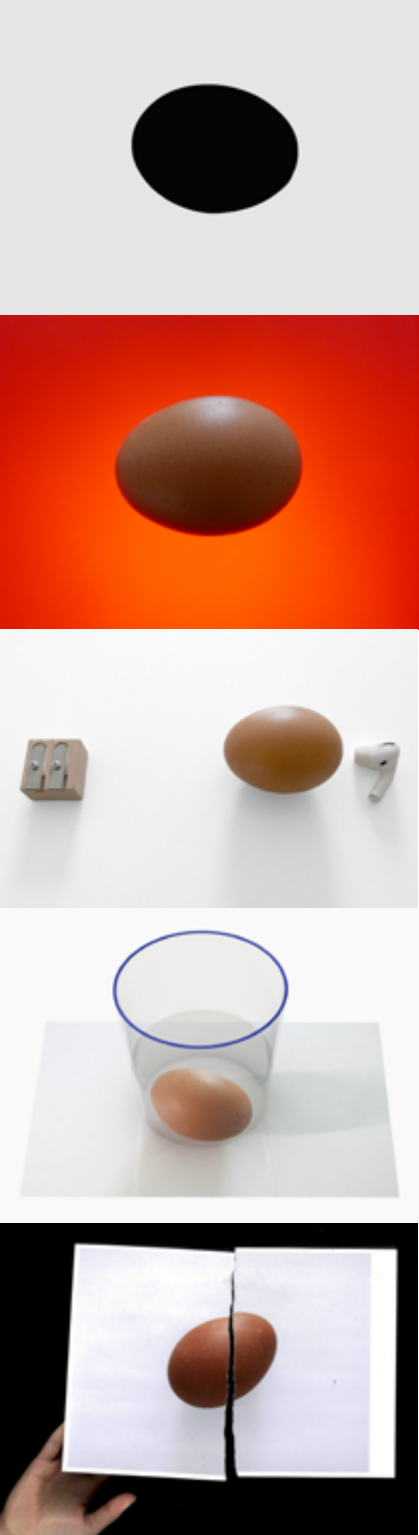


There is a well-known riddle that asks: how do you put an elephant into a fridge? The answer: open the door, put in the elephant, close the door. It continues: how do you put a giraffe into the fridge? Open the door, take out the elephant, put in the giraffe, close the door. This logic feels absurd, but the answer is accepted—not because it makes sense in real life, but because it satisfies the structure of a command.

This project investigates how an image can operate as language—not through illustration or narration, but through its own structure—and how meaning emerges, shifts, or drifts in the relational space between image and text.

This question led me to a foundational observation: idea, image, and word never fully align. When I say “apple,” the word might refer to a red fruit, a tech company, or a metaphor. An image might show a single fruit, a tree, or something else entirely. The idea evoked might belong to none of these. But this slippage is not a failure of communication—it is where meaning lives. I use this instability as a starting point, not a problem to solve.

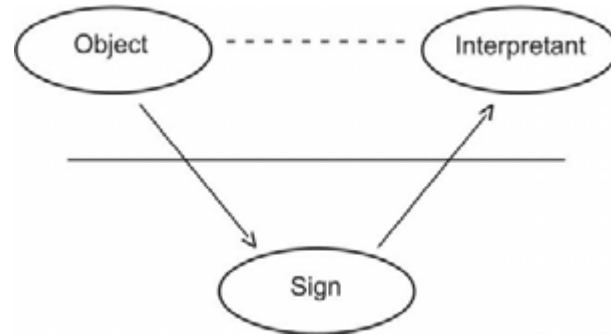




From this gap between idea, image, and word, I developed Semantic Drift—a system that treats images as grammatical units. Meaning is not fixed, but gradually shifts across a sequence. Each image functions as a kind of word, and together they form a syntax of looking.

- Words refer to the essential visual features of the object—its shape, size, surface.
- Tone is created by light, angle, and distance, setting affective or emotional conditions.
- Syntax is built through the spatial relationship between objects—their positioning, grouping, or alignment.
- Accent emerges from visible traces of material processes, such as digital glitches, pixelation, or print texture.

These categories allow me to construct image sequences in which semantic distance slowly increases. An egg becomes an object, becomes an apple, becomes an image. The structure remains stable, but what the viewer recognises—or thinks they recognise—begins to drift. Meaning arises not from resemblance, but from structural relation. The image is no longer a representation of content, but a compositional unit within a language system.



My model is shaped by semiotic theory, particularly Peirce's notion of the arbitrariness of the sign and Peirce's triadic model of sign, object, and interpretant. Both emphasize that meaning is not embedded in the sign itself, but generated through difference and interpretation. I apply this logic to image-language relations—not to decode images, but to test how they function structurally.

In *Semantic Drift*, the image remains constant while the text or linguistic context changes. The same egg, placed in different structural or narrative environments, acquires new referents. The drift is not in the object but in its context; not in the image, but in its sentence.

My practice is informed by a lineage of artists who have interrogated image, object, and language. Joseph Kosuth's work treats object, image, and text as interchangeable representations of a single concept. My approach diverges: I do not assume equivalence, but examine the gaps—each form reveals one aspect of meaning while concealing others.





Magritte's *The Treachery of Images* famously reminds us that the image is not the thing. I take this further by treating the image not just as a detached sign, but as a material surface. In my Accent section, I emphasise the physical characteristics of images: pixelation, scanned paper, Riso texture. Sometimes the object (the egg) disappears entirely, replaced by fragments of print or torn paper. The shift is not only semiotic—it is material and structural.

5

The closest reference point is Fischli and Weiss's *Suddenly This Overview*, in which clay figures are paired with dissonant or recontextualising captions. A vague sculpture becomes "Mr. and Mrs. w shortly after the conception of their son, the genius Albert." The image does not change; the language reframes it entirely. Their practice inspires *Image is Language*, where I pair ordinary objects with news headlines. But my images do not depict the events described. The cup is not a hospital cup; the headphones are not a sleep aid. They respond not to content but to tone, orientation, placement.

6



Unlike Fischli and Weiss, whose clay models still attempt to depict the subject of the caption, my images do not reconstruct the referent. I am not interested in image-object identity, but in relational structure—between object and environment, object and other objects, object and medium. I do not depict the thing named in language. I attempt to re-present the grammar of its relations.



Therefore, I do not use images to explain a fixed idea—I use them to organise meaning. Meaning is not embedded in the image, but constructed through its structural relation to other images and to language. What I build is not a descriptive system, but a visual grammar. In this system, meaning drifts and is constantly renegotiated between image and text. I am not telling a story; I am constructing the conditions for meaning to emerge. I am not reading images—I am writing with them.

To construct this grammar, I chose photography as my medium. Not for its documentary function, but because it allows a “believable” surface while giving me control over internal structure. I take reference from Thomas Demand, who builds paper models to reconstruct entire scenes—his photographs preserve spatial relationships but erase texture. I also draw from Laura Letinsky, who integrates printed images into still-life compositions, mixing flatness with real objects. These practices all emphasise one thing: the image is no longer a record of reality, but a structural proposition.

In my work, photography is not about “capturing,” but about “writing.” I use it to organise relationships, control rhythm, and compose arrangements—allowing images to function like language. The image is no longer a mirror of the world; it becomes a constructed unit within a system. This shift—from image as surface to image as structure—invites a new kind of reading.



Reading images is often mistaken for an instinct—something as natural as a mother tongue. But in *Semantic Drift*, I treat the image as a foreign language. I build a system that must be re-learned through structure, not resemblance; through composition, not intuition. This system teaches us not to look for what an image is, but how it works.

In *Image is Language*, the image becomes the first language. Images and text are placed on adjacent pages. This spatial separation reflects a structural decision: the two elements do not illustrate or explain one another. Instead, they speak in parallel. The image does not repeat the content of the text, but responds to its structure, rhythm, or tone—like a voice echoing in another register. Together, *Semantic Drift* and *Image is Language* form a methodology for working with images—one that moves beyond representation and into construction.

I hope this methodology can be of value to anyone who works with images. The “egg becomes apple” exercise visualises how we learn to connect signs and meanings in everyday life. It reminds the viewer—as a receiver of symbols—that these associations are not natural, but trained. And it reminds the image-maker that symbols are not fixed. Meaning doesn’t have to be stable—semantic drift is not a mistake, but a beautiful extension.

This approach to visual semantics can also be extended into broader design contexts—such as exhibition design, architecture, or spatial systems. Take the example of a staircase. Like an egg, it comes with a set of inherent properties: it connects two spaces, it is composed of repeated units, it involves a vertical gap between a start and an end point, it slows down movement, and it segments space both physically and experientially.

But when we design a staircase, we are not only solving a structural problem—we are arranging meaning. What do we want the staircase to say in this particular context? How can the relationships between parts, or between parts and their environment, shift that meaning toward another direction?

I want the viewer's experience not to be one of solving puzzles, but of entering a new rhythm of seeing. Not to ask “what does this image mean?”, but to notice when meaning begins to move. This is not a universal language—it is a structure with space for misreading, for memory, and for surprise.

1

Unknown (n.d.) Elephant and fridge riddle. Available at: <https://www.riddles.com/riddle/241> (Accessed: 18 May 2025)

Question: How do you put an elephant into a fridge?

Answer: Open the fridge, put in the elephant, and close the fridge.

Question: How do you put a giraffe into the fridge?

Answer: Open the fridge, take out the elephant, put in the giraffe, and close the fridge.

Question: The Lion King is hosting an animal conference. All the animals attend—except one. Which animal is missing?

Answer: The giraffe. It's still in the fridge.

Question: You need to cross a river that's home to crocodiles. How do you manage it safely?

Answer: You just swim across. All the crocodiles are at the animal conference.

2

Wikipedia (n.d.) Course in General Linguistics. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Course\\_in\\_General\\_Linguistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Course_in_General_Linguistics) (Accessed: 18 May 2025).

According to Ferdinand de Saussure, a sign is made up of two parts:

- The signifier — the form of the word (for example, the written or spoken word “tree”)
- The signified — the concept you imagine (a tall plant with branches, leaves, and roots)

Saussure argued that the link between the signifier and the signified is not natural, but arbitrary and based on social convention.

For example:

- In English, we say “tree.”
- In French, we say “arbre.”
- In Chinese, we write “树.”

These are completely different words or sounds, but they all point to the same concept. This shows that the relationship between a word (signifier) and its meaning (signified) is not fixed—it's something we agree on within a language system.

This idea—that meaning is constructed, not inherent—has deeply influenced how we understand signs, language, and images in both semiotics and design.

3

Wikipedia (n.d.) Semiotic theory of Charles Sanders Peirce. Available at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semiotic\\_theory\\_of\\_Charles\\_Sanders\\_Peirce](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semiotic_theory_of_Charles_Sanders_Peirce) (Accessed: 18 May 2025).

Peirce's key insight was that meaning is not directly transferred from sign to object—it's created in the mind of the observer. The interpretant is what allows signs to mean different things in different contexts.

Another example (with a word):

- Sign: the word “egg”
- Object: a real egg
- Interpretant: your personal understanding of what an egg is—this might include ideas like food, fragility, or even symbolic meanings (e.g. new life)

This model is useful for understanding how meaning is always context-based and never fixed. It has been highly influential in semiotics, especially when discussing ambiguity, misreading, and shifting meanings.

4

Kosuth, J. (1965) One and Three Chairs [installation: chair, photograph, text panel]. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

5

Magritte, R. (1929) The Treachery of Images [oil on canvas]. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

6

Fischli, P. and Weiss, D. (1981–2012) Suddenly This Overview [unglazed clay sculptures]. Various collections and exhibitions.

7

Demand, T. (1999) Copyshop [photograph of paper model]. Sprüth Magers Gallery.

Demand, T. (2011) Daily #13 [photograph of paper model]. Published by Matthew Marks Gallery.

8

Letinsky, L. (2011) Untitled #3, from the series Ill Form and Void Full [photograph]. Courtesy of the artist and Yancey Richardson Gallery, New York.

Letinsky, L. (c. 2000–2010) Untitled, from the series Hardly More Than Ever [photograph]. Various collections.