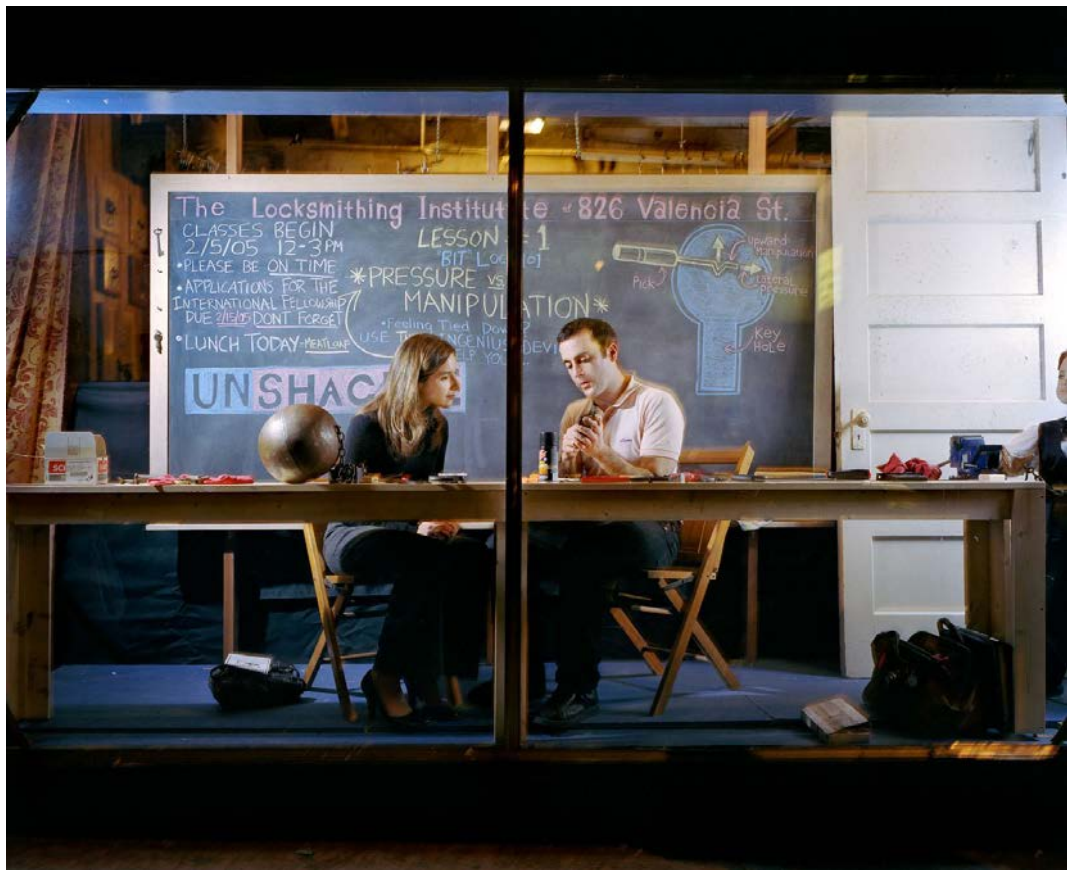


Lucas Murgida
Portfolio, 2024

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.



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.



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>



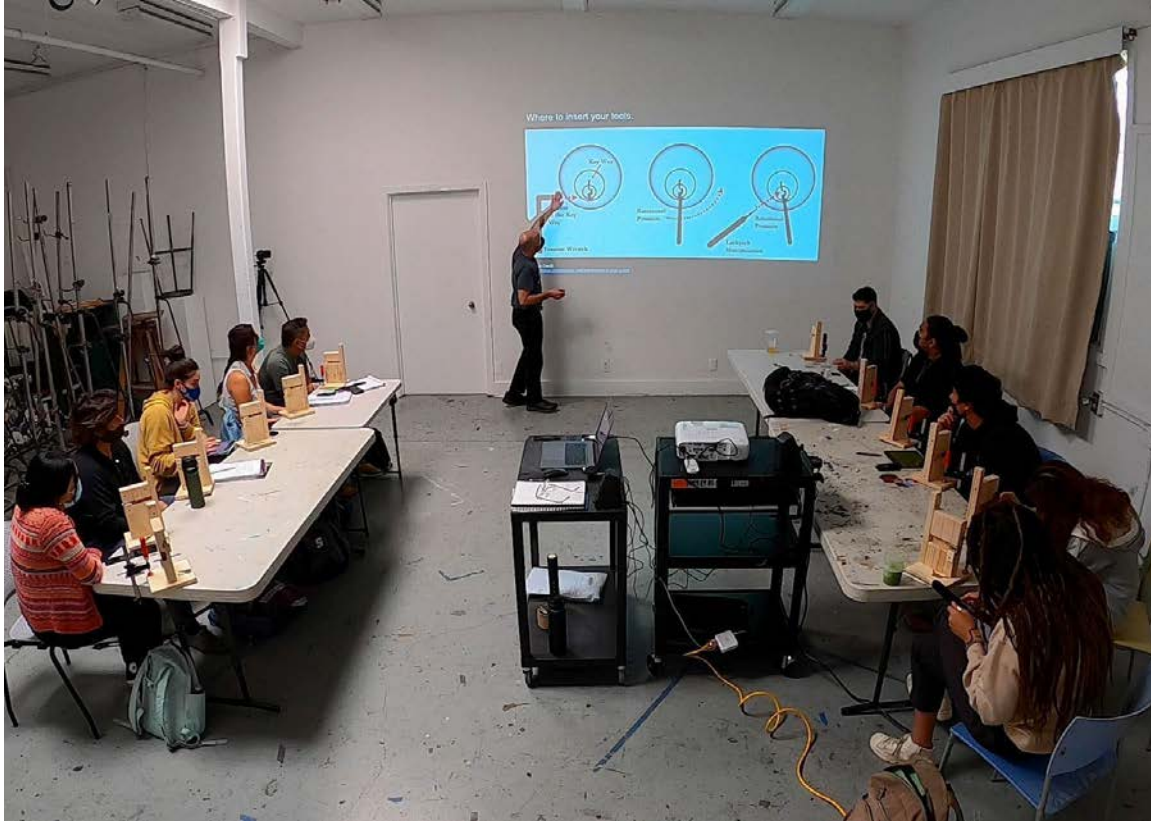
The Locksmithing Institute of GCAC: None of this is Real, Phase #5, 2019, Social Practice and Video.

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>



The Locksmithing Institute of CA53776v2.GALLERY, Lesson #15: Student as Authority, Gatekeeper, and Curator, 2022, 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>



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/>