

# STEPHEN ALTHOUSE

## OBJECTS OF INTENTION

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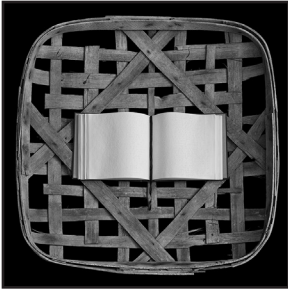
BLACK / SANDERSON GALLERY  
GREGG MUSEUM OF ART & DESIGN  
NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY, RALEIGH, NC

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AUGUST 31, 2020 — MAY 9, 2021



*SHOVEL WITH BRAILLE, 2017*



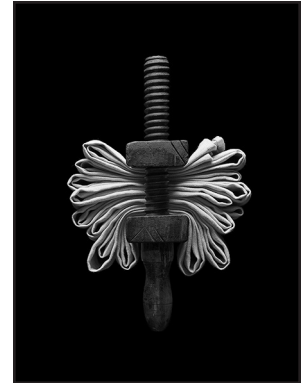
Lobby

## **BOOK, 2009**

A Braille New Testament opened to book of *James*, which comprises a letter intended for wide distribution among early Jewish Christians, encouraging them to have patience and perseverance in the face of trials and temptations.

Inside gallery on left

## **CLAMP AND SHROUD, 2013**



Inside gallery ahead

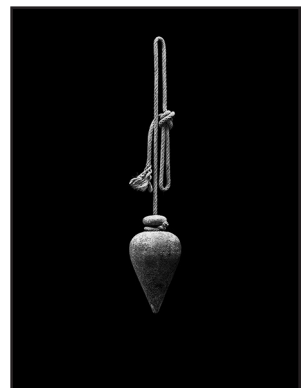
## **CLAMPS AND SHROUD, 2003**

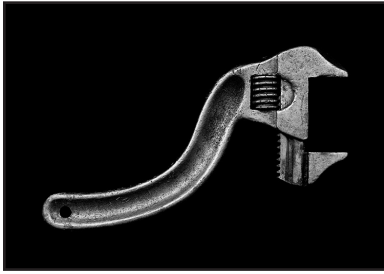


Clockwise around gallery

## **RAKE I, 2003**

## **PLUMB LINE, 2017**





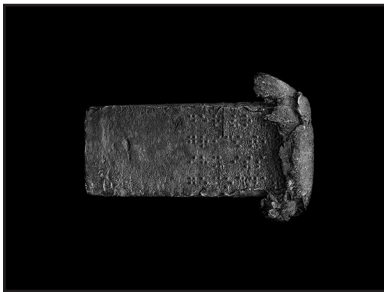
**ADJUSTABLE WRENCH, 2003**



Above

**RUSTED NAILS, 2015**

The Braille spells “*Die Welt halt uns fescht*,” Pennsylvania German for “The world holds us captive.”



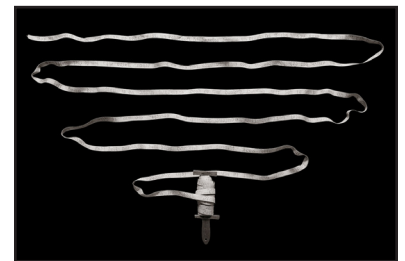
Below

**IRON WEDGE, 2011**

In Braille are words in Pennsylvania German, “*Der vo viel grickt huht, bei ihn iss viel guckt daffer*,” translating to, “For everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded” (from the New Testament, *Luke 12:48*).

## **THE FIVE TALENTS II, 2019**

The object presented in this image is a “pseudo-implement” fabricated by Althouse specifically to be photographed. It portrays an imaginary “message tape” upon which he hand-penned a controversial biblical passage (“The Parable of the Five Talents” from the New Testament, *Matthew 25:14–30* and *Luke 19:11–27*) in old *fraktur* script and in Pennsylvania German. This reflects the influence of Amish culture in the Pennsylvania countryside where Althouse now lives, surrounded by Amish farms.





### **BRICK AND IVY, 2003**

The Braille spells “*Ruit mole sua*,” Latin for “its own weight.” This is from a line by Horace (Roman poet Quintus Horatius Flaccus) in his *Odes*, published in 23 BCE: “*Vis consili expers mole ruit sua*,” which translates as, “Brute force without judgement collapses under its own weight.”

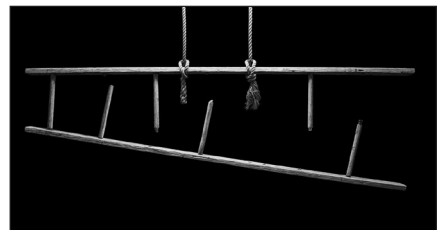
### **WALNUT, 2013**



### **SHOVEL WITH BRAILLE, 2017**

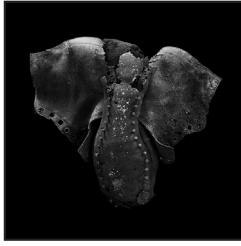
The message in digitally-created Braille dots consists of the Latin words “*Vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas... Quid habet amplius homo... qui futuri sunt in novissimo*,” which means, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity... What profit does a man have... that shall be at the very end?” (from the Old Testament, *Ecclesiastes* 1:2-11).

### **LADDER, 2013**



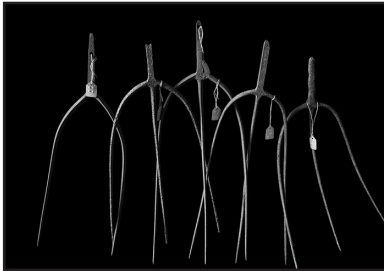
### **AXE WITH BRAILLE, 2013**

The Braille spells “*Der and’r mit Herzenleid*,” which is sixteenth century German for “the other [goes] with heartbreak.” This is a line from a funeral song (song 138, verse 15) in the *Ausbund*, a hymnbook first published by early Anabaptist Swiss Brethren in 1564 and still used in Amish churches today.



Above

### **SHOE II, 2011**



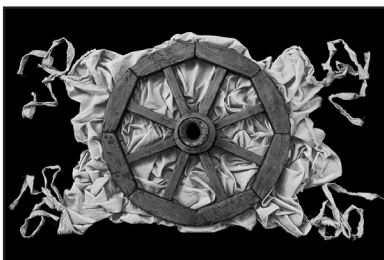
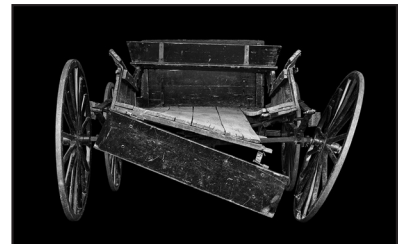
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### **FORKS WITH BRAILLE, 2011**

The Braille spells “*Gep uns*,” Pennsylvania German for “Give us” (a fragment of the Lord’s Prayer).

### **BROKEN WAGON, 2017**

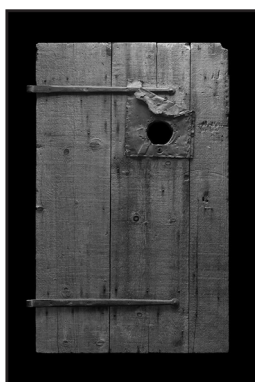
The Pennsylvania German words read, “*Fer die schwer Lod drowa wah ich willich und bin noch willich aber yetz kann ich nicht*,” meaning “To carry the heavy load I was willing and still am willing, but am now unable.” Althouse photographed this broken Amish horse-drawn wagon as a metaphoric self-portrait, following an exhausting period in his life spent caring for aging parents and an ill sister. After they had all passed away he created this piece, digitally “carving” the words in the back of the wagon.



### **WHEEL I, 2008**

This image was inspired by the memory of Elam Beiler, an Amish Bishop who had befriended Stephen Althouse. On a snowy morning just after Althouse and his family had shared dinner at the Bishop’s house the night before, Beiler was fatally injured while felling a tree for firewood. The wheel includes phrases from songs read at Beiler’s funeral from the old Anabaptist hymnal, *Ausbund* (1564). “*Wo soll ich mich hin kehren*” is sixteenth century German for “Where shall I turn to?” (song 76, verse 1) and “*Entlaubet ist der Walde*” means “The woods are barren of leaves” (title of song 35).

## BOUND HAMMER, 2017



### DOOR WITH HOLE, 2017

The sixteenth century German words digitally “hammered” into the tin read, “*All die mit Weinen säen thun, werden mit F(reuden erndten)*,” which can be translated as, “All those with weeping do sow, will with J(oy reap).” This is a line from song 86, verse 3, in the *Ausbund* hymnal that Amish churches still use. The *Ausbund* contains songs that originated with with Anabaptist captives held at the

Oberhaus castle prison in Passau (in present-day southeastern Germany) and is the oldest Christian songbook in continuous use.

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## STATEMENT

Artist Stephen Althouse photographs manmade objects, cloth, tools, and simple farm machinery with large format film cameras and highly specialized printing and development processes to record exquisite detail and rich tones in prints so large (up to 9 feet wide) that they command a sculptural presence.

“Like so many artists across time, I feel compelled to portray aspects of the human race,” he states. “I utilize old implements as depictions of ourselves rather than making literal portrayals of people. The relics and tools that I choose remind me of the paradoxes of our species, and some imply the valor of individuals facing lives of relentless uncertainty. Intertwined within these are representations of people, thoughts, and experiences of my own life.”

Often contrasting these objects with cloth wrappings or shrouds, Althouse’s facility as an artist with a background in sculpture allows him to elevate simple objects to an almost spiritual sensibility through a deft use of composition, lighting, and printing techniques. The resulting large-scale minimalist images reflect his attachment to his upbringing in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, as well as his fascination with the vast variety of cultures he has encountered on his many travels throughout the world. The works featured in *Objects of Intention*, however, primarily reflect his ongoing fascination with his Amish neighbors, whose farms surround his home.



“My artwork provides a personal way for me to express my feelings of mystery about humankind. It allows me to acknowledge our strengths and weaknesses, ponder our contradictions, and subtly bestow upon us a small degree of nobleness.”

## **TECHNICAL INFORMATION**

In order to capture the maximum amount of visual information and detail, Althouse utilizes large format view cameras with film rather than digital cameras. Most of his images are made with 8 x 10 and 5 x 7 inch black and white sheet film. Using only available light and time-exposures up to 8 minutes, Althouse overexposes the film in the camera to insure the capture of all shadow detail in his darker subject matter. This is combined with special underdevelopment of the film with a high acutance film developer solution in order to conserve highlight details such as the minute fibers in brightly lighted white cloth.

## **PRINTING INFORMATION**

Althouse scans his processed sheet film negatives in order to digitize his images so he can further manipulate them with a computer. Using imaging software, he subtly enhances each of his images in preparation for printing, often combining several shots made at different focal distances in order to create a file with maximum depth-of-focus. He then prints his images at a very large scale, up to 9.5 feet in length, using a wide format inkjet printer with highly stable pigmented inks on acid-free cotton rag paper. Applying his mastery of darkroom printing skills to his digital printing techniques, Althouse is able to produce archival pigment prints of superlative richness, tonal quality, and detail, which are exceptionally sharp even at great magnification.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Inspired by his love of tools and farm equipment, as a young artist Stephen Althouse (b. 1948) began fabricating sculptures out of wood, leather, and forged metal to resemble agricultural implements. Later, rather than making sculptures from raw materials, he began collecting already made objects which he combined to create new artwork. He transitioned from sculptor to artist-photographer when he discovered that once a piece was assembled, he could use photography as a tool to capture and control the perception of his work. Althouse continues to approach his work primarily as a sculptor, assembling and enshrouding tools, artifacts, clothing, and even weapons into a uniquely personal pictorial idiom. He further manipulates the scene with

lighting, camera and computer work, employing increased scale to create his larger-than-life minimalist compositions.

Raised on a farm in rural Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Althouse grew up close to farmers and their work with animals and the land. During his teens and twenties, he further explored the primordial realm of labor by working arduous jobs at a stone quarry, on the railroad, in concrete construction, and in road building. Through interactions with fellow workers he became sensitive to a culture of people who approach a life of physical labor with the same humility and compliant determination as countless generations before them. During these formative years Althouse also began to question humankind's predisposition for making war. He embeds different attributes of humanity, labor, and warfare into much of his artwork.

Throughout his life Althouse has continued to foster a fascination with people and diverse cultures through extensive travel, work, and residencies abroad in South America and Europe. He made Miami Shores, Florida his home-base for thirty years while he worked as an artist as well as Distinguished Professor of Fine Art at Barry University, and also taught courses and lectured on his art in France, England, Spain, Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands. In 2003-2004, Althouse lived in Belgium as an artist-in-residence at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Liège with support from a Fulbright Research Fellowship and concurrent German grants from Hahnemühle papers and Epson printers.

Since leaving academia, he now resides in central Pennsylvania where he is reconnecting with his rural roots and finding new artistic inspiration from the surrounding Amish community.

## **EDUCATION**

During the late 1960's, Althouse studied at Rollins College, Florida; Temple University, Pennsylvania; and Tyler School of Art, Pennsylvania. His undergraduate studies culminated at the University of Miami, Florida with a BFA in Sculpture. His graduate studies were at Virginia Commonwealth University where he received a Master of Fine Arts degree in Sculpture in 1976.

## **MUSIC**

Background ambience for *Objects of Intention* features Amish music and prayer chants from the 1564 *Ausbund* hymnal, recorded by the Harmonies Workshop in Leola, Pennsylvania.