Menno Aden
Photography
Room Portraits

A Model Existence
Multiple top-down photos stitched together yield novel perspectives on our living spaces
by Nicholas Felton (Photoviz, Gestalten)

Menno Aden flattens the interiors of real living and working spaces into 2D scale models by stitching together 10 to 1,000 images taken from above by remote control. The technique is akin to removing the ceiling and replacing it with a scanner. The results reveal hidden symmetrical compositions and the way the (absent) inhabitants exist in their enclosed spaces.

Menno Aden’s Room Portraits
by David Rosenberg (Slate/Washington Post)

Photographer Menno Aden likes to look down on his subjects, but in about the least pretentious way possible. To him, it’s just another way of seeing someone’s personality.

“For me as an artist, watching from a higher position on a small space is interesting because I can see someone’s ‘compressed personality,’” Aden says. “I started photographing rooms of friends in Berlin, to make portraits of them without actually seeing them. Many of them had - or still have - an unpretentious life, which is quite typical in Berlin since rents have been quite low.”

Aden isn’t limited to private spaces. He has take images of stores, in elevators, and also in basements and parking garages, which are some of his most abstract work. About the garages, Aden explained: “One day I stumbled upon the basement garage of a supermarket where I was buying some food. I noticed the dirty and oily traces cars make that went over some lines in the parking lots. I took some test pictures and liked the lines - they remind me of calligraphy … so I started to do a series that could easily redefine the term ‘oil-paintings.’”
Untitled (Dentist), 2009, 100 x 128 cm
Untitled (Bar), 2011, 90 x 160 cm
Untitled (O.W.), 2009, 100 x 145 cm
Untitled (Anonymous II), 2008, 100 x 134 cm
The image Lab by German photographer Menno Aden offers a view down from the ceiling onto an empty pharmaceutical laboratory. Menno Aden produced Lab as part of an ongoing project to document interiors from unconventional viewpoints. Previously he’s captured domestic interiors and public places, but this latest photograph focuses on the biological laboratory of a pharmaceutical company in Switzerland. There are no people in the shot, but the cluttered desktops reveal some of the activities that take place inside the space. “Through the steep top-view the deserted laboratory appears as a model,” said Aden. “As if the ceiling was removed, architectural structures and human traces of modern bio-laboratories become visible.” To create a flattened bird’s-eye view, the photographer took over 1000 shots from different places on the laboratory ceiling, then collaged 600 of them together to remove perspective distortions. It took two days to take all of the photographs, followed by three months of computer editing to create a single composite image. Aden told Dezeen he believes this kind of image production provides a more accurate representation of reality than traditional photography.

“Interestingly photographs are still associated with ‘truth’ and ‘reality’, not only by consumers but also by many professional photographers who boast not to use Photoshop to distort authenticity,” he said. “In my photographic work this situation is indeed exactly vice versa: only the digital image processing allows the representation of a reality,” he continued. “Like a radiograph, it sometimes requires special techniques to look ‘behind the curtain’ and come a bit closer to the truth.”

Amy Fpearson (Dezeen)
Lab, 2012/2013, 263 x 149 cm
Untitled (Car), 2009, 60 x 101 cm
Untitled (Basement Garage II - V), 2011, 110 x 110 cm
Untitled (Arrow), 2011, 100 x 130 cm
Untitled (Box I, III), 2011, 40 x 40 cm
Untitled (Box IV - VII), 2014, each 40 x 40 cm
Over Head

For his series Over Head (2015), photo artist Menno Aden photographed ceilings of the former U.S. Headquarter offices in Berlin-Dahlem. Aden captures a moment of this orphaned building’s turbulent history during the Cold War – the time of transition up to its current reconstruction. Preserved by photography, this moment is carried into the present. Here are the observations of a pathfinder who scans the building for material remains of its now faded, historically significant function.

Aden does not address obvious traces that are omnipresent at a site like this. It is the inaccessible parts that interest him, the unconscious leftovers such as the pipe system and powerlines behind the ceilings, a web of veins that pervades the whole building and become readable only through the precise capture of the camera lens.

Menno Aden’s digital editing and juxtapositioning of individual works carry a rhythmical playfulness from which emerges a particularly sensible and graphic aesthetics.

Katrin Seemann
Untitled (OH 02, 04, 05, 06), each 75 x 50 cm, 2015
Untitled (OH 07, 08, 09, 10), each 75 x 50 cm, 2015
Untitled (OH 12), 2015, 130 x 180 cm
Menno Aden’s series Parallele Heimat (Parallel Homes), which was awarded the 2009 European Architecture Prize, shows nature honed and shaped in the form of front yards. He now continues this idea in his series Tracks and Fields in the same vein, following a similar vision bound by strict aesthetic principles. A well-ordered system dominated by tones and surfaces emerges in his compositions of long, vertical images. The extreme cropping of his photographs works against the typical expanse of a landscape and requires the viewer to move his gaze independently to the next bordering image. Our typical gaze is called into question and put to the test when no single horizontal line is there to guide our eyes into the distance. Instead, a play of colors and surfaces dominates.

He forcefully carries out this optical alternation, weaving the structures into two-dimensional series. His images, which were made in new housing developments, present us with a perfect environment, which finds analogy in the strict photographic sectionals of reality. As though ordered according to a two-dimensional plan, everything fits perfectly into an ordered system, and space is smoothed into two dimensions. It is not without irony that Aden uses the title Parallel Homes to play with ideas of the uniformity of these German suburban areas, their identical seeming front yards reflected in the precise structure of the architectural details.

Christina Wendenburg

Untitled (XX), 2009/2010 (detail)
Untitled (Tracks and Fields II & I), 2009/2010, each 130 x 22 cm
Untitled (Windows), 2012, each 130 x 22 cm
Untitled (Escalator), 2012, each 130 x 22 cm
Tubes

Untitled (Tubes 10), 2012, 75 x 50 cm (detail)
Untitled (Tubes II), 2013, each 50 x 50 cm
Untitled (Tubes 10, 15), 2012, each 75 x 50 cm
Untitled (Tubes II), 2013, each 50 x
Re 01, 2011, 40 x 80 cm (detail)
Re 01 - 03, 2011, each 40 x 80 cm
Panel Flats

In his photo series Panel Flats, 2004/2014 Aden shows nine windows of buildings made of precast slabs. His video Panel Flats II shows more than 100 individually created windows in a fast and hard changing rhythm of the same buildings made of precast slabs. The windows become interfaces that communicate from inside to outside as they reflect the world outside at the same time. The serial repetition nearly eliminates all human notion of the situation.

Guy Schraenen

Filmstill from Panel Flats II, 2014 (HD, PAL, color, sound, 1:26 Min, loop)
Untitled (Panel Flats 06 - 09), 2004/2014, each 30 x 40 cm
Menno Aden | Curriculum Vitae

Weener (Germany), 1972

1993 - 2000 Art and Music, University of Bremen

Lives and works in Berlin

Awards

2013    Deutscher Preis für Wissenschaftsfotografie (German Award Science Photography), Bremen (1st Prize)
        International Photography Awards 2013, Los Angeles (Architecture: 1st Prize)
        Accademia Apulia UK Photography Award 2013, London (1st Prize)

2012    Art | Science | Industry - Art Prize, Potsdam (1st Prize)

2009    European Award of Architectural Photography 2009, Frankfurt am Main (Selection)

Solo Exhibitions (Selection)

2016    Menno Aden: Room Portraits. European Month Of Photography, Galerie Schuster, Berlin DEU

2015    Menno Aden: AØ From Above. Antje Oeklesund Audiovisual Laboratory, Berlin, DEU

Menno Aden: Over Head II. Former US-Headquarter, Berlin, DEU
2014  Menno Aden: Room Portraits. Segeberger Kunstverein, Segeberg, DEU
2013  Wirklich - nicht wirklich II. With Hermann Reimer, Kunstverein Barsinghausen, DEU
2012  Menno Aden – New Works. Galerie Schuster Potsdam, DEU
      Menno Aden: Room Portraits. Galerie Abrahams, Hamburg, DEU
      Still Light. With Marcin Cienski, Galeria Deák Erika, Budapest, HUN
2011  Menno Aden – Photography. Schuster Gallery, Miami, USA
      Menno Aden: Spurensuche. Galerie Lesmeister, Regensburg, DEU
2010  Menno Aden – Photography. Galerie Schuster Photo, Berlin, DEU
      The Universe is not your Friend, Babe. With Jessica Buhlmann, Galeria Deak Erika, Budapest, HUN
2007  Menno Aden - Quis Custodiet Custodes. Your Mother Gallery, Singapore, SIN

**Group Exhibitions (Selection)**

2016  Berlin Raum Radar - New Architecture Photography. Menno Aden, Sibylle Bergemann, Peter Bialobrzeski, Tacita Dean,
      Mitch Epstein, Ola Kolehmainen, Andreas Mühe, Robert Polidori, Pola Sieverding, Michael Wesely et al. Curated by
      Nadine Barth, Neue West, Berlin, DEU
      A Better World. Curated by David J. Brown, Director of the Fine Art Museum at Western Carolina University. The Bascom
      Museum, NC, USA
2015  EVA European Video Art. College of Fine Art Ladkrabang, Bangkok University, Chiang Mai University, THA


Discover me. Emden Landesmuseum, Emden, DEU


2012  International Multimedia Art Festival. New Zero Art Space Institut Francais, Yangon, MMR

In Private. La Tour De Villers Gallery, Palais Bellevue, Cannes, FRA

Art | Science | Industry. Kunsthaus Potsdam, Potsdam, DEU

Distance - Magnet - Closeness. Menno Aden, Chatchawan Nilsakul, Miriam Noske, Julia Schwadron et. al. CMU Museum, Chiang Mai, THA

2011  Ich bin ein Berliner. Menno Aden, Georg Baselitz, Rebecca Horn, Katharina Sieverding et al. Dezer Schauhalle, Miami, USA


Pommes und Nivea. Temporäre Kunsthalle, Berlin

Blooom Art Fair. Menno Aden and Barbara Ullmann, with Galerie Lesmeister, Cologne, DEU

Experimental VDO Art 8 Exhibition. Video, Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Nakhorn Pathom, THA

Nachbarn. Abgrenzung und Gemeinsamkeit. Curated by Thomas Kaestle, HUB:Kunst-Diskurs, Hanover, DEU

Stand der Dinge. Menno Aden, Juliane Eirich, Gudrun Kemsa et al., Galerie Schuster Photo, Berlin, DEU

AAF Art Fair. Menno Aden and Barbara Ullmann, with Galerie Lesmeister, Milan, ITA

2010  ArtFair 21. Menno Aden and Jens Hausmann, with Galerie Schuster, Cologne, DEU
Volta 6 Basel. Menno Aden and Alexander Tinei, with Galeria Deak Erika, Basel, CHE

Contemporary Art Ruhr. Menno Aden and Sonja Weber, with Galerie ArtAffair, Essen, DEU

RaumFormen. Menno Aden, Daniel Becker, Katharina Wahl, Galerie ArtAffair, Regensburg, DEU

New Homeland. Architekturzentrum im Kulturbahnhof, Kassel, DEU

New Homeland. VHS-Photogalerie, Stuttgart, DEU

2009

Experimental VDO Art 6. Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Nakhorn Pathom, THA

New Homeland. Architektur Galerie Werkraum, Berlin, DEU

The Dark Side Of The Moon. Menno Aden, Steffi Stangl, Natalie Pelosi. Galerie im Park, Bremen, DEU

New Homeland. Deutsches Architektur Museum, Frankfurt/Main, DEU