

STEPHEN ALTHOUSE
OBJECTS *of* UNCERTAINTY
PUCKER GALLERY ■ BOSTON



HAMMER WITH BRAILLE,
2003
ALT34
Braille, Latin: *Dona nobis*
English translation: *Give us*

STEPHEN ALTHOUSE OBJECTS *of* UNCERTAINTY

The monumental photographs of Stephen Althouse are carefully constructed portraits of primitive tools and simple aged objects whose presentation elicits powerful emotions. There is a subliminal transference, an emotional anthropomorphism, as the objects call forth unexpected personal responses. Althouse's goal is to "use old implements as depictions of ourselves rather than making literal portrayals of people." He goes on to explain, "The relics and tools that I choose remind me of the paradoxes of our species, and some simply the valor of individuals facing lives of relentless uncertainty.

Intertwined within these are representations of people, thoughts, and experiences of my own life."

Several aspects of Althouse's photographic compositions and techniques contribute to the unique character of his prints. The most obvious is their large scale. To accomplish such considerably sized enlargements, Althouse has developed a laborious method that begins with standard film in a large format camera to create an initial negative. He then digitizes the negative using an ultra-high-resolution scanner, makes any desired adjustments, and occasionally combines separate images using a computer. After multiple test prints,

he uses a five-foot-wide digital printer to create his enormous images. Confronting a supersized object, such as a seven-foot hammer, demands viewer engagement. Close inspection reveals the sharp details Althouse achieves through the meticulous enlargement process. Tiny threads, grains in the wood, rusted metal appear as facial characteristics in a portrait. There is a strange humbling before these majestic inanimate objects.

Using pigmented inks on heavy rag paper, Althouse isolates and illuminates lighter objects against an intense black background. The contrast pushes these objects forward, disconnects them from any associative context, and allows a certain persona to emerge. In *Hammer with Braille* (ALT34), there is a simultaneous recognition and appreciation of both the work the tool has performed over many years and the implied individual who used it. The single object in the composition becomes a universal representation of the agricultural class, much as an image of one working person can emblemize the idea of work in general. The old and worn items Althouse photographs are

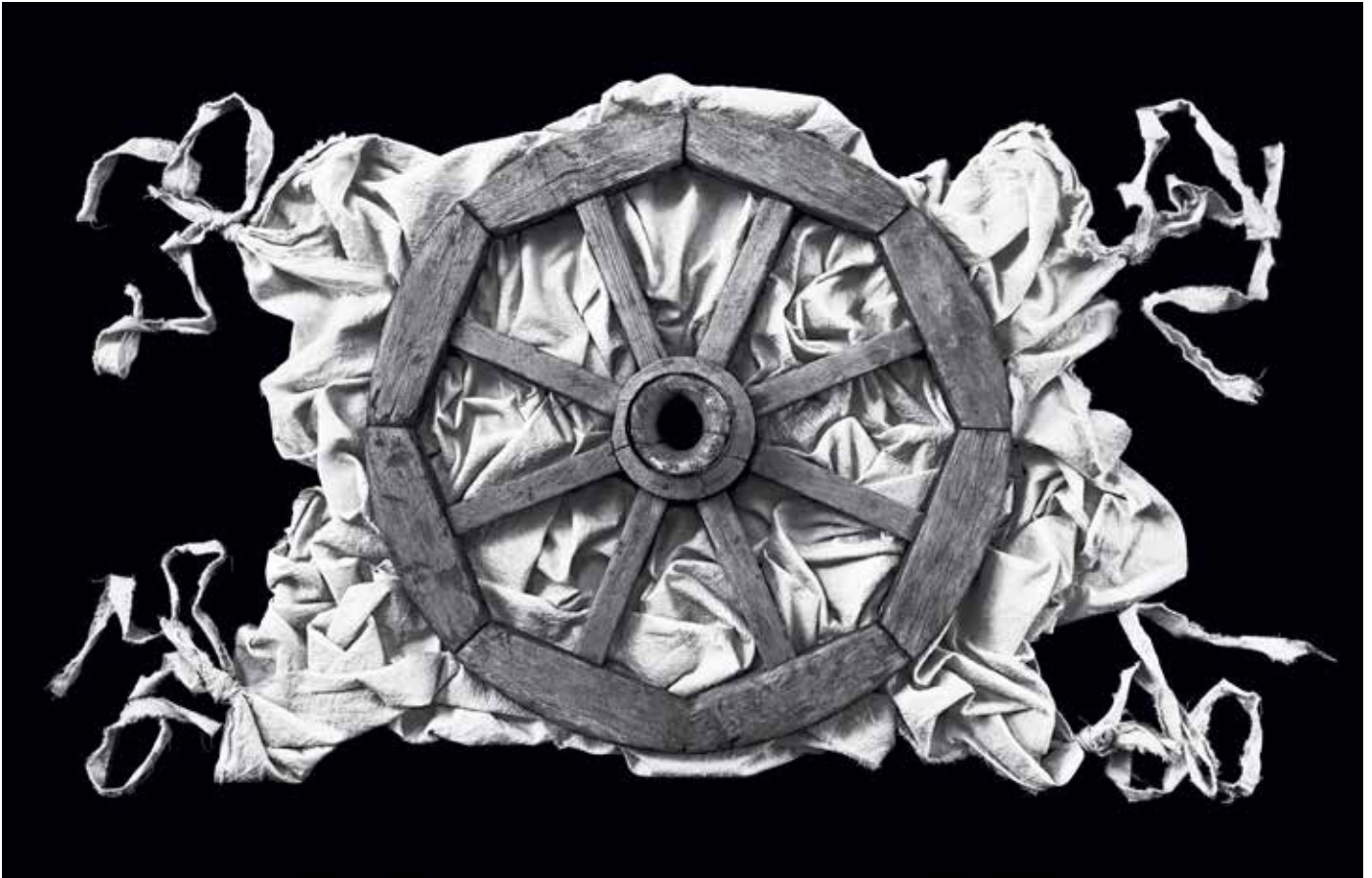
commonly everyday objects with which most viewers have some experience and likely multiple memories. But even for viewers with no personal experience, they are so stylized that they can also elicit classical stereotypic reactions. In either case, the goal of holding the viewer's attention and stirring the imagination is achieved.

White cloth is a prominent feature in many of Althouse's photographs. Ultra-high-resolution digital enlargements of the fabric reveal every woven strand, all the waves, folds, and curves in the matrix, and the feathery micro-strands at each fiber's end. Willowy cloth is a soft contrast to the hardness of wood and metal, allowing the image to reflect some comfort in a demanding world. With religious intent, Althouse also uses the white cloth to represent a shroud. Objects rest on or are wrapped funereally in the shroud and the inference to death is obvious. In *Clamps and Shroud* (ALT26), the cloth is suspended between two objects, creating an illusion of the crucifixion.

To add clarification, and perhaps guidance for interpretation, Althouse developed a technique for adding



CLAMPS AND SHROUD, 2003
ALT26



WHEEL I, 2008

ALT2

16th century German: *Wo soll ich mich hin kehren. Entlaubet ist der Walde.*
English translation: *Where shall I turn to?/ The woods are barren of leaves.*

words and Braille to his images. These overlays are so subtly placed they appear carved or engraved, as if they were original to the objects. These act more as invitations to closer scrutiny rather than easily assessable explications. They add an element of intrigue, and once properly translated, a layer of complexity to Althouse's message about the human condition. Some texts are difficult to find, some are written in foreign languages (like Latin, German, Pennsylvania German, French, or Catalan), and some are presented as Braille versions of English and foreign words. Several prints quote the *Ausbund*, or Amish hymnal. Although not a member of their faith, Althouse has close ties to the Amish community in Centre County, Pennsylvania. Their simple, purposeful life—which values hard work and self-sufficiency—informs many of his photographs, celebrating devotion and spirituality more than thoughtless religiosity.

Wheel I (ALT2) was created during a period of mourning after one of Althouse's very close Amish friends died unexpectedly and tragically while cutting a tree for firewood.

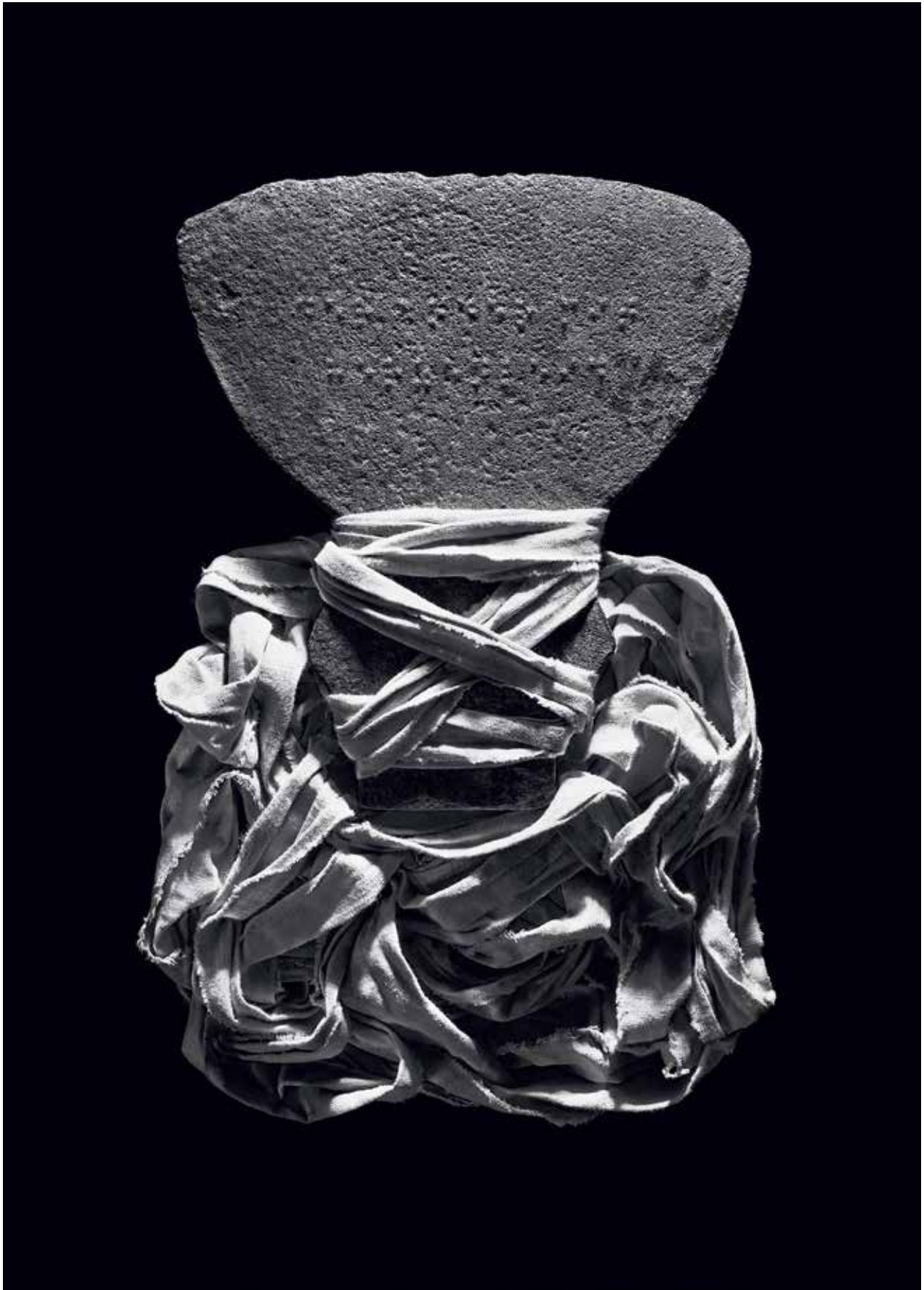
The core image is an old wooden wagon wheel, as would have been used on an Amish cart, lying atop a large piece of white cloth, a shroud. The corners of the cloth are tied to reflect a purposefulness of use, and its placement against the deep black background pushes both objects into clear, isolated consideration. The wheel is essentially “laid to rest” in front of the viewer. Two lines from the *Ausbund*, delicately and inconspicuously Photoshopped into the wooden wheel, appear as though carved there during its creation. Written in 16th century German, the English translation of these lines is “Where shall I turn” and “The woods are barren of leaves.” These are clear expressions of mourning for a departed friend and have broader relevance to anyone who suffers a loss.

From inanimate and aged objects, Althouse's images induce poignant human emotions and universal human questioning. In essence, these photographs function as mirrors of the soul, reflecting what it means to be a part of humankind.

—Dr. Carl M. Herbert



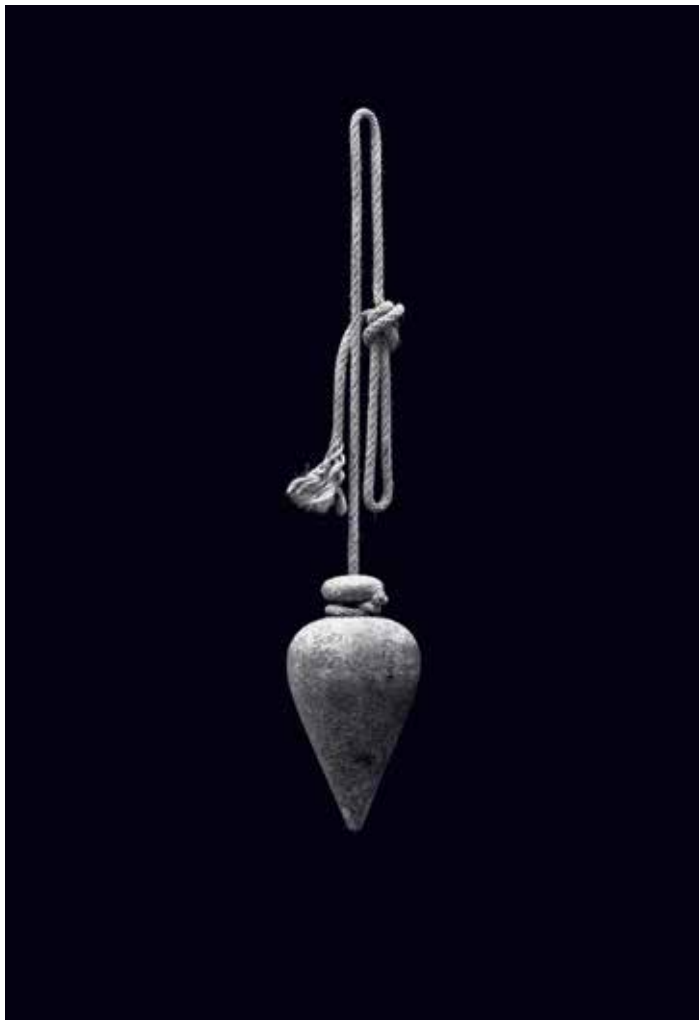
RAKE I, 2003
ALT5



AXE WITH BRAILLE, 2013

ALT4

Braille, 16th century German: *Der and'r mit Herzenleid*
English translation: *the other (goes) with grief (heartbreak)*



PLUMB LINE, 2017
ALT50



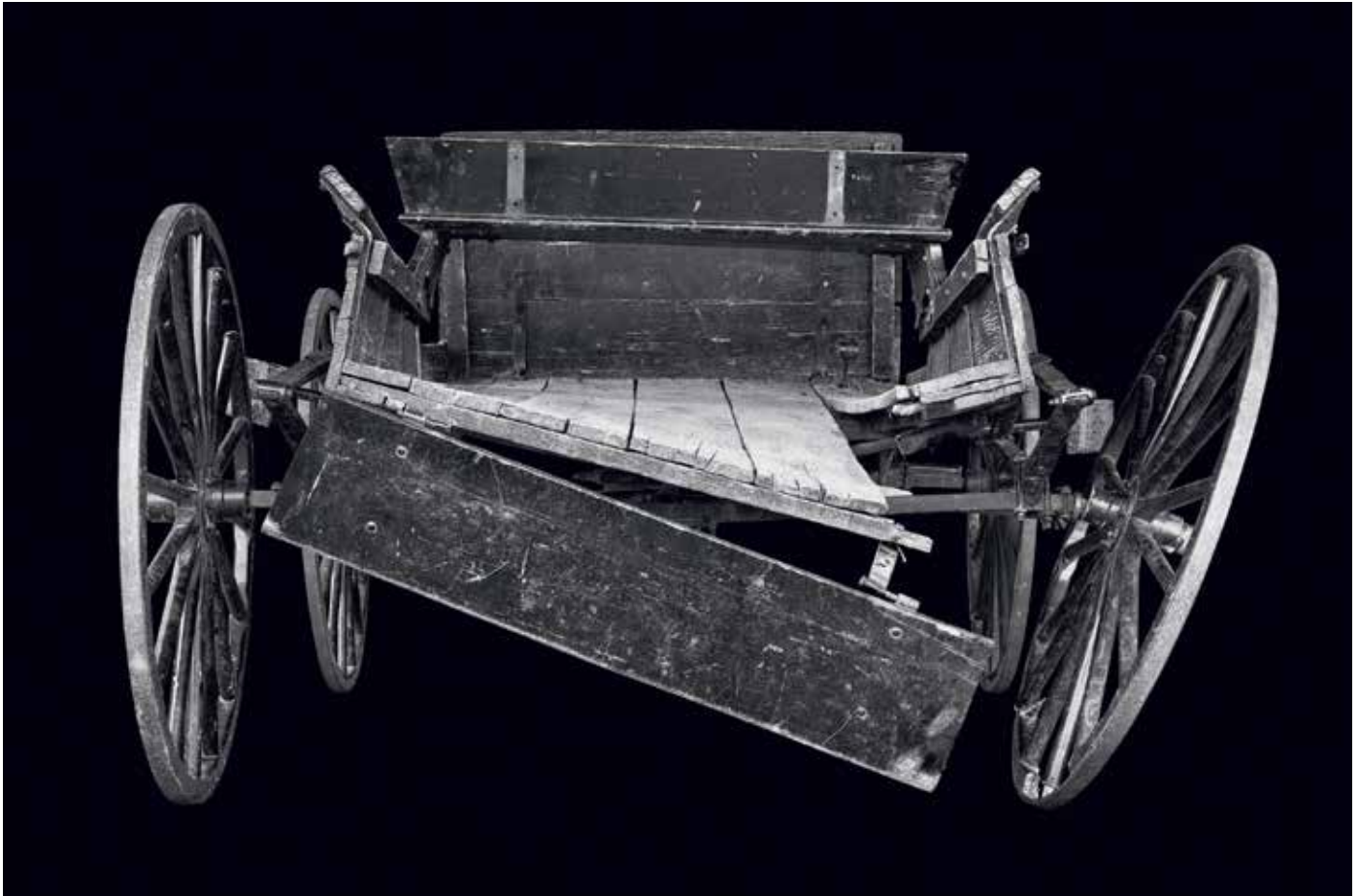
SCYTHE I,
2009
ALT61



LINE WITH HOOKS, 2019
ALT9



BROKEN BOW,
2013
ALT19



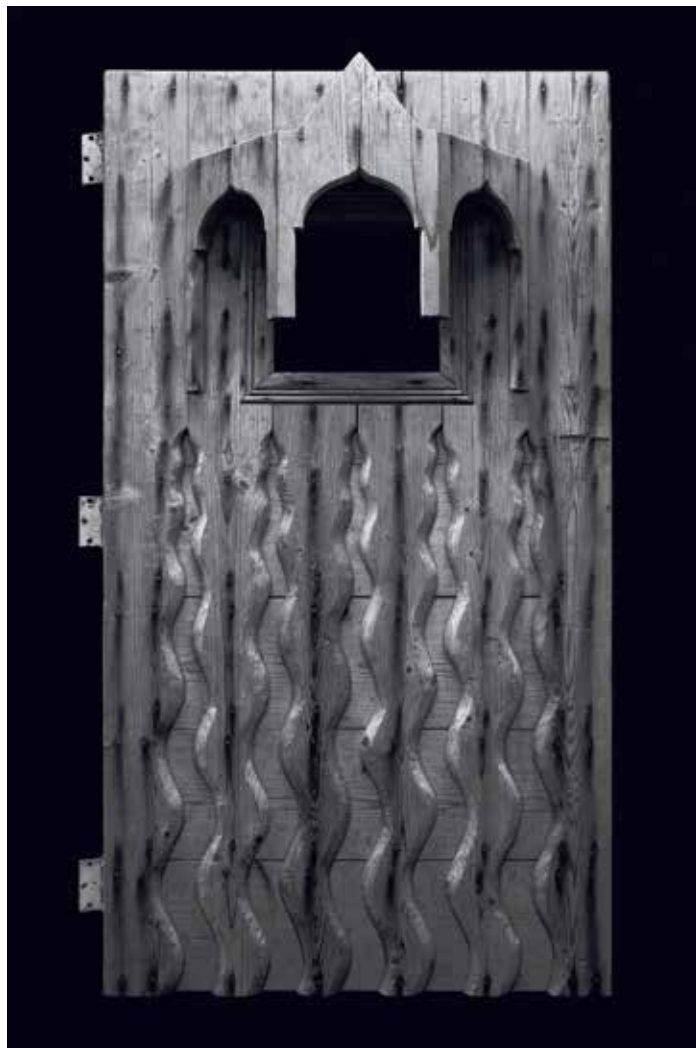
BROKEN WAGON, 2017 (with detail)

ALT6

Pennsylvanian German: *Fer die schwer Lod drowa wah ich willich und bin noch willich aber yetz kann ich nicht*
English translation: *To carry the heavy load I was willing and still am willing, but I am now unable.*



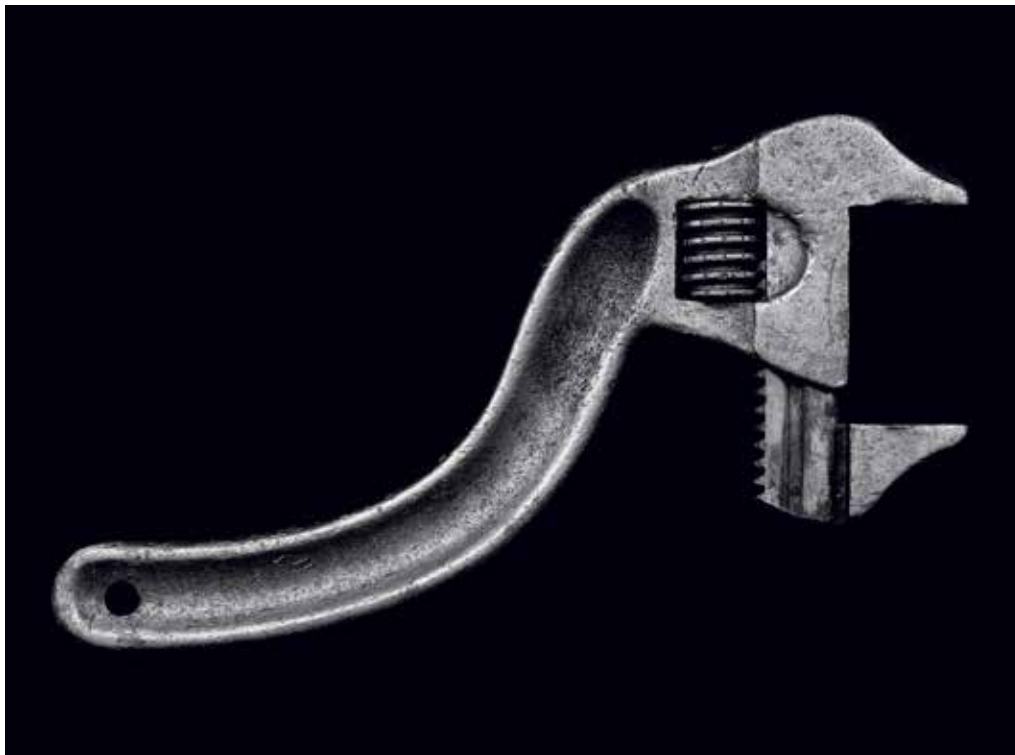
**FORKS WITH
BRAILLE, 2011**
ALT31
Braille, Pennsylvanian
German: *Gep uns*
English translation:
Give us



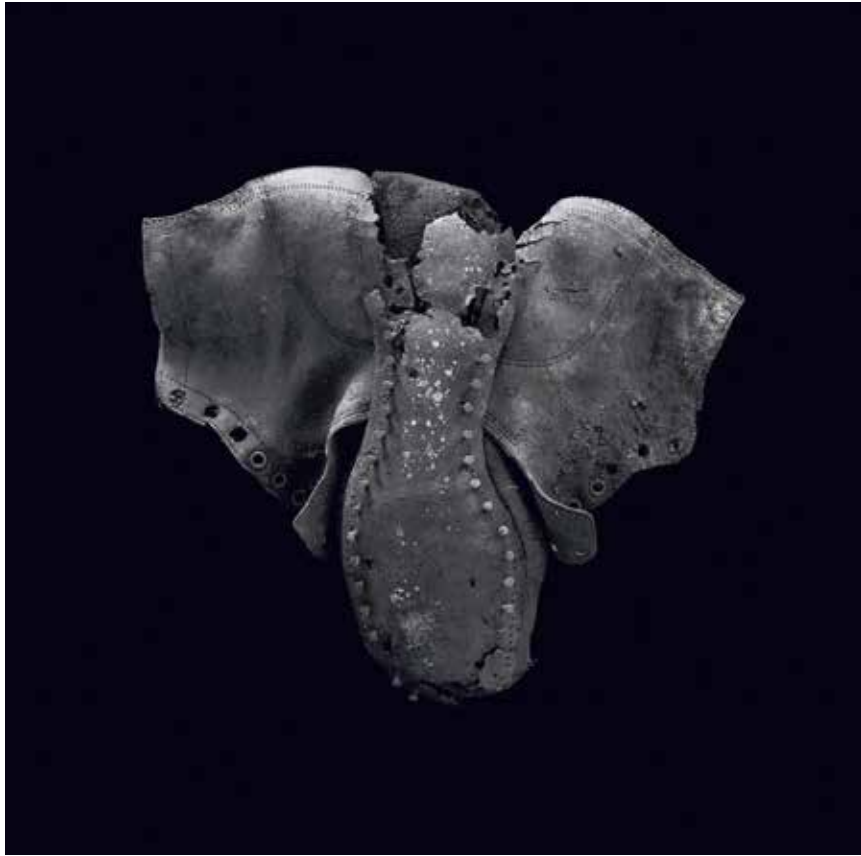
DOOR WITH FLAMES, 2017
ALT29
Catalan: *Temo les seves flames però les
meves preguntes em demanen que l'obri*
English translation: *I fear its flames but
my questions beg me to open it*



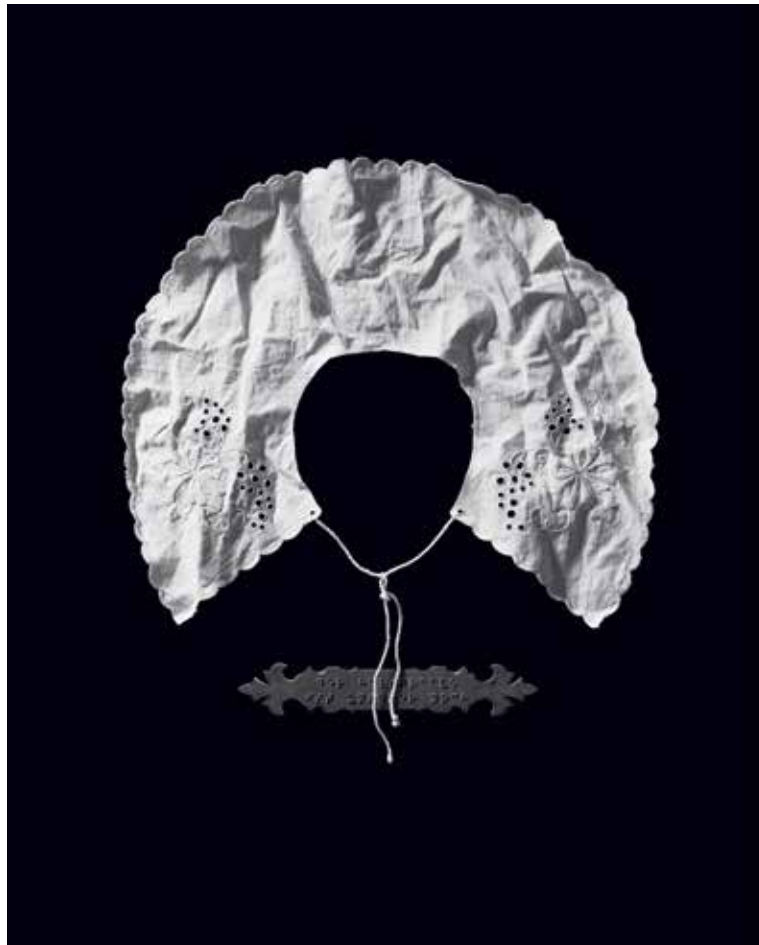
CLAMP AND SHROUD I, 2013
ALT24



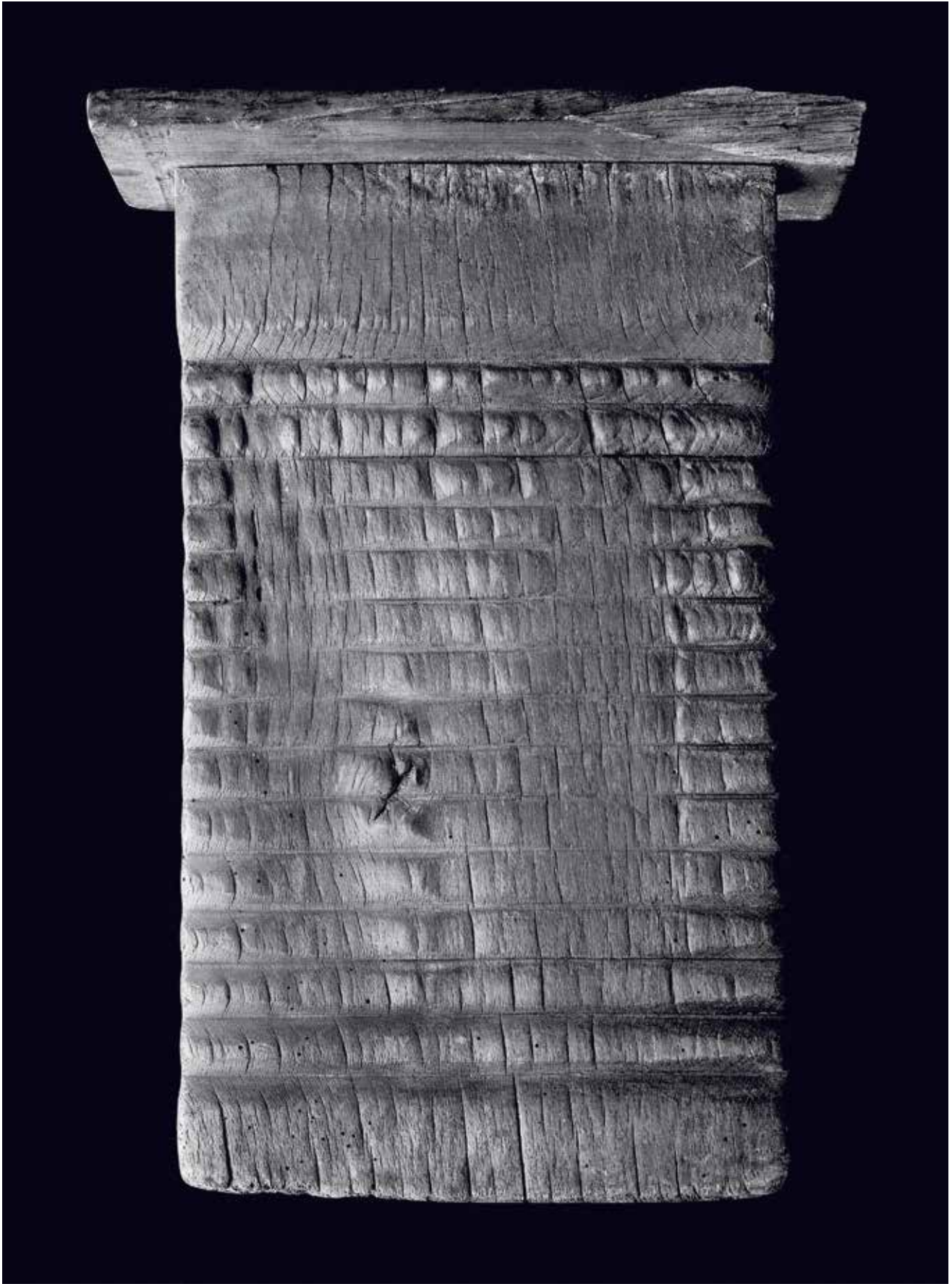
ADJUSTABLE
WRENCH, 2003
ALT10



SHOE II, 2011
ALT63



COLLAR WITH BRAILLE, 2020
ALT8
Braille, Pennsylvanian German:
Der Halsgraave ist unserer Yoch
English translation:
The collar is our yoke

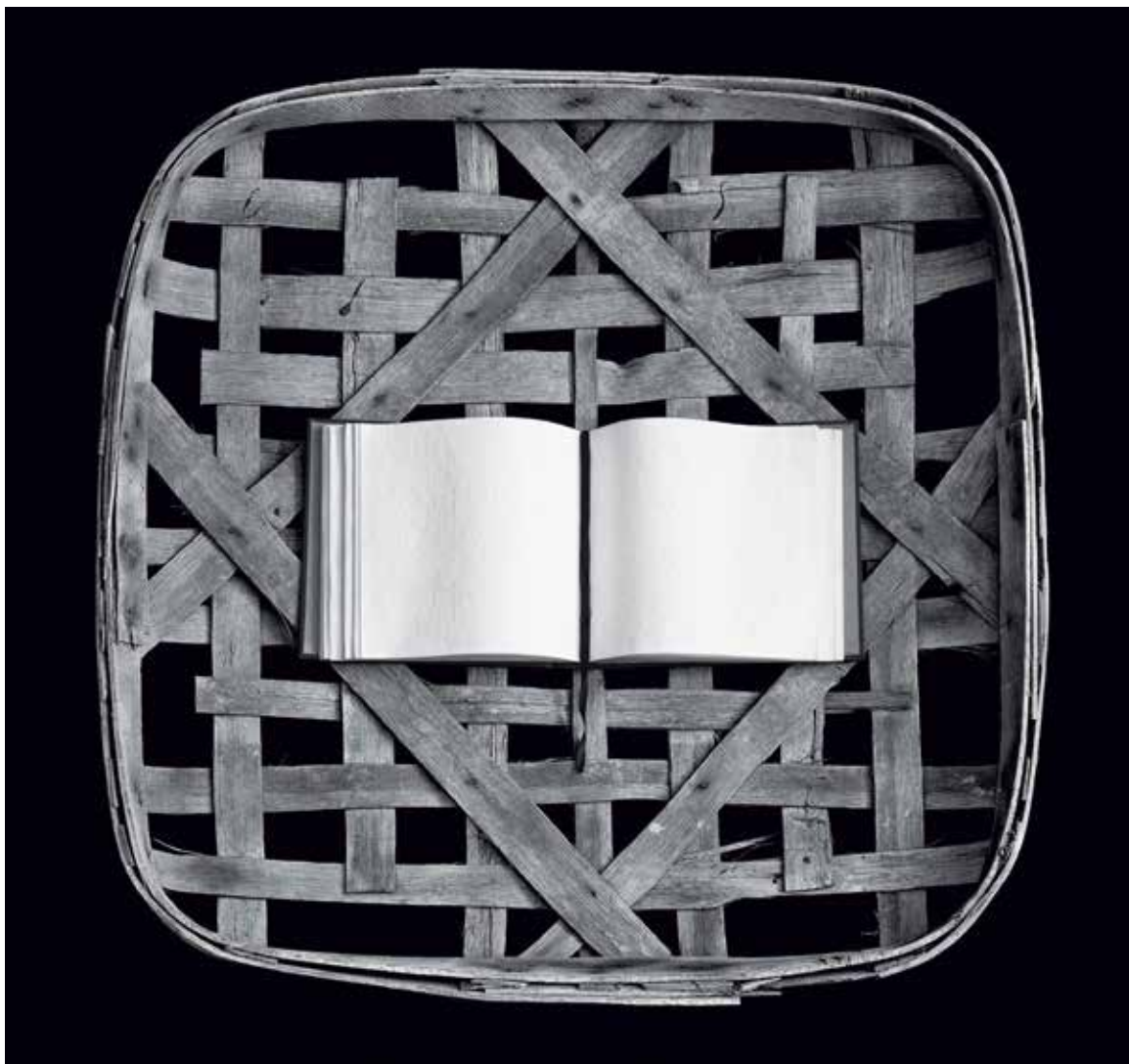


WASHBOARD, 2003

ALT72

Latin: *Res est sacra miser*

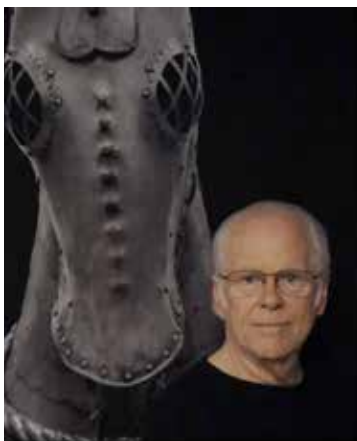
English translation: *A sufferer is a sacred thing*



BOOK, 2009
ALT7

STEPHEN ALTHOUSE

Stephen Althouse was born in 1948 and raised in a centuries-old farmhouse in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. As a child he was intrigued by the axe marks of the hand-hewn timbers, the hand laid stone masonry of his house and barn, the simple well-used primitive furniture and implements that surrounded him, and the community of people and animals working the land. During the late 1950s, his family resided in Mexico for a year, where he attended a local school and worked on a ranch. This reinforced his curiosity about artifacts and influenced his interest in traveling. He has



worked arduous jobs at a stone quarry, on the railroad, in concrete construction, and road building, fostering a heightened sensitivity to the daily challenges of a life of toil. Althouse now lives in the farmlands of central Pennsylvania, where he has been accepted as a trusted friend into the Amish culture and is privileged to participate in their social and spiritual functions.

Althouse planned to work in diplomatic services but his college-required art course inspired him to change his focus. He earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Sculpture in 1970 from the University of

Miami, and his Master of Fine Arts degree in Sculpture in 1976 from Virginia Commonwealth University. His extensive travels and varied experiences inspire his artwork's unusual visual expressions of life. His time as Distinguished Professor of Fine Art at Barry University (Miami) allowed him the opportunity to work, reside, and create on three continents. He was Artist-in-Residence at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Liège, Belgium (through a 2003-2004 creative Fulbright Research Fellowship), which culminated in his first major European solo museum exhibition and sparked significant museum-level global interest in his work. He has since had sixteen solo and twenty-seven group museum exhibitions and his work is now in the permanent collections of more than fifty museums.

As a sculptor, Althouse collected found well-used objects and tools which "...possess a tremendous magic with their wear, scars, and wounds that portray the history, toil, and souls of their users...." He began to photograph these random, often incompatibly colored objects utilizing black and white film. To capture the important yet subtle details of his objects, he started utilizing cumbersome large-format cameras and film, then masterfully printed the silver gelatin prints. Though he esteems fine silver darkroom printing,

he began experimenting with emerging digital printing to achieve archivally stable digital prints. Their quality equaled, and judged by many, even surpassed that of the darkroom silver print. In 2003, Althouse received concurrent German grants from Hahnemühle papers and Epson printers in support of his fine art digital printing.

Althouse approaches his photographs as he did his sculpture, assembling and intertwining tools, artifacts, cloth, clothing, and even weapons into a unique pictorial dialect that metaphorically depicts aspects of our species related to his own experiences and observations of humankind. Although photographs are the prime carrier of his creative ideas, Althouse does not identify as a photographer. His creative process is contemplative, premeditated, and leaves nothing to chance. Althouse's powerful images appear ritualistic and meditative in nature, often cryptically blending mysteries of passage from his youth and adulthood, varied experiences, and emotional reactions to people, cultures, and events which have impacted upon his life. Amplifying mystery in his work and privately expressing his thoughts, Althouse subtly integrates written phrases into his images, often encrypted in Braille or in non-mainstream dialects that relate to his life experiences.



As this recent museum installation photo shows, Althouse prints his photographs at large scale to best convey their emotional detail. They are at their most powerful in large format and best seen in person. However, he recognizes the reality for many collectors of space limitations and can print most images in small and medium formats that maintain the beauty and integrity of spirit of the photograph. All prints exist in limited, numbered editions based on title and size. Please contact the Gallery for details.

PUCKER

ESTABLISHED 1967 BOSTON

GALLERY

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240 Newbury Street, 3rd Floor
Boston, MA 02116
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contactus@puckergallery.com

Gallery Hours:

Monday through Saturday
10:00 AM to 5:30 PM
Sunday 1:00 to 5:00 PM

Pucker Gallery is a member of the
Boston Art Dealers Association
and the New England Appraisers
Association.

Credits:

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Editors: Jeanne Koles and
Beth Plakidas

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Please visit

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to view current and past
exhibition catalogues, read
artist biographies, and
subscribe to the *Artwork of
the Week* email list.

Cover:

KNOT III (HORSE ARMOR), 2011
ALT41

Braille, 16th century German: *Mein Harf
ist mir zerbrochen / Sind wir denn auch blind*
English translation: *My harp is broken unto
me. / Are we then also blind?*

*All works are archival pigment
prints on heavy weight acid-free
cotton rag paper.*

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Dates:

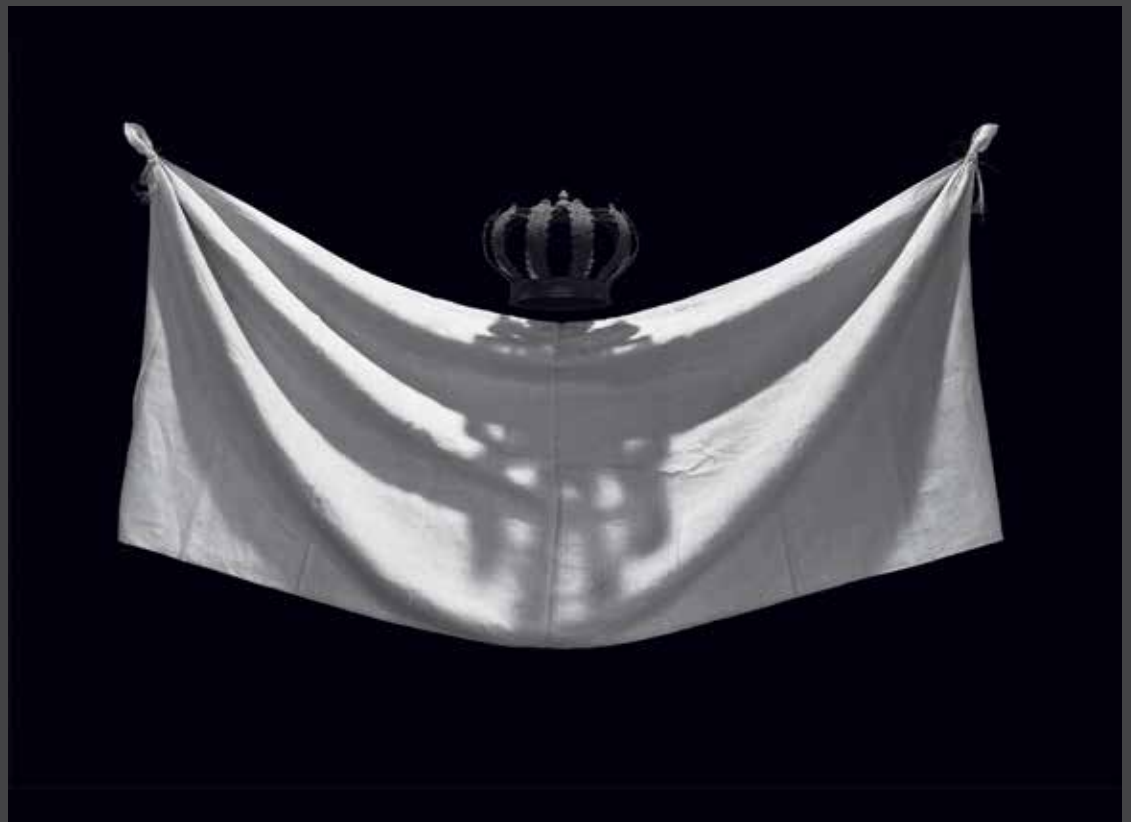
3 February through 17 March 2024

Public Opening Reception:

Saturday 3 February 2024 3PM to 6PM The artist will be present.

Online Events:

Please visit www.puckergallery.com for a list of virtual gatherings and
events accompanying *Objects of Uncertainty*.



RUSTED CROWN, 2013
ALT3