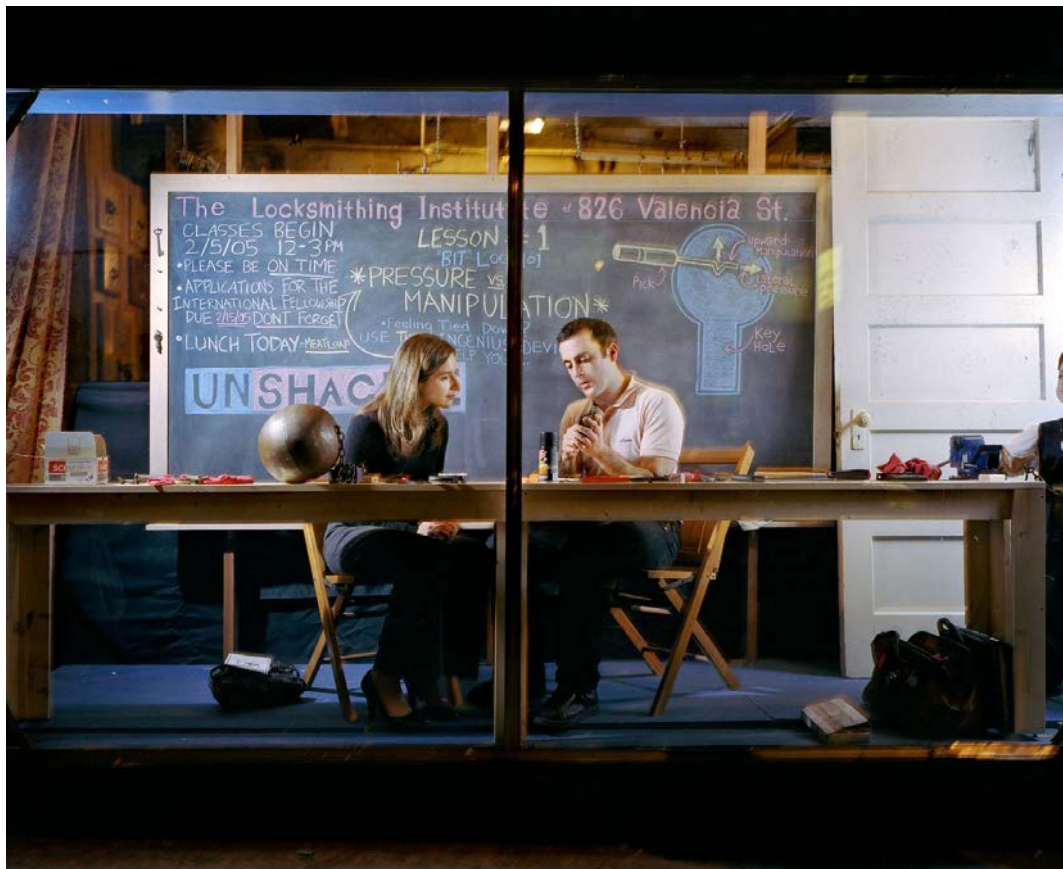


Lucas Murgida
Portfolio, 2024

www.lucasmurgida.com

Lucas Murgida Artist Statement:

Through performance, sculpture, installation, video, photographic documentation, viewer interactions, and social practice I create opportunities for audiences to experience very private moments in very public situations. Thematically, my projects address ideas of service, perception, liberation, privacy, power, and labor by utilizing the under-appreciated aspects and roles of human existence –such as furniture, locks, teachers, and service professionals– as raw material to craft my artistic experiences. I have worked professionally in roles such as a cabinet maker, fine-dining busboy, production assistant in adult films, and yoga teacher, and mined these job skills and situations as a platform from which to produce artistic work. This includes my best-known body of work, produced out of the nine years that I spent working as a professional locksmith. The artwork that comes as the result of my different employment/research projects changes, but from the time I spent working as a locksmith, I created a conceptual project called *The Locksmithing Institute*. This “school” traveled to different public places and aimed to teach anyone interested the different themes or skills related to locksmithing. Initially, the lessons were a derivative of the physical activities that I executed while working as a locksmith, such as picking locks or making keys. Each class consisted of both a mechanical lesson –for instance, “How to pick a lock”– and also an embedded conceptual lesson. For example, in order to pick a lock, a person needs to use “pressure” and “manipulation” in order to coax the device open. It is not without coincidence that those words –with powerful cultural histories– are used in conjunction with that lockpicking process. It was up to participants whether they wanted to discuss this connection between theory and practice or to just learn how to pick a lock. I would develop the lessons in four or five parts and let participants dictate how much or how little they got out of the experience. This multi-tiered approach allowed me to cater to children, adults, art-experts, and/or art-novices simultaneously in a seamless fashion.



The Locksmithing Institute of 826 Valencia Street. Lesson #1. Unshackle, Part #1, 2005, Social Practice, Photo.

Since 1999 I have used my jobs as research to inform my art practice. From 2002-2011 I worked as professional locksmith and in February of 2005 I started to make artwork about the experience. To do this I created *The Locksmithing Institute*. This “school” traveled to different public places and taught anyone interested themes and skills related to locksmithing. The first class was installed in the window display of *826 Valencia Street* –a pirate themed writing center for school age children– in San Francisco. Every Saturday for two months, I taught anyone interested in how to pick a lock by using “pressure” and “manipulation.” At the end of the lesson each student was locked into a ball and chain leg shackle and had to pick their way to freedom in order to exit the classroom-window display. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities.



The Locksmithing Institute of Keys that Fit, Lesson #3: Code VS DeCode, 2005, Social Practice and Photo.

Lesson #3 was conducted in the an artist space called *Keys that Fit*. This space used to be a locksmithing store. By examining the pattern of a key, I taught students how to *decode* its spaces and depths to determine its corresponding *code* (an alpha-numeric sequence that when translated provides its pertinent information). Students were then taught how to cut a key to factory specifications using a manual code cutting machine called a *Framon*. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities.



***The Locksmithing Institute of Ocean Beach
Lesson #4: Lost Keys, 2006, Social Practice
and Photo.***

Students were taught how to find their lost keys as opposed to picking locks or making new keys as taught in the previous lessons. The hope was to restore the sense of safety and security that the student lost when they misplaced their key. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities.

'Close Calls: 2007' at Headlands Center for the Arts

By Mark Van Proyen



One of the more durable money investment strategies is called "spray and pray." Purchase a wide variety of low-priced equities and hope that the exponential gains of a few will offset and outpace the losses of the majority. The Bay Area art calendar supports a few annual exhibitions whose organization seems keyed by a similar strategy: large group shows that expose the next level of "accomplishment" (read: investability) by post-MFA artists. GenArt's annual *Energy* is one such exhibition, and Southern Exposure Gallery also hosts a large annual cattle call. But for the past few years, the most telling of these exhibitions has taken place at the Headlands Center for the Arts. Titled *Close Calls*, it is an exhibition of all of the contenders for the Townsend Award, which includes a residency at the Marin County Center. This year's iteration of *Close Calls* was juried by gallerist Lisa Dent and curator Kerri Johnson, along with Headlands staffers Holly Blake, Linda Samuels and Gary Sanger.

At first pass, and at the second, this seemed to be one of the less interesting examples of the *Close Calls* series. Certainly, all of the expected bases were covered, and the exhibition had a routinely respectable diversity of media, material and iconography that invited viewers to pull their best-of-breed picks from each of a large array of sub-categories. The overall look of the show bespoke a general tone of ingratiating predictability and overall fatigue, meaning that too many of the works seemed like threadbare versions of well-worn

artistic strategies seen—and indeed, taught—elsewhere. I longed for something that could convey a moment of disrupted assumption, something that was about something more urgent and/or sophisticated than the mere adaptation of a proven look. Not much was to be found, because too many of the artists in the exhibition seemed to be reciting routine lines without much awareness of what they might mean.

However, there were several works of mention. Lisa Stoeneman's *Buried Life* stood out in the painting category. It was a large work on paper that sported many layers of slightly tinted acrylic gel that seemed to sandwich labyrinthine configurations of colored lines in different layers of plasticine sediment that suggested fossilizations suspended in different geological eras. The configurations themselves bespoke systems—electrical, circulatory, etc.—and these ranged from the open to the closed, simultaneously suggesting the painting itself to be a model of self-enclosure and also a switching point for external energies passing through it. Best of breed in the area of sculpture (and/or installation) goes to Lauren Davies, whose tableaux titled *Days* and *Stairs* featured everyday objects that were transformed by their canopy proximity into the cryptic class of a metaphysical drama involving hand-made chairs, antique maps and sofa-sized dirtballs partially covered with artificial snow. The maps seemed to bespeak the plans of a nineteenth-century expedition—in one case, to the Feyjapin desert—and their positioning came with a kind of hauntedness that spoke of the bad end that comes to grand dreams.

There were a lot of photographs in *Close Calls* 2007. But—how to put this elegantly?—most of them failed to distinguish themselves. The excep-

tions were stunning works by Nadim Roberto Sabella and Lucas Murgida. Sabella's *Piano* pictured an overturned upright



piano boots and placed them in a large quasi-circular configuration on the gallery floor. But the low production value price has to go Steve Lambert's *I will talk with anyone*, a table and two chairs with some homemade signage and writing supplies. Presumably, this was the set for a performance piece of some kind, but I was more amused by the fact that the table was unmanipulated during my visit to the gallery. The piece isn't talking to me—Was it talking to anybody? Either way, the art world's longstanding concept of truth-in-advertising was etched in a stark and starkly empty relief.

—Mark Van Proyen

Close Calls 2007 closed February 25 at the Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito. Other artists in the exhibition were Matt Andrews, Jelena K. Anicic, Benickovic, Lisa K. Blatt, Jon Brumit, Freddy Chandra, Alexander Chavez, Lisa Conrad, Chris Duncan, Sheila Ghidin, Diana Guerrero, Karen Hampton, Jason Jager, David G. Johnson, Hiroyo Kikuchi, Vanessa Marsh, Victoria May, Michael Meyers, Sungking Min, Anne Faith Nichols, Trevor Pagler, Kathleen Guillain & Gilbert Guerrero, Zachary Royer Scholz and Dan Tierney.

Mark Van Proyen is a contributing editor to Artweek.

Press: ArtWeek March, 2007 by Mark Van Proyen

"There were a lot of photographs in *Close Calls* 2007. But—how to put this elegantly?—most failed to distinguish themselves. The exceptions were stunning works by Lucas Murgida...Murgida's photos (*Locksmith* and *The Locksmithing Institute of Lost Keys Nos. 1+4*) were documentations of the artist "performing" (i.e., working) his day job as a locksmith, or as a teacher of locksmiths. While the depicted goings-on did seem laced with many allegorical portents of a surrealist provenance, the photos themselves had a composed stateliness rarely seen in most photographic documentation, and seemed to have knowing relationship to the ways that high-renaissance painters staged their own allegorical figures."

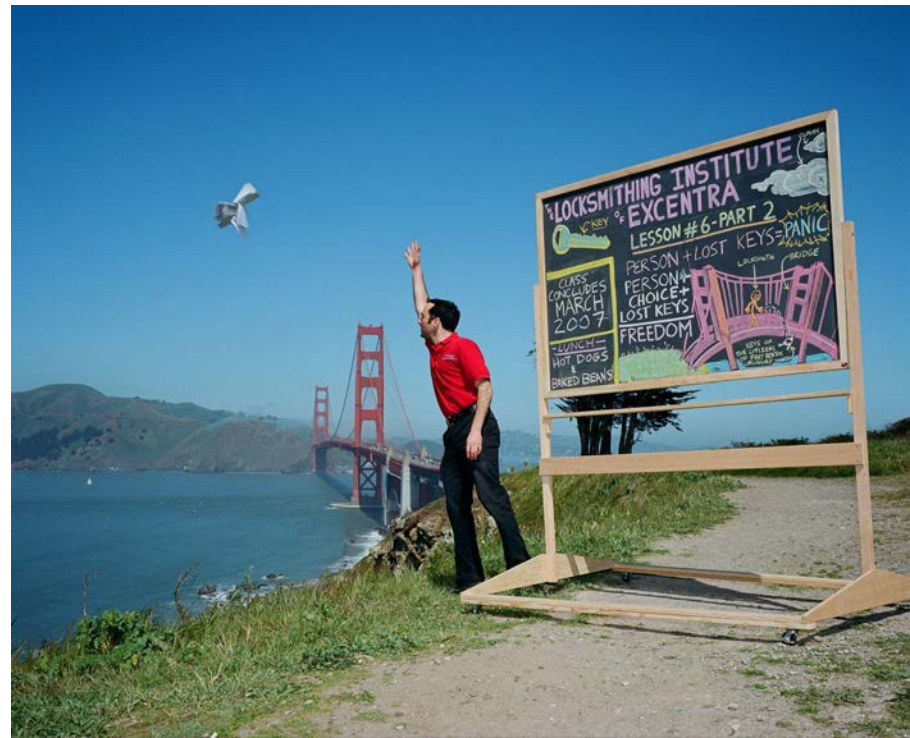


Clockwise from above: Lucas Murgida, *The Locksmithing Institute of Ocean Beach*, Photo Documentation, 2006, 20" x 30" (Gretchen Menter); Underground 2006, installation, 1,200 grocery bags, monofilament, 102" x 136" x 142"; Sheila Ghidin, *Our Wing*, 2006, charcoal, graphite on paper, 60" x 54", at the Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito.



The Locksmithing Institute of DISJECTA, Lesson Plan #5: Changing States, 2006, Social Practice and Photo.

In Lesson #5 of the Locksmithing Institute students were given the chance to change their relationship to their keys. A furnace was constructed in the parking lot in Portland, OR. If the students wanted to, they could give me one of their keys and I would melt it down and pour it into a new form. The abstract piece of brass that remained was still the student's key, however their relationship to that key was now changed. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities.



The Locksmithing Institute of Excentra, Lesson #6: Losing Keys, 2006-7, Social Practice and Photo.

Students in Frey Bentos, Uruguay were given the chance to lose their keys of their own free will. The keys were then brought to San Francisco and the I lost them on behalf of the students of Uruguay. When someone accidentally loses their keys, they often panic. The hope was if a person loses their keys by choice they might find liberation. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities.



The Locksmithing Institute of Contaminate, Lesson Plan #7: Willful Disappearance, 2007, Social Practice and Photo.

In Lesson #7 of the Locksmithing Institute students in Boston, MA were given a copy of the keys to the instructors apartment in San Francisco, CA. They were told that when he returned to San Francisco from Boston four days after the show that he would be locked out of his apartment. Students were unable to directly experience the final outcome of the lesson, however they were directly connected to the experience. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities.



The Locksmithing Institute of Queens Nails Annex, Lesson Plan #9: Nature, 2007, Social Practice and Photo.

In Lesson #9, students were given the opportunity to enter *The Locksmithing Institutes* mobile chalkboard isolation chamber (a space in which all light and sound have been removed). Each student that wanted to experience the isolation chamber got to spend 5 timed minutes in the box while students outside discussed their experiences with the instructor. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities.



***The Locksmithing Institute of Conflux.
Lesson #10. Unshackle Part #2: Passive
Control, 2007, Social Practice and Photo.***

In the first part of Lesson #10, students were shown how to get out of standard police issued handcuffs. In the second part of the class students were given the opportunity to choose to willfully submit to restraints by having a black hood placed over their heads and allowing their wrists to be zip-tied together for five minutes. After the five minutes were over they were shown how to liberate themselves from the zip-ties. Students were encouraged to compare the sensations that arose while they were trying to force their way out of the handcuffs as opposed to what it felt like to willfully decide to not get out of the restraints while having the hood over their heads. Each student that completed the class was given a key that will open up most handcuffs in the United States. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities.

In Brooklyn, a Conflux Junction

It's intriguing to witness how the ideas of Guy Debord, the French writer, filmmaker and co-founder of the Situationist movement, are still alive and kicking.

Over the last few days, more than 100 artists assembled in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, for Conflux, a festival inspired partly by psychogeography, a term that Debord coined in the mid-1950s to describe the ways that the physical environment can affect people's emotions and behavior.

Now in its fourth year, with projects mounted in multiple locations, the festival, which ended on Sunday, centered mostly on the intersection of Havemeyer Street and Metropolitan Avenue and offered everything from audio graffiti to surveillance technology.

Debord's bent was radical and revolutionary: "We want the most liberating change of the society and life in which we find ourselves confined," he wrote.

Translated to a festival, this meant a distinctly free-wheeling approach.

Artists didn't always appear when or where they were scheduled to. Time was fluid. One multimedia walking tour (arising from the concept of the "dérive," or "drifting" — what Debord described as "transient passages through varied ambiances") was supposed to make 10 stops in 2 hours. The tour took 3 hours and made 5 stops.

Technology, unsurprisingly, showed up everywhere.

A guerrilla cell tower was erected on top of a gallery. Text messages were projected on the side of a building. The Dublin artists Tim Redfern and Ralph Borland installed a surveillance camera on Havemeyer Street that mimicked cameras in Britain that "talk back" to subjects. The device transmitted no images but emitted a self-generating soundtrack that sounded like a mumbled stream of concrete poetry.

Matt Roberts combined multiple technologies to create instant



Learning how to pick a lock on handcuffs at the Locksmithing Institute, a Conflux booth.

abstract experimental videos. His tandem bike was outfitted with saddlebags holding a video camera pointed at the ground, a global positioning system, or G.P.S., device and a laptop computer loaded with a software editing program. You could ride on the back of the bike, directing Mr. Roberts through the streets, and when you returned to Conflux headquarters, he would burn a DVD, a kind of instant Stan Brakhage souvenir.

Art projects inspired by Guy Debord's psychogeography.

Students and professors from the Interactive Telecommunications Program at New York University were in abundance. Michael Dory, a student, made "audio graffiti" by inserting an MP3 player and miniature speakers into disposable objects like a coffee cup, a rolled-up advertising circular and a soda can and placing them around the neighborhood.

Another student, Mouna Andros, fashioned a vending cart from wooden wine crates, a solar panel and a hand crank, at which she offered free alternative power for cellphones and portable music players. ("Dis-tourment," the reuse of pre-existing artistic elements or media in a new ensemble — another practice favored by Debord — was on full display here.)

Surveillance was a recurring topic. A panel discussion was de-

voted to "Sousveillance Culture," sousveillance being the Situationist term for watching from below ("sous" means under in French) rather than monitoring from above. The artist Hasan Elahi described a post-9/11 experience with the F.B.I. that inspired him to wear a tracking bracelet and publish his activities — his plane flights, spending, bathroom usage — since, he said, he felt he could do a better job watching himself than the government could.

The good news is that you can still interact with the environment — or be acted upon — without the aid of technology. Jane Rigler's musical "Relay" involved 13 performers at three locations who improvised on saxophone violin and even wine glasses filled with water. The musicians relocated periodically to form new ensembles, so the work was always changing.

A duo called Public Domestications created a little street library, a school desk chained to a lamppost holding miniature books by Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling and others. It met with the worst fate of street art: it was torched on Friday night.

In a more anarchist vein, Lucas Murgida offered "The Locksmithing Institute of Conflux," which provided instruction on how to pick locks, including those on handcuffs.

At times Debord felt so marginal that you could forget all about him. An exception was a presentation on "Guy Debord's Game of War," a work in progress by the Radical Software Group that the artists plan to publish eventually as free, open-source software. Taking their cues from an actual game developed by Debord, the group used its discussion to gather feedback on how older war-game strategies jibe with contemporary warfare, like the so-called war on terrorism.

In perhaps the most far-out take on psychogeography I witnessed during the four-day event, a young woman could be viewed on Saturday on the sidewalk applying a hole-puncher to a sheet of paper. Her name was Jaelyn Meloche, and her project was "Making Winter." On Sunday she planned to spread out the "snowflakes" and make snow angels.

I suppose this fit the Conflux program: She was inspired to change the physical environment. And I couldn't help wondering what Guy Debord would think. Over the weekend, the temperature dropped 15 degrees.

Press:
New York Times
September, 2007
by Martha Schwendener

"...In a more anarchist vein, Lucas Murgida offered, "The Locksmithing Institute of Conflux," which provided instruction on how to pick locks, including those on handcuffs..."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/18/arts/design/18conf.html>

Where to stay.

Where to eat.



The Locksmithing Institute of 826 Valencia Street, Lesson #11: Graduation/The Lobster Trap, 2008, Social Practice and Photo.

Lesson # 11 was installed in the window display of *826 Valencia Street* – a pirate themed writing center for kids– in San Francisco. Students were invited to teach themselves how to unlock a door that didn't require a key. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities. These photographs are part of *The Berkeley Art Museum's* permanent collection.

The Locksmithing Institute of Destructables: How to Drill Open a Standard Door Lock, 2011, Social Practice and Video.



In 2011, artist and activist Packard Jennings asked me to create a project for his website: Destructables.org. The site is currently not active, but it began as a critique of the “instructables” movement. However, instead of teaching folks do-it-yourself solutions about how to –for instance– fix a loose floor board, Destructables.org was geared towards DIY projects of protest and creative dissent. Leaning heavily into the “destructive” aspect of the theme, I decided to make a video in which I taught people how to drill open standard door locks. Often when I tell a person that I worked for nine years as a professional locksmith, they usually say something to the effect of, “Oooooo, you can pick locks!!” Though I can indeed pick locks, this skill represented a tiny fraction of what I did on a day-to-day basis. In actuality most locks cannot be picked. The reasons for this are complicated, however it is very unlikely that anyone is going to pick the lock on –for instance– a standard parking meter. Because of this most locks must be destroyed in order to open what they are on. A good locksmith can gain access to something while causing minimal damage to the door or hardware that the lock is installed on. Link to video:

<https://vimeo.com/852986069>



The Locksmithing Institute of the Charlie James Gallery, Lesson #12: Unshackle, Part #3. 2012, Social Practice, Photo, Video

In Lesson #12, two students were locked together with handcuffs and isolation boxes of my own construction were placed over their heads. A third student was restrained with handcuffs and was isolated in a darkened face mask. The first two students sat quietly in isolation for five minutes while I guided the third students handcuffs over a high speed grinder. I then taught the first two students how to work together to destroy their handcuffs with a hammer and chisel. In both instances I prostrated myself and was vulnerable to the danger of the tools and debris that were produced by the experience while the students (though helpless and isolated) stood erect and were kept safe from danger as they submitted to the experience. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities. Link to video:

<https://vimeo.com/853040442>



The Locksmithing Institute of ArtPad, Lesson #13: Egressive Flshbowl, 2013, Social Practice, Photo, Video.

Students were first taught how to break into a motel room. After breaking into the room students were invited to try and open a small cabinet that utilized a “puzzle lock” while the rest of the audience observed them through the motel room’s window. If the student was able to get the cabinet open they found a key to the bathroom inside. They were then instructed to unlock the door to the bathroom, go inside, and shut the door. The door to the bathroom could only be opened from the outside. Once inside, the student was trapped until the next student let them out. In the bathroom they found some reading material to pass the time until they were set free. The process of sharing entrance and egress continued for several hours. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities. Link to video:

<https://vimeo.com/853012321>



***The Locksmithing Institute of 918 Oak Street,
Lesson #14: The Duty-Cycle of Power 2016-7,
Social Practice, Photo, Video.***

Students were given the opportunity to work in teams of three to create a physical “power circuit” between one another by utilizing three of my custom made stools. One stool produced the “positive” charge of mild pleasure by vibrating when a person sat on it. The second stool delivered the “negative” charge by allowing a participant to receive a mild electro-static shock when they sat down. The third student acted as the “neutral” conduit between the first students by sitting down on a 3rd stool that had trigger rigged inside of the seat which activated the vibration and shock of the other two stools. The third “neutral” student was then taught how to make a key that would unlock all three students from their predicament by using simple everyday materials and a pair of scissors while the other two students experienced the sensations delivered from their respective stools. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/853004780>



The Locksmithing Institute of GCAC: None of this is Real, Phase #1, 2018, Social Practice and Video.

From March 2018-September 2019, I was an invited artist in residence for the *Grand Central Art Center*, at California State University, Fullerton. Every month I engaged with the community of Santa Ana, CA during their vibrant Art Walks. In the first phase of this evolving project, I taught anyone interested how to break into a room installed in GCAC's front gallery by drilling open a standard door lock. I then taught the person how to repair the lock. Once the door was opened, participants were given the option of being locked inside the room and then challenged to figure out how to escape through a second door that has been outfitted with one of my custom made conceptual locks. Each participant got to keep the lock that they destroyed and the drill-bit that they used as a souvenir of event. The experience was free and open to participants of all ages and abilities. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/852896503>



The Locksmithing Institute of GCAC: None of this is Real, Phase #2, 2018, Social Practice and Video.

For Phase #2 of this evolving project, participants at *Grand Central Art Center* were asked to bring an unwanted brass key to the gallery during the *Dia de Los Muertos Celebration*. I then took the unwanted key, melted it in a furnace, poured the molten metal into a mold to form a new key, and then gave the new key back to the owner. The participant could then use that new key to open a door to a special room and experience a private installation. Recognizing that not everyone has an old key, I broadened the definition of “keys” to include anything that allows a person to exit one space and enter another space regardless of whether or not it’s a “mental” space or a “physical” space. This expanded definition of keys can include but is not limited to: ideas, people, places, things, memories, or traditional bits of metal. Paper and pens were available for people to create anonymous written descriptions of their unwanted keys to be burned with some recycled keys to create a molten-poured new key. Regardless of the shape a participant’s key takes, I wanted to encourage people to participate in an “exchange” and “transformation” in some capacity in order to give up something and let something go in order to be transported to a new perspective. The experience was free and open to participants of all ages and abilities. Link to video:

<https://vimeo.com/852894332>

The Locksmithing Institute of GCAC: None of this is Real, Phase #3, 2019, Social Practice and Video.

For Phase #3 of this evolving project, an impasse was installed in the front gallery of *Grand Central Art Center* that spanned from the street facing window to the rear wall, effectively separating the gallery from the rest of the exhibition spaces. Participants were first taught how to break into the gallery through a secret door hidden in the impasse by utilizing a technique that in pop culture is usually referred to as “credit-carding.” Locksmiths call this technique “shimming.” Once the door had been shimmed open, gallery-goers were free to enter the gallery and experience the exhibition that was located behind the impasse. However, the door was then closed and locked from the inside in a way that required a second participant to be taught how to destroy the lock by using a high- speed grinder. Once the lock had been destroyed the door could be opened and gallery-goers were then free to enter and exit the space again. Participants got to keep the shim that used to enter the gallery and also the lock that they destroyed in order to exit. This process of breaking into and out of the gallery continued for three hours during *Grand Central Art Centers* twenty year anniversary celebration. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/852883892>





The Locksmithing Institute of GCAC: None of this is Real, Phase #4, 2019, Social Practice and Video.

For Phase #4 of this evolving project, participants were asked to bring an unwanted brass key to the *Grand Central Art Center*. I then took the unwanted key, melted it in a furnace, and poured it into a mold to create a new key. I then gave that new key back to the owner and the participant could use that key to open the door of a custom made wardrobe that I constructed. Participants were then able to have a 2 minute solo experience inside of the wardrobes' mediative and transportive interior. While I melted and poured keys in one room, my assistant escorted people into and out of the wardrobe in a second room. Recognizing that not everyone has an old key, I broadened the definition of "keys" to include anything that allows a person to exit one space and enter another space regardless of whether or not it's a "mental" space or a "physical" space. This expanded definition of keys can include but is not limited to: ideas, people, places, things, memories, or traditional bits of metal. Paper and pens were available for people to create anonymous written descriptions of their unwanted keys to be burned with some recycled keys to create a molten-poured new key. Regardless of the shape a participant's key takes, I wanted to encourage people to participate in an "exchange" and "transformation" in some capacity in order to give up something and let something go in order to be transported to a new perspective. The experience was free and open to participants of all ages and abilities. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/852859208>



The Locksmithing Institute of GCAC: None of this is Real, Phase #5, 2019, Social Practice and Video.

In fifth and final phase of this evolving projects, I taught participants at the *Grand Central Art Center* how to free their wrists when bound with standard zip-ties. Instead of attempting to cut or break the zip-ties, participants learned a different technique that focused on “shimming” the sliding mechanism that secures the restraints in a tightened position by using a modified coat hanger. I took all of the wood, mirrors, and materials that I had used to construct the various installations for these five projects and used them to construct an edition of 50 special boxes. Each person that learned the zip tie escape technique was able to take one of the boxes home with them. Also, in September 2018, I was invited to Tijuana, MX to teach this same zip-tie escape technique with the help of an interpreter. The events were free and open to all ages and abilities. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/852851307>

Performance art locks, unlocks participants' points of view at CSUF gallery

Artist in residence changes up his "None of This is Real" exhibit at Grand Central Art Center



A simple key is an important part of artist Lucas Murgida's next show. Murgida was a former locksmith and cabinetmaker and has been the artist in residence at the Grand Central art center in Santa Ana since July. Murgida is getting ready to launch his next project in what he calls "None of This is Real." He creates situations that allow audience members to experience private moments in public situations. (Photo by Michael Fernandez, Contributing Photographer)

By **SUSAN GILL VARDON** | sgvardon@ocregister.com | Orange County Register
 PUBLISHED: November 28, 2018 at 9:42 a.m. | UPDATED: November 28, 2018 at 3:00 p.m.

Lucas Murgida is hard to miss for those strolling by Grand Central Art Center on the nights of the Downtown Santa Ana Art Walk.

With a face shield respirator strapped to his head, Murgida takes keys from participants and drops them into a furnace in front of the center. Then he pours the molten metal into a key mold and hands the refashioned key back to the owner after it has cooled for about three minutes.

At that point the person is invited inside the gallery to use the new key to enter a large, three-sided wooden box Murgida built that is situated in front of the gallery's big picture window in an area known as "the fishbowl." Once inside the box, the person realizes the door knob(s) they are using to get out of the box don't work.

Welcome to Murgida's "None of This is Real," which since July has played out in two variations in the front gallery at the Cal State Fullerton art center. His third version of the piece debuts at the [art walk](#) from 7-10 p.m. Saturday.



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Orange County Register

November, 2018

by Susan Gill Vardon

<https://www.ocregister.com/2018/11/28/performance-art-locks-unlocks-participants-points-of-view-at-csuf-gallery/>

"...*"My projects explore who's in charge, switching between me and the viewer, how people are watching, inside or outside," he said in an interview at the gallery. "People inside have a very different experience than those outside, so depending on the vantage point the viewer is looking from, each piece is totally different."* "None of This is Real" is Murgida's latest work to mine his past jobs as the foundation for his art. He graduated in 2002 from the San Francisco Art Institute with a bachelor's in fine arts from the New Genres department, and has been a professional cabinetmaker, a busboy and yoga teacher. But it was his nine years working full-time as a locksmith in San Francisco that prompted his curiosity about people's relationships with their keys — and how lost they can be when they lose them. "Keys bring feelings of safety and security," Murgida said. "They allow people to enter and exit not only doors but certain psychological states."...Some audience members initially mistake "None of This is Real" for an escape room, where people work together to find a way out. Murgida said his goal is to make participants feel stuck and then unstuck — to worry briefly about the situation they have gotten themselves into and then figure it out. There is always a way out of the box, according to the artist. "People outside can see the trick," he said. "But once you're in the fishbowl, people's psychology changes and they often, even though they know the way out, forget how to do it because they're being watched."...



The Locksmithing Institute of CA53776v2.GALLERY, Lesson #15: Student as Authority, Gatekeeper, and Curator, 2022 and 2023, Social Practice and Photo.

Students were first taught how to use a “slim jim” to open the door lock of the ca53776v2.gallery. This alternative art space utilizes the dashboard of Alex Lukas’ 2007 Ford Ranger to display a diverse spectrum of art projects. Once students manipulated the door lock open, they were invited to leave behind a small piece of themselves and contribute to a group sculpture that was displayed in the gallery's main exhibition space by adding a piece of chewed gum to a small vitrine. The experience was free and open to people of all ages and abilities. Link to video: <https://vimeo.com/852759950>



Arts & Entertainment > Visual Arts

The Art of Breaking into Cars

Cracking Open Santa Barbara's Mobile Art Gallery with Artist Lucas Murgida of the Locksmithing Institute



By Ryan P. Cruz
Tue Jun 06, 2023 | 11:12am



Lucas Murgida alongside Santa Barbara's unique curbside gallery space, CA53776V2.gallery, on West Anapamu Street | Credit: Courtesy

Press:

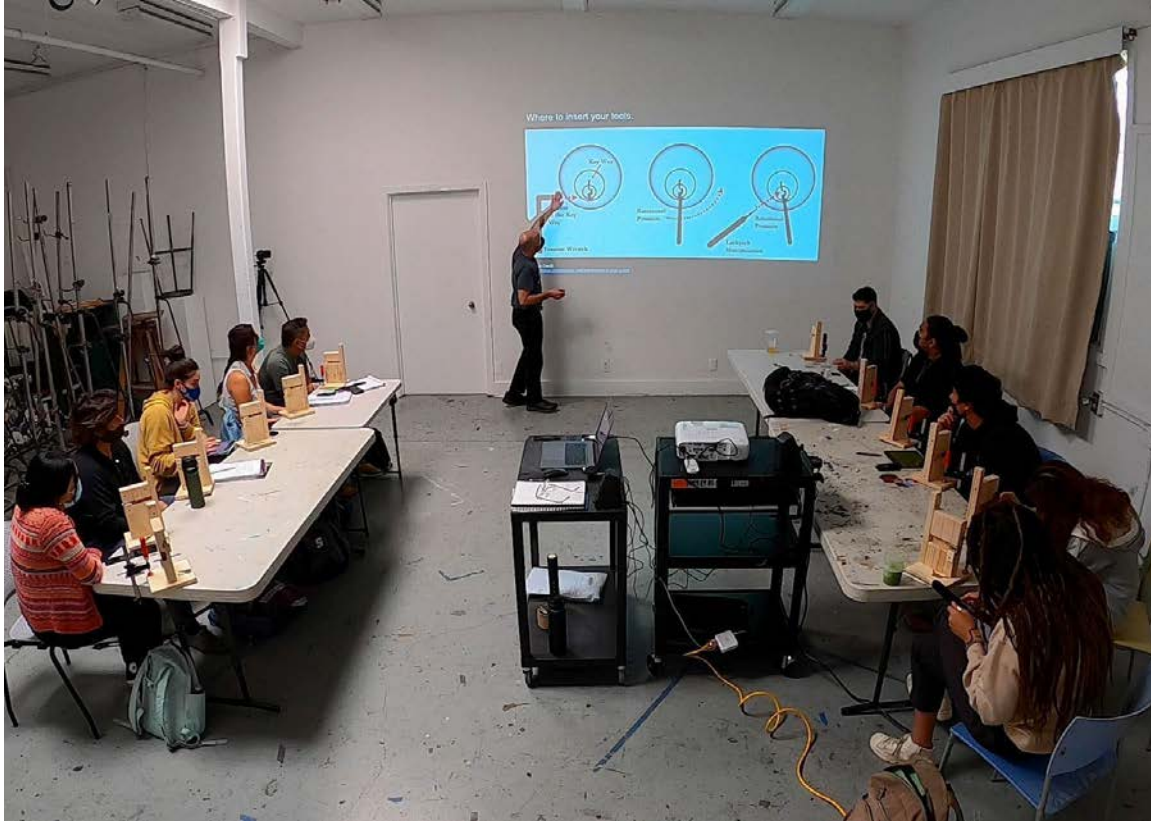
Santa Barbara Independent

June 2023

By Ryan P. Cruz

<https://www.independent.com/2023/06/06/the-art-of-breaking-into-cars/>

“Yesterday I learned how to break into a car — but I swear it was for the sake of art...Sunday’s exhibition in Santa Barbara marked Lesson #15: where visitors could “get into the institution,” Murgida said, using easily available tools, then leave a little piece of themselves behind. It starts, funnily enough, with a piece of chewing gum. Murgida asks me to take a piece of gum from an assortment of packs in a small box sitting on the curb beside the truck, then tells me to chew while he explains the process, using a six-step process conveniently illustrated on the sunshade stretched across the windshield...Once inside, Murgida invites me to take my piece of gum, now properly mangled and chewed, and place it in a small clear case in the center console on the front seat, on top of a sculpture made of about 20 or 30 other chewed pieces. As a souvenir, Murgida hands me a brochure of the instructions illustrated on the sunshade and a printed lesson plan, which explains the thinking behind showing people these skills as a form of art. These lessons, the plan reads, are attempts to show people the “backdoor” ways to gain access to social wealth that is at times kept “physically and symbolically away by people in positions of expertise and authority.”...By breaking into Santa Barbara’s CA53776V2.gallery, Murgida writes, students will learn “that they too have the power to open up the institutionalized power within” and “become their own authority, gatekeeper, and curator.”...It was one of the most unique art experiences I’ve been able to take part in...”



The Locksmithing Institute of the University of California, Santa Barbara: Locks as Art, Lesson #1, 2022, Social Practice and Video Documentation.

During the 2021-2022 Academic year I was an awarded teaching fellow with UC Santa Barbara's College of Creative Studies and Department of Art. One of the six classes that I taught was called, *Locks as Art*. In this class, I took seven of the lessons of *The Locksmithing Institute* and taught them as weekly installments for a group of twelve undergraduate students. Lessons included: picking locks, making keys, losing keys, and –among other things– sharing power. First class consisted of a class overview, introduction, and Lesson #1, *Picking Locks: Pressure VS Manipulation*. Link to full documentation:

<https://lucasmurgida.com/2872/locks-as-art-uc-santa-barbara-spring-2022/>



(W)hole

The Charlie James Gallery, LA, CA

**Gallery Exhibition, Performance, Installation, Viewer Interaction
2009**

I constructed two wooden cabinets that looked like refrigerators to hold the food and beverages that were consumed on the night of the opening. This included single serving bottles of red wine, cracker jacks, popcorn, grape juice, and raisins. All of which stained a consumers mouth or got stuck in their teeth; providing a physical remnant that stayed with each viewer over the course of the evening. Near the front door of the gallery I stood behind a table with a metal harness inserted into the corners of my mouth. This harness was connected to the refrigerator doors by a string and pulley system that ran the length of the ceiling. As viewers opened the refrigerators doors, the string was pulled taut and then lifted the metal harness in my mouth up, forcing me into an awkward and painful smile. During the four hour opening, I talked to people about my other related projects and offered viewers the chance to have a muscle inside of their mouth massaged. If a participant was interested, I would first have them lay down on the table and then I applied direct, soft pressure to their “pterygoid,” which is one of the muscles responsible for shutting the jaw. When this muscle relaxes, some people experience a quieting sensation throughout their entire body. Though the action of touching these muscles is quite invasive and uncomfortable while it is occurring, afterwards most will feel a certain amount of relief.



Culture Monster All the Arts, All the Time

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Art Review: Lucas Murgida at Charlie James Gallery

August 21, 2009 | 10:30 am

Performance art, as everybody knows, can be difficult: messy, obscure, intimidating, boring, baffling and occasionally, downright painful.

San Francisco-based performance artist Lucas Murgida, in his solo debut at Charlie James Gallery, looks like the sort of person who couldn't be difficult if he tried. With the boyish good looks of Tobey Maguire, a voice that one imagines patiently explaining complicated things to children, and the gentle manner of an understanding locksmith — which, in fact, he is (but more on that in a moment) — he puts a friendly face on a challenging tradition, employing its methods to explore a complex range of phenomena without resorting to sensationalism or mystification.

It is a refreshing combination. If you're wondering, for instance, about the two wooden refrigerators, the big table, the dangling wire headpiece, and the string and pulley system that links them all together in the gallery, he explains their significance quite plainly in a video that plays in the corner, as well as on the gallery's website.



In the performance that occurred on the show's opening night, he recounted, he stood at the table wearing the headpiece, each end of which looped into the corners of his mouth, while offering to massage the interior of the mouths of willing viewers — stimulating pressure points for relaxation, apparently — and extemporizing (much as he does in the video) on the conceptual parameters of the piece.

They revolve around the notion of “herding,” or manipulating the movement and behaviors of groups, in this case with the help of a pair of “food troughs” (the refrigerators) stocked with drinks and snacks. Every time the doors were opened, however, the pulley system drew the headpiece upward, which raised the corners of Murgida’s mouth into a painful-looking smile — making visible the complex give-and-take dynamic between artist and viewer at an opening.

Press:

Los Angeles Times

August, 2009

by Holly Myers

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/blogs/culture-monster-blog/story/2009-08-21/art-review-lucas-murgida-at-charlie-james-gallery>

Excerpt:

“Performance art, as everybody knows, can be difficult: messy obscure, intimidating, boring, baffling, and occasionally, downright painful...San Francisco-based performance artist Lucas Murgida...puts a friendly face on a challenging tradition, employing its methods to explore a complex range of phenomena without resorting to sensationalism or mystification....(The exhibition) revolve around the notion of “herding” or manipulating the movement and behaviors of groups, in this case with the help of a pair of “food troughs” (the refrigerators) stocked with drinks and snacks. Every time the doors were opened, however, the pulley system drew the headpiece upward, which raised the corners of Murgida’s mouth into a painful-looking smile — making visible the complex give-and-take dynamic between artist and viewer at an opening... Murgida is a searcher, it seems, an inquirer....At the root of this and the dozen of so other performances and projects represented in the photographs around the gallery is an earnest, undogmatic interest in the figure of the worker, and in the relationship of the worker to the particular constituency he serves....It is unassuming but nonetheless rigorous work, undertaken with an easy, guileless attitude that makes one eager to follow along.”

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Lucas Murgida, *(w)hole*, 2009. Performance view.

LOS ANGELES

Lucas Murgida

CHARLIE JAMES GALLERY
969 Chung King Road
July 25–August 22, 2009

Experiential and performance art tend to make comebacks in lean economic times, as seen in a recent evening of performances hosted by Los Angeles's Chinatown gallery district. Among the events, ranging from serious to entertaining to histrionic, Lucas Murgida's four-hour

performance *(w)hole*, 2009, and a related exhibition emerged as a highlight. In a dexterous feat, the Bay Area artist fused the caring honesty of direct interaction with the intellectual vagaries of relational aesthetics, while improbably balancing material, object-based concerns with the raw nerve of performance art.

On the evening of the event, Murgida stood behind a long wooden table, a metal loop protruding from his mouth, around his jaw, and onto a rope strung through pulleys across the ceiling and attached, at the other end, to two wooden boxes (designed to look like refrigerators) filled with snacks and drinks. When viewers/participants opened the doors to the boxes to retrieve a treat, the rope tugged at the device, twisting Murgida's mouth into a painful and unnatural smile. Through his eerie expression, the artist calmly explained the roots of the word *herd* and its relationship to consumption, the psyche, and predicting the future—a seemingly unrelated train of thought that unfolded sensibly in clear elocution—to gallery guests.

Also in the gallery, Murgida has installed an exhibition of large-scale digital images derived from his past works. In contrast to the artists' refreshingly candid performance, the pictures offer neither explanation nor record but proffer another form of experience, a poetic reflection on the myriad and surreal possibilities of human behavior.

— [Annie Buckley](#)

Press:

ARTFORUM

July, 2009

by Annie Buckley

<https://www.artforum.com/events/lucas-murgida-187613/>

Excerpt:

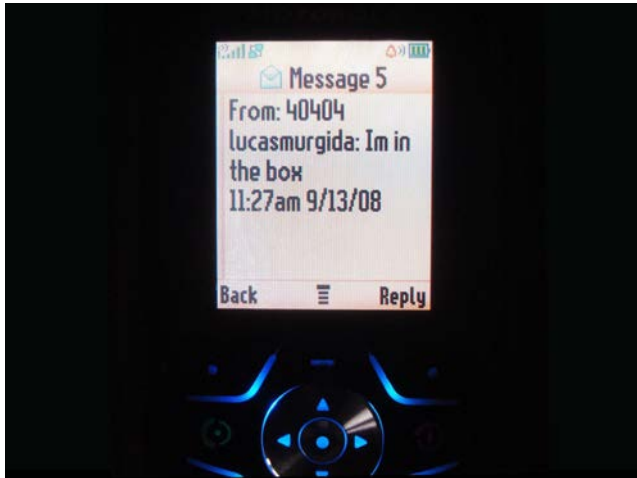
“Lucas Murgida’s four-hour long performance (w)hole, 2009, and a related exhibition emerged as a highlight. In a dexterous feat, the Bay Area artist fused the caring honesty of direct interaction with the intellectual vagaries of relational aesthetics, while improbably balancing material, object-based concerns with the raw nerve of performance art. On the evening of the event, Murgida stood behind a long wooden table, metal loop protruding from his mouth, around his jaw, and onto a rope strung through pulleys across the ceiling and attached, at the other end, to two wooden boxes (designed to look like refrigerators) filled with snacks and drinks. When viewers/participants opened the doors to the boxes to retrieve a treat, the rope tugged at the device, twisting Murgida’s mouth into a painful and unnatural smile. Through his eerie expression, the artist calmly explained the roots of the word herd and its relationship to consumption, the psyche, and predicting the future – a seemingly unrelated train of thought that unfolded sensibly in clear elocution – to gallery guests.”



9/10
Social Practice, Performance, and Photo Documentation
2008

Day #1: I constructed a wheeled cabinet with a locked and hidden compartment. I hid inside the cabinet and was left on a sidewalk in New York City. I didn't exit the cabinet until someone unknowingly brought me from the public sidewalk into a private space. On the first day I remained in the cabinet for five hours, but no one took me home.





9/10

Social Practice, Performance, and Photo Documentation 2008

Day #2: On the second day, I wheeled the cabinet to a new location and hid again. After three hours and a lot of movement, I was eventually pushed into the back of a restaurant. I tried to exit without being noticed, but was discovered by a chef while I attempted to sneak out the back of the kitchen. During both days, I interacted with people all over the world by using my cellphone to update a blog and an early version of *Twitter* with texts and images.

Lucas Murgida "9/10"

JOSEPH DEL PESCO

Appearing on city sidewalks or littering back alleys, decommissioned furniture is given a chance at a second life. Items like an old cathode-ray television or a suspiciously stained sofa appear at random and dare passersby to adopt them despite their faults. Sometimes these byproducts of commodity culture's planned obsolescence have FREE signs attached, assuring the potential owner of their transitional status. Working with this logic of the street-side gift, San Francisco based artist Lucas Murgida occupied a piece of furniture as a performance project. "A cabinet will be constructed and left on a sidewalk. I will be hidden inside and not reveal myself until someone assumes possession and brings the cabinet to their home." By locking himself into the bottom compartment, Murgida transformed a cabinet into a trojan horse.

Although Murgida's custom-made dresser was partially unusable — only the top drawers were unlocked — and it must have seemed unusually heavy (even despite being on wheels), its mint condition attracted attention and probably some wariness. After learning about a bed-bug epidemic in the city that was likely to blame for an unsuccessful first attempt, Murgida added a small note "lost keys, no bed bugs." Interested in the ambiguities of possession and its transference, Murgida omitted "free" from the note.

On the second attempt, and after hours suffering the oppressive summer heat, peeing into a bottle and, on one occasion, being rolled half a block down the street, the cabinet carrying his crumpled body was adopted. Periodic photos taken through the perforated back-panel of the cabinet accompany fragments of text like "Scared, heart is racing," sent via mobile phone. Together they tell the story of his movement through the city. Upon arrival, Murgida reports "Sounds of a kitchen" and "Alone in store room." After waiting through a stretch of silence, a thoroughly exhausted Murgida quietly extracted himself from his hiding place. When he found the backdoor he had been rolled through was locked, he was forced to walk through to the front of the building where he ran into an alarmed chef. After explaining the project, and proffering his business card, Murgida exited the restaurant and walked out into the sunshine, leaving his cocoon behind.

LUCAS MURGIDA

Additional images of the project can be found at <http://www.lucasmurgida.blogspot.com/>

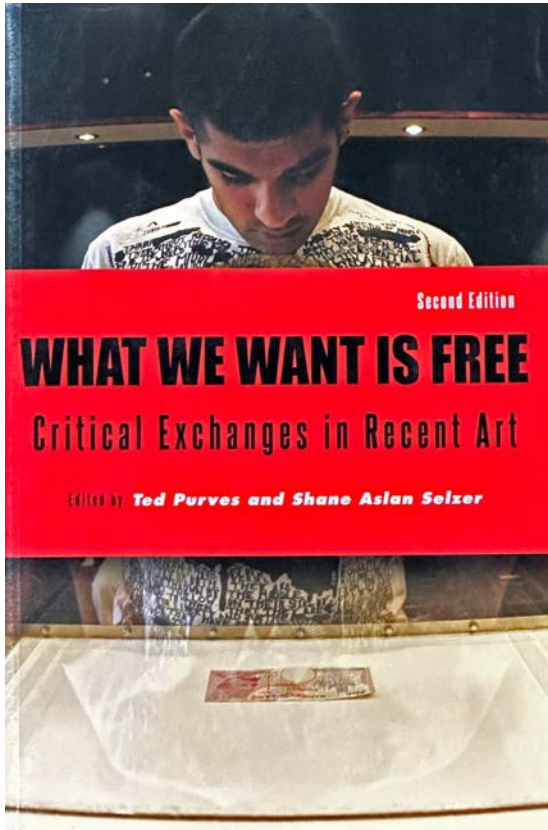


“A CABINET WILL BE CONSTRUCTED AND LEFT ON A SIDEWALK. I WILL BE HIDDEN INSIDE AND NOT REVEAL MYSELF UNTIL SOMEONE ASSUMES POSSESSION AND BRINGS THE CABINET TO THEIR HOME.”

Press:

Nuke Art Magazine, January, 2009, by Joseph Del Pesco

“Appearing on city sidewalks or littering back alleys, decommissioned furniture is given a chance at a second life. Items like an old cathode-ray television or a suspiciously stained sofa appear at random and dare passersby to adopt them despite their faults. Sometimes these byproducts of commodity culture’s planned obsolescence have FREE signs attached, assuring the potential owner of their transitional status. Working with this logic of street-side gift, San Francisco based artist Lucas Murgida occupied a piece of furniture as a performance project...On the second attempt, and after hours suffering the oppressive summer heat, peeing into a bottle and, on one occasion, being rolled half a block down the street, the cabinet carrying his crumpled body was adopted. Periodic photos taken through the perforated back-panel of the cabinet accompany fragments of text like, “Scared, heart is racing,” sent via mobile phone. Together they tell the story of his movement through the city. Upon arrival, Murgida reports, “Sounds of a kitchen,” and “Alone in a store room.” After waiting through a stretch of silence, a thoroughly exhausted Murgida quietly extracted himself from his hiding place. When he found the backdoor he had been rolled through was locked, he was forced to walk through to the front of the building where he ran into an alarmed chef. After explaining the project, and proffering his business card, Murgida exited the restaurant and walked out into the sunshine, leaving his cocoon behind.”



Press:

*What We Want is Free,
2nd Edition*

Editors: Ted Purves and
Shane Aslan Selzer
2014



“This key was obscured in the pocket of Lucas Murgida who himself was obscured within a six-foot-long credenza which he built and then positioned on a New York City sidewalk. On two September days in 2008, he climbed inside and waited. When an unsuspecting trio found and decided to keep the cabinet despite its locked drawers and remarkable heaviness, they rolled it into a commercial kitchen, where the jostled artist finally emerged. Having successfully transgressed the threshold between city street and locked interior, Murgida left the key for the cabinet’s new owners. It opens the exterior locks, turning a Trojan horse into a functional piece of private property, and implementing a final twist in the project’s dialectic between public and private. The fraction etched on the key alludes to the truism, “possession is nine tenths of the law...9/10 made use of the sidewalks capacity to turn private property into a public offering...” Elyse Mallouk