Alternative Openings

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Hosted by: Laila Gijsen (graduate Rietveld Amsterdam)

Project Information (EN)

Housing activism

Being born and raised in Amsterdam, Gijsen feels a lot of connection with the city which has let her to become an active part in the activist community. Through her years at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Gijsen discovered a way to use her activism as a fuel to tell a story that is deeply connected with the city and the changes it has gone through. In Alternative Openings (2023), she does this by taking a simple object, a lock. These objects of daily use are relatively small but represent one of the biggest social structures our world knows — ownership.

The workshop

In Gijsen's Alternative Openings, she invites visitors to rethink the concept of ownership as we know it by understanding the technical side of locks. In line with the essence of skill-sharing, she teaches visitors how to lock pick locks and lock boxes. By learning how to bypass the need of a key or code, you might see that property is just another illusion, like the idea of an unbreakable lock. Up until the Amsterdam of the 70's, people would let themselves into houses by pulling on a string that would come out of the mailbox, this phenomenon disappeared since then. Nowadays, the equivalent of that is a little box next to the door that opens with a code, and then presents you the key. Gijsen uses this story, amongst others, to show visitors different perspectives on the topic of changing social dynamics and the power of possession.

The space

The riso-printed manual Gijsen illustrated shows a recognizable relation to the space she created. The distinctive design language she developed over the years by making many prints and posters, forms a direct inspiration for the shape of the eventual workspace Gijsen designed for the workshop. The table in the workshop consists of 149 ceramic tiles, each one is unique. Some tiles have an imprint which shows a technical drawing off the inside of a lock. The shelves cary the same element, with imprints of keys. This creates a tactile element that invites people to touch the objects and to have a seat at the table, follow the instructions and alternatively open these spatial puzzles.

Image List

Filename	Caption	Credit
manual_1693953828.jpg	the lock picking manual, tools and locks	Layla Gijsen
layla-gijsen-dl-sophiaxu-1-kopie_1693991715.jpg	The workshop	Sophia Xu
layla-gijsen-foto-sophiaxu-kopie_1693991760.jpg	ceramic lockbox house and small shelve	Sophia Xu
layla-gijsenl-foto-sophiaxu-kopie_1693991834.jpg	Table detail	Sophia Xu
layla-gijsen-dl-sophiaxu-2-kopie_1693991869.jpg	table detail	Sophia Xu

The images above are included in the ZIP under `/images`.