

# AMERICAN PHOTO

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## CONTRIVERSY

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so with the "Supervisions" series of German photographer Andreas Gefeller. He has arrived at a remarkable, labor-intensive methodology that creates stunningly detailed images of large, flat surfaces indoors and out, from parking lots to office ceilings to fields of vegetables.

These images seem to exist in a wholly abstract realm, with no apparent point of view, yet record their contents with a clarity that unaided human vision could never achieve. It is as if Gefeller had somehow scanned these enormous surfaces at ultrahigh resolution. Yet while the photographer acknowledges that the details of his images are faithful, he describes the final result as a "construction."

That construction results from Gefeller's methodical process of shooting his subject—the paint-splattered floor of an art-school studio, the dense pattern of shoe imprints on a well-traveled

**CLASS NOTE**  
"STITCHING  
MANUALLY  
GIVES YOU  
MORE CREATIVE  
CONTROL."

beach—square by square. He mounts his Canon EOS 5D digital SLR on a tripod that has been extended but with the legs unplayed so that he can wedge its feet into his belt; the tripod is aimed up at an angle, with the head tilted down to keep the camera parallel to the surface he's photographing. After each cable-released shot, he takes a step (or three, or four) before shooting again. "When I started this series I actually measured the squares, but

### LESSON 1 ON PRECISION

"Sometimes I set up a grid to do the shooting, but often I don't. The reason for this is interesting: Many of my subjects are urban places, which means they're man-made. Humans put everything in **strict order** and in rows, which makes the photography process easier. **I can use the grid** created by tiles, paving slabs, or other regular patterns to orient myself, for example. This fact tells a lot about human character—about man's will to control nature and his environment."

now it's just a matter of feeling," Gefeller explains. "I know the length of my feet and how many steps I have to make."

**G**efeller shoots with a 35mm lens, a moderately-wide focal length that captures a little over a square yard from about eye level. For outdoor subjects he often extends his improvised boom so that it's as high as nine or ten feet. It can take many hours, if not days, to photograph the whole surface he has chosen, and Gefeller may shoot hundreds if not thousands of overlapping frames. For his recent image of an entire floor of the Art Academy in his native Dusseldorf (below), Gefeller made approximately 10,000 separate exposures.

Though the process of shooting is arduously systematic, the digital stitching—done without the help of dedicated stitching programs—is even more so. Sometimes Gefeller creates, or simply leaves intact, a seamless transition from frame to frame; other times he leaves unaltered a more abrupt transition. "I think this is one of the main creative aspects of the work, to decide where you leave some seams in the picture and where it's unnecessary," he says. "Naturally, it's very easy to remove seams in Photoshop. But for me, these little 'mistakes' are very important for the viewer so that he can try to understand what he is looking at."

The result is reminiscent of the digital pastiche produced

### LESSON 2 ON PRINT SCALE

"There is no one ideal size for the 'Supervisions' prints. Some must have a **minimum size** or else you wouldn't even understand what they are showing. I did an image of a golf driving range, and although this print is quite large, the golf balls on it are still tiny; if it were any smaller, the viewer wouldn't be able to identify the golf balls. Other prints don't need to be so large—images of paving slabs, for example. The sections remind me of pixels, an effect you'd lose if you made the prints really big.

"Sometimes I downsample the individual frames before I put them together. But in general, I try to leave them at full resolution and downsample the whole image to suit the particular print size. That means of course that the **files are massive**. I could produce the prints in dimensions that would fill huge temples."

