

Stephen Althouse looks for old, used, worn objects that he can combine and photograph in single large black and white compositions to construct aesthetically intriguing visual metaphors. *Rusted Crown* (Figure 5.19), for example, juxtaposed an historical crown with an old piece of white linen: “The crown may connote authoritarianism, material wealth, opulence, exploitation, exclusiveness, and injustice” and may also conjure “benevolence, justice, protection, dignity, honor, and nobleness. It is an antonym of itself.” That the crown is made of steel rather than precious metals, and is rusted, adds complexity. The cloth may suggest piety, purity, and joy, but may also denote a shroud. Althouse intends that the combinations heighten mystery and “expand rather than constrict possibilities for interpretation.”⁴⁸



Figure 5.19 Stephen Althouse, *Rusted Crown*, 2013.

Abstraction for aesthetic purposes is commonly associated with painters of modern art, but photographers in the early twentieth century pursued abstraction in photography. Walter Benjamin asserted in 1929 that photography’s “second nature” is its inherent ability to detach and abstract the visible from the real.⁴⁹ Alfred Stieglitz’s series, *Music – A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs*, is credited with being the first intentional set of abstract photographs.⁵⁰ He referred to these as *Equivalents*: Although they are realistic photographs of clouds, he intended them to free the subject matter from the literal to the poetic. Photographers such as Aaron Siskind and Minor White are two among many who pursued abstraction, often depicting a fragment of a real scene, removing it from its