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 beach—square by square. He mounts his Canon EOS 35D digital SLR on a tripod that has been extended but with the legs unployed 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 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."

Gefeller 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,” 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...