

**TEORÍA Y CRÍTICA**  
*THEORY AND CRITICISM*

# Conversation between Menno Aden and Alejandra Celedón

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## ABSTRACT

In a conversation with the artist Menno Aden, Alejandra Celedon explores into the artist's precise, objective and detached views proposing that such records produce a cartography that naturalises the limit between that room and any other. The vast scale of the world is reduced by Aden into a manageable area, that of the room as the building block of strategy of supervision and surveillance.

**Key words:** Plan; cartography; inventory; typical; domestic.

## RESUMEN

*En un aconversación con el artista Menno Aden, Alejandra Celedon explora dentro de la meticulosidad del artista, visiones objetivas y desinteresadas proponen que estos registros producen una cartografía capaz de naturalizar el límite entre cuarto (Rooms) y cualquier registro otro. La inmensa escala del mundo reducido por Aden dentro de un área manejable hacen del cuarto l apiedra angular de la supervisión y la vigilancia.*

**Palabras Clave:** Plan; plano; planta; cartografía, inventario, típico, domé

## Domesticized Inventories

by Alejandra Celedón

The shots seem precise, objective and detached from an observer and existing objects, in which domestic rooms and private retreats become publicly represented. At extracting, reorganizing, and thus editing the rooms, Menno Aden's familiar and domestic environments become dissected, mummified and even typified through a generic act of abstraction. At the same detached distance, Aden's snapshots -however- are not as objectives as they look at first glance. Not a single synoptic view, but the represented spaces are composed by hundred images and a careful, rigorous process of assembling, manipulating and overlaying multiple glimpses together, a process which can take many months for each art work. He recreates every moving point of view, into a single bird-eye overview in which neither a centre nor particular point can eventually be reconstructed, but rather a continuous plane at a removed distance unfolds. The work, thus, can be taken as a cartographic fiction - a super-vision - against the insufficiency of human visual field.

A simulated omnipresent standpoint is the one Aden constructs, suggesting a controlled, strategic watcher over our heads. Far from a mechanic operation, behind Aden's lens lies the construction of an impossible viewer, with the power to synthesize and describe the space of a room by fully describing everything in it. His photographs can be taken not only as views, but as comprehensive inventories of the rooms' contents, objects and their arrangement, to the point of becoming a list of stuff, and even a complete written description: a plan of the room. By learning the place and arrangement of the things within the room, by fully cataloguing and inventorying each object, the room becomes typical. The space is catalogued and thus mapped, recording an idealised version of such room that can be perfectly grasped, as the only possible way of finding one's place in the image. Such records produce a cartography that naturalises the limit between that room and any other. The vast scale of the world is reduced by Aden into a manageable area, that of the room.

What we see in the photographs is the artist's eye, as in Ledoux's eye we can see his building.

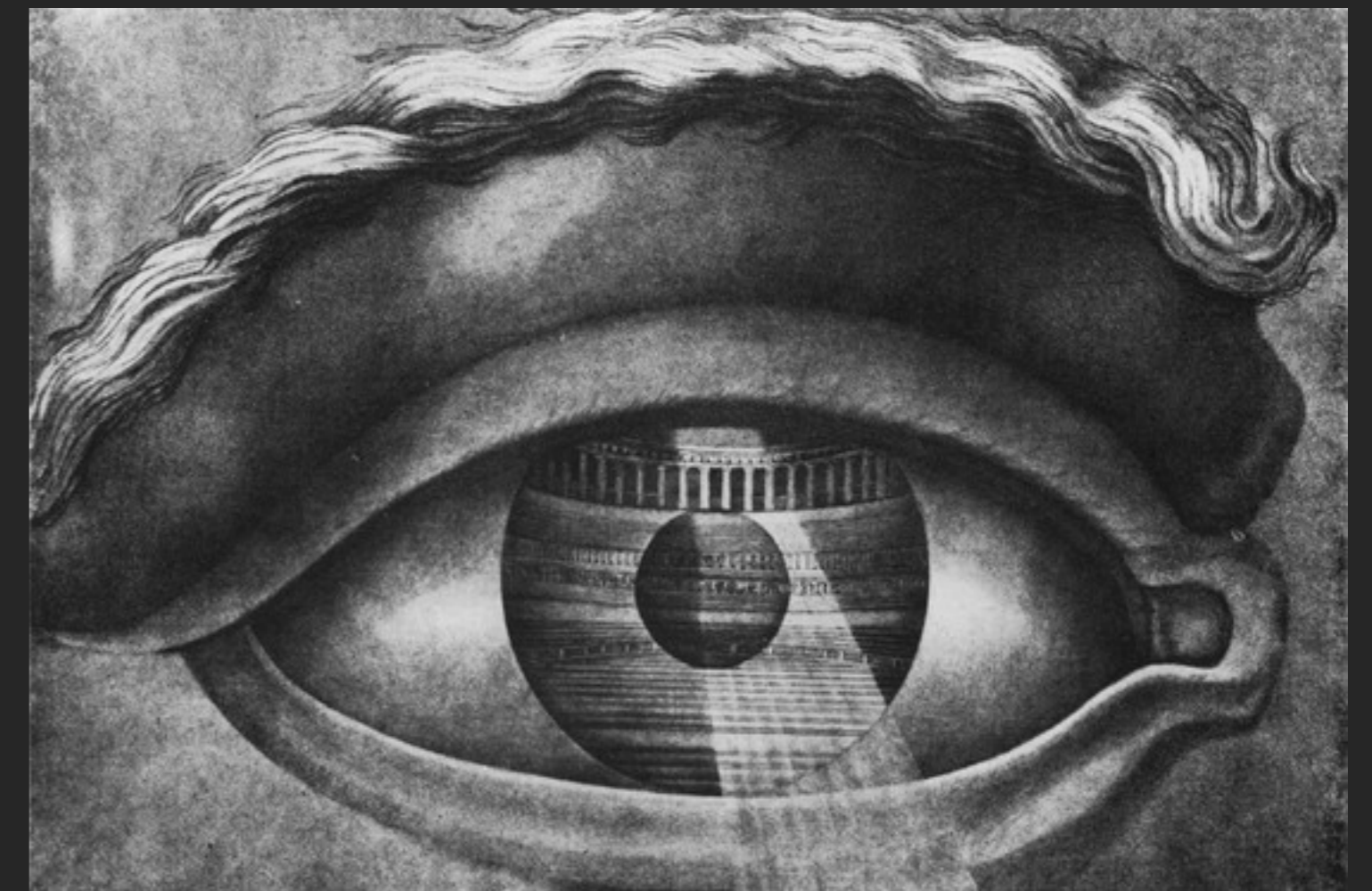


Figure 1: Ledoux, C.N. (circa 1800) Interior of the municipal theatre of Besançon (built by Ledoux in 1784), seen in the mirror of an eye. Scanned from exposition catalogue *Revolutionsarchitektur*. Boullée, Ledoux, Lequeu, ed. By Günter Metken and Klaus Gallwitz, Baden-Baden: Staatliche Kunsthalle 1970



Untitled(Kitchen III)  
2008  
Menno Aden

### Conversation between Menno Aden and Alejandra Celedón

Alejandra Celedón: What are the criteria of selection of the rooms you depict in the "Room Portraits" series?

Menno Aden: My main interest as an artist is the relationship between human beings and technology; or human beings and the world around them. I have been always interested in the question of how we are influenced by the objects and architecture that surrounds us. For the series "Room Portraits" I mostly check the room's style or "feeling", then I often look on the floor (colors and materials) and compare it to other elements of the rooms like furniture, walls (colors and materials). Then I try to find grids, symmetries, micro- and macro-structures, order and disorder.

A.C.: Your rooms don't feature anyone. Was that a conscious decision? Why did you decide not to include people inside the shots?

M.A.: Sometimes you can see people inside, but mostly they behave like parts of the furniture or the surrounding items so that you don't realize them as individuals. It is a conscious decision. With people inside the rooms the most important question "who is living there" would already be answered. Without people the furniture starts to speak, it constructs the subject telling us what kind of person lives or works in each room. Including persons in the room the pictures would look like snapshots, without them they look more or less like stills of surveillance cameras.

A.C.: What are you interested most, in the objects inside the outline of the plans you photograph, in the lines of the outline, or the space they enclose?

M.A.: For me usually all three dimensions are important as parts of the whole. The compilation and interaction of the different objects speak to us. They tell us about the people that live or work in each room. Maybe they underline our position as a voyeur who can watch into private dwellings. The lines of the outline again focus the patterns that determine our lives. They also give the

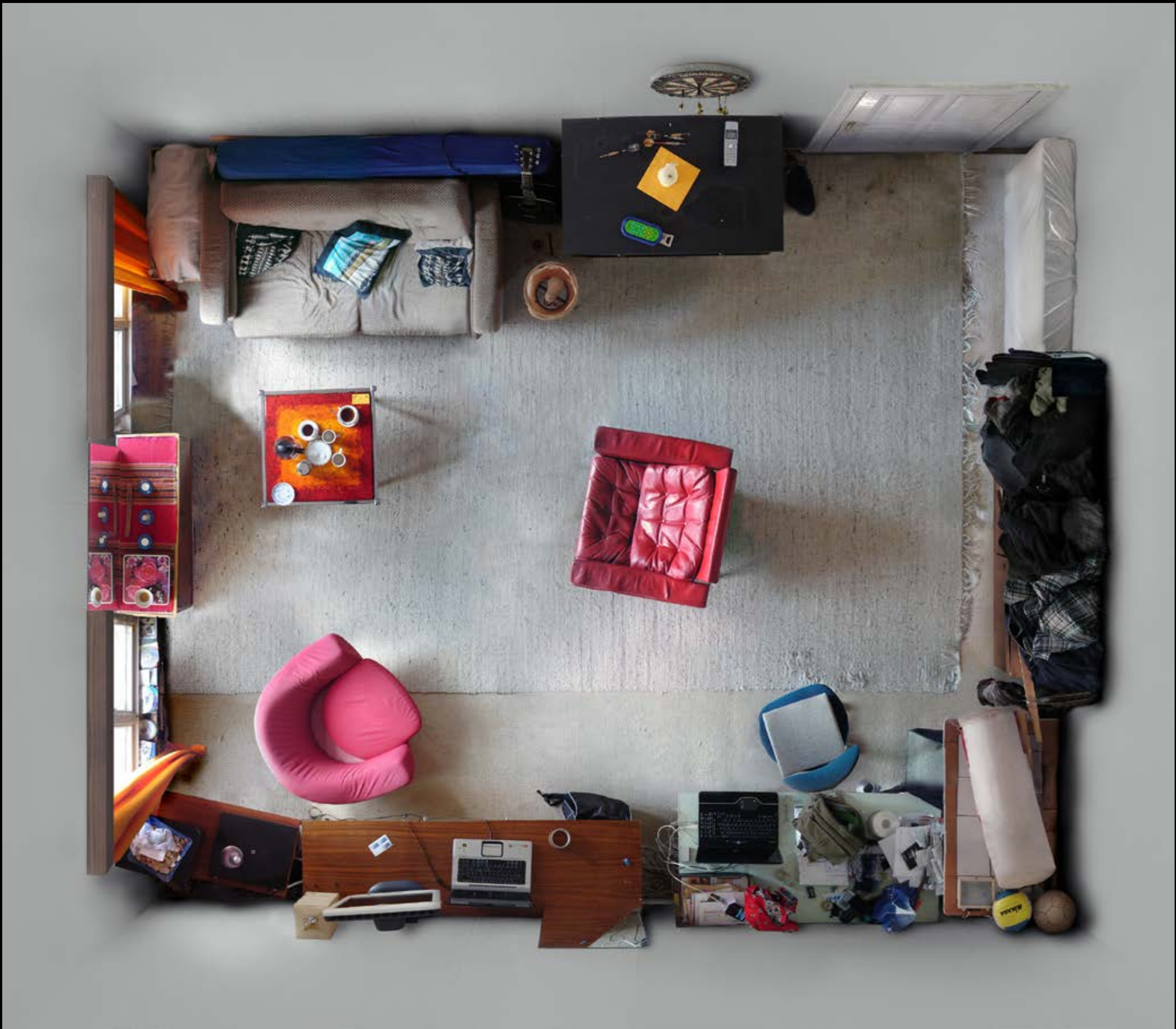
viewer a structure that makes the images flattened and more abstract. The space they enclose is important because it shows the restriction and limitation of the (square) spaces we have to live in and that we have to dispose. It reflects our living in boxes.

A.C.: The walls of the plans you depict define and demarcate an inner territory, in which there is never an outside. Could you expand on this isolation of the room and omission of its context? Is it a deliberate statement, or does this just reflect a concern with what is exclusively inside the walls?

M.A.: To show isolated rooms is a conscious decision. I like the idea that you feel locked, maybe claustrophobic and sublime (through the god's eye view) at the same time. The images remind us of puppet houses but also of the total view of a surveillance camera. Simultaneously it can transport both a cute and threatening feeling. My idea is to show single rooms that reflect a person's compressed identity. Like a closed and isolated cell each room can reflect one's 'life in a nutshell'.

A.C.: Do you see any relation between your work and film regarding point of views and moving cameras?

M.A.: Because I have to move through a room to shoot it from different positions from the ceiling I work rather like a scanner. Each image reflects that movement in one picture. As there are - in most of the works - many vanishing points you get a multi-perspective view of reality. You have to wander around the images like a surveillance camera to get the whole information. For my series Room Portraits I was inspired by the photo-mosaics of David Hockney from the 1980s where he arranged many pictures of a scene into a split one. Hockney again was influenced by cubism where objects were shown in a multi-perspective way too. As our eyes are able to focus only in a small sector of our visible world we are used to wander and glimpse around all the time. To understand a whole scene our brain always has to compose the different single visual pieces of information into one.



Untitled (M.O.)  
2007  
Menno Aden  
110x127cms

A.C.: Does the photographs in plan view looking down, explore different things than the 'Overhead' series? How did the change of plane, from horizontal to vertical - in the case of 'Panel Flats' or 'Parallel Home', affect and inform your work?

M.A.: I'm using different angles to tell different stories. In 'Over Head' I'm more interested in the (broken) structures of the ceilings of abandoned offices. For instance how they could reflect our structured life. A similar idea is behind 'Panel Flats' or 'Parallel Home', showing the grids, the raster we (have to) live in.



Untitled (O.W.)  
2009  
Menno Aden  
100x145cms

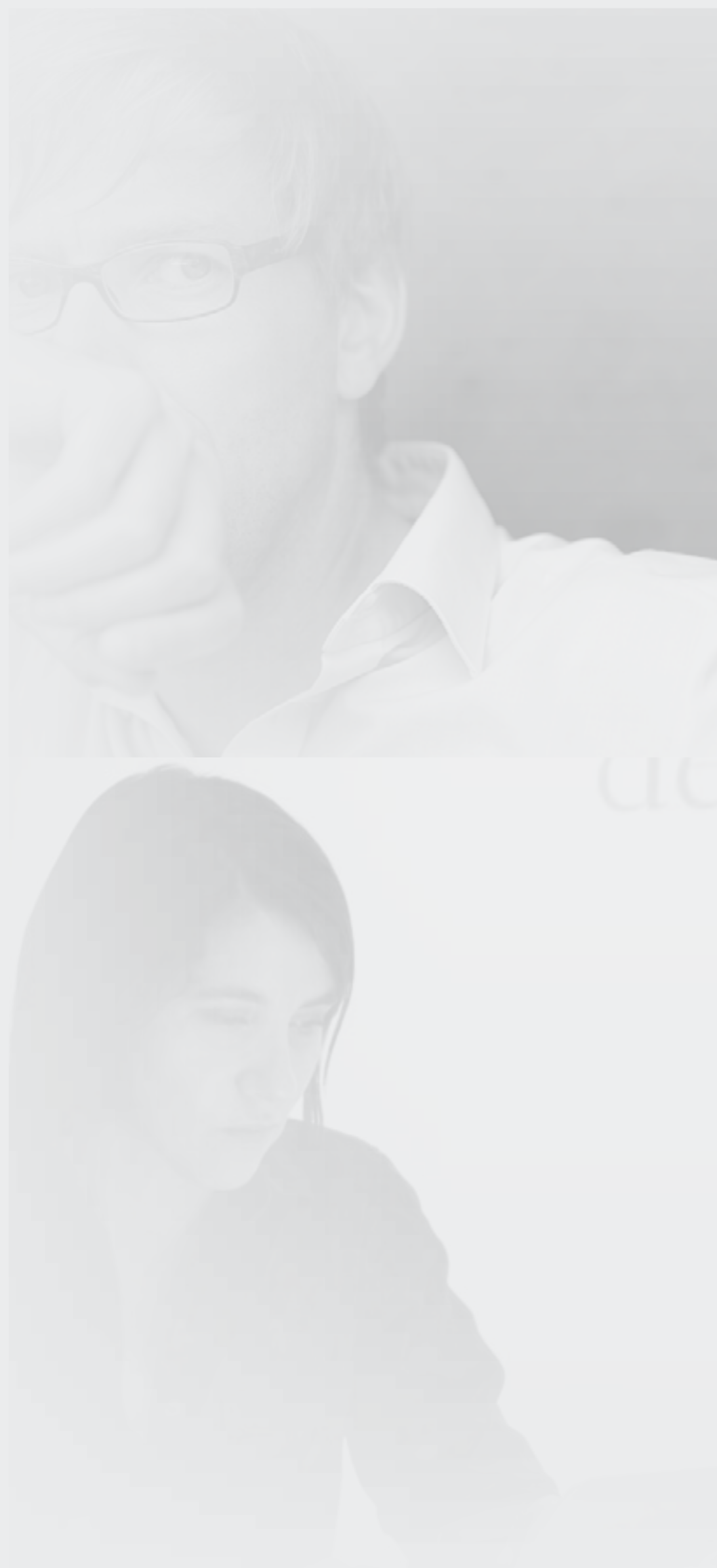




Untitled (GS II)  
2006  
Menno Aden  
70x50cms



Untitled (Kitchen II)  
2008  
Menno Aden  
111x80cms



### **Menno Aden**

German artist and musician, University of Bremen. Awards: 2013 Deutscher Preis für Wissenschaftsfotografie, Bremen (1st Prize), International Photography Award 2013, New York City (Fine Art: 3rd Prize, Architecture: 1st Prize), Accademia Apulia UK Photography Award 2013, London (1st Prize). 2012 Art | Science | Industry - Miethke Kunstpreis, Potsdam (1st Prize). 2009 European Award of Architectural Photography 2009, Frankfurt Main (Selection)

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### **Alejandra Celedón Forster**

Arquitecta, Universidad de Chile. Master en Bartlett, UCL. Está en proceso de obtener su PhD en la Architectural Association School of Architecture con una tesis sobre "Rhetorics of the Plan". Becaria conjunta CCA-AA para investigación de archivos en Montreal. Ha enseñado en la Universidad de Chile, Universidad Católica, Universidad Diego Portales (Chile) y en la Architectural Association (Londres). Organizó el simposio de la Architectural Humanities Research Association "The City: Language, Planning and Politics" (2011) y la exposición "Sachiyo Nishimura: Random Structures" (AA Gallery, 2013). Ha escrito artículos para la Enciclopedia Routledge del modernismo ("Juan Martínez, Emilio Duhart y la práctica BVCH", 2014) y el Catálogo de la Exposición "A Companion to Sachiyo Nishimura: Random Structures" (AA Exhibitions, 2013).

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