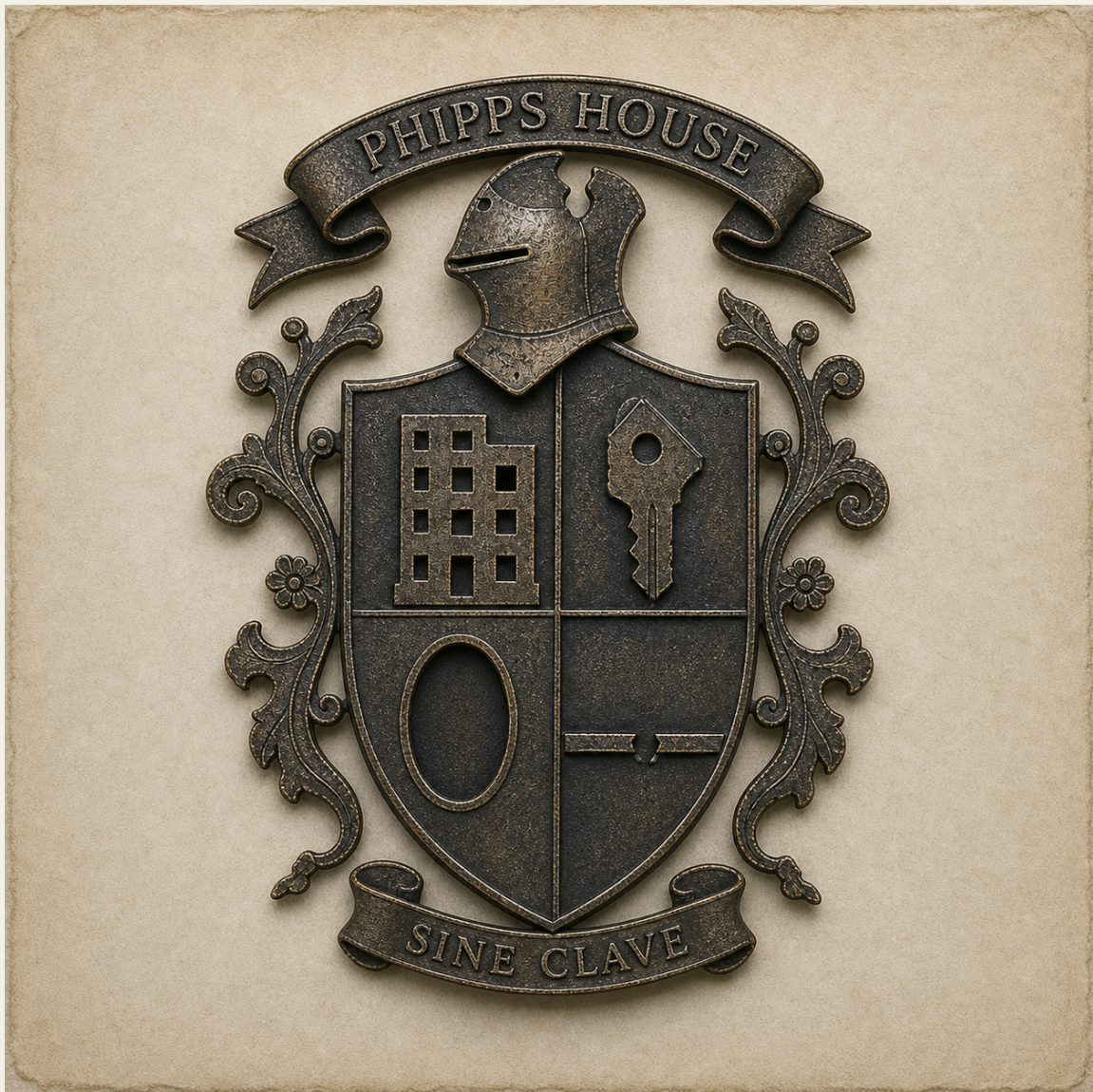


A Key Without a Key

Concept and process work, 2026



Scarlett Xuan Guan

Artist text, AI-generated visual studies, edited CC0 key sounds, composed silence, and a hand-led material process. Dimensions variable.

What remains human?

A Key Without a Key begins with a first London address and the bodily memory of carrying keys after access has been replaced by phones, codes, facial recognition and apps. The object has disappeared from everyday life, but its choreography remains: check, pocket, drop, return, pause at the threshold.

The project tests whether an address can become a portable credential without pretending to be inherited authority. It moves between a two-sided object, a pseudo-heraldic badge, the sound of borrowed keys and a manual process of cutting and recombining written place names.

Central tension

An AI image can arrive before the material decision that gives it meaning. The generated propositions looked complete too quickly. Their fluency became the reason to stop, reject their symbols and return the work to touch, duration, failure and the artist's own decisions.

Public process record

scarlettguan.com/writing/a-credential-in-motion

scarlettguan.com/lab#key-sound-study-title

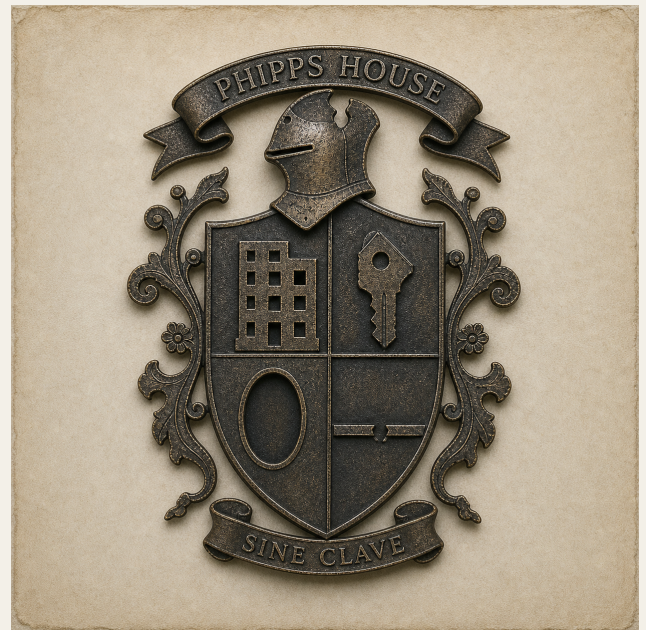
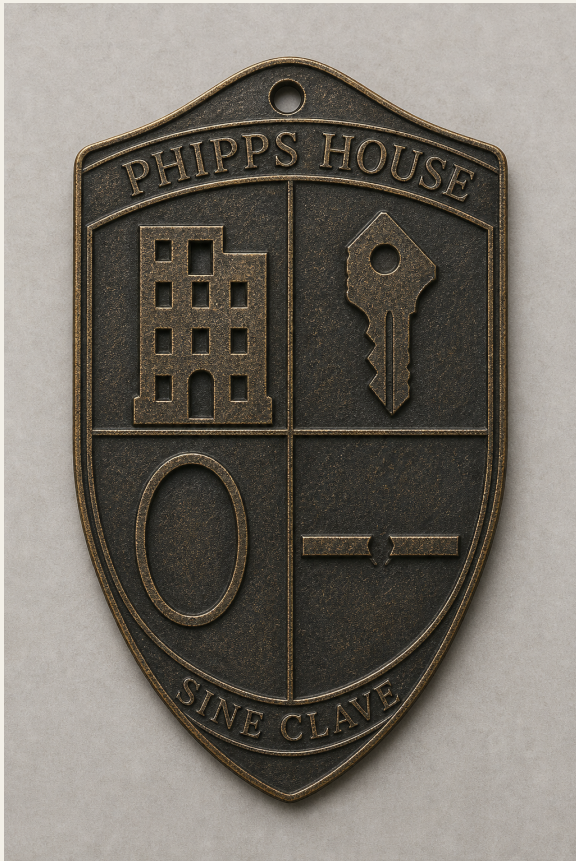
A convincing image is not a decision



AI-generated visual study, 27 July 2026. The work retains only the front-and-reverse structure and the possibility of multiple inscription fields. The marks shown in the image are rejected and are not treated as language, source text or final geometry.

- Retained: two-sided reading, portability, suspension and the relation between access and the body.
- Rejected: invented inscriptions, synthetic material certainty and the appearance of a finished luxury object.
- Human decision: split the address into place units, then test it physically rather than copy the generated marks.

Fluency became a warning



The shield and heraldic device made authority immediately legible, but they also overdetermined the work. Scarlett rejected the claim to lineage, the decorative completeness and the implied fabrication. The images remain as evidence of temptation and refusal.

What survives the rejection: the relation between address and belonging; the difference between access and possession; a front and reverse; a credential that can touch, strike or weigh on the body.

The next image must pass through the hand

01

Print

Set the address as ordinary text. Do not invent a special typeface or imitate Chinese writing.

02

Cut

Separate the address into words, letters and stroke-like fragments. Keep the cutting visible as an embodied edit.

03

Compose and refuse

Assemble one mark at a time, photograph it, move it and preserve failures. The purpose is not speed or elegance.

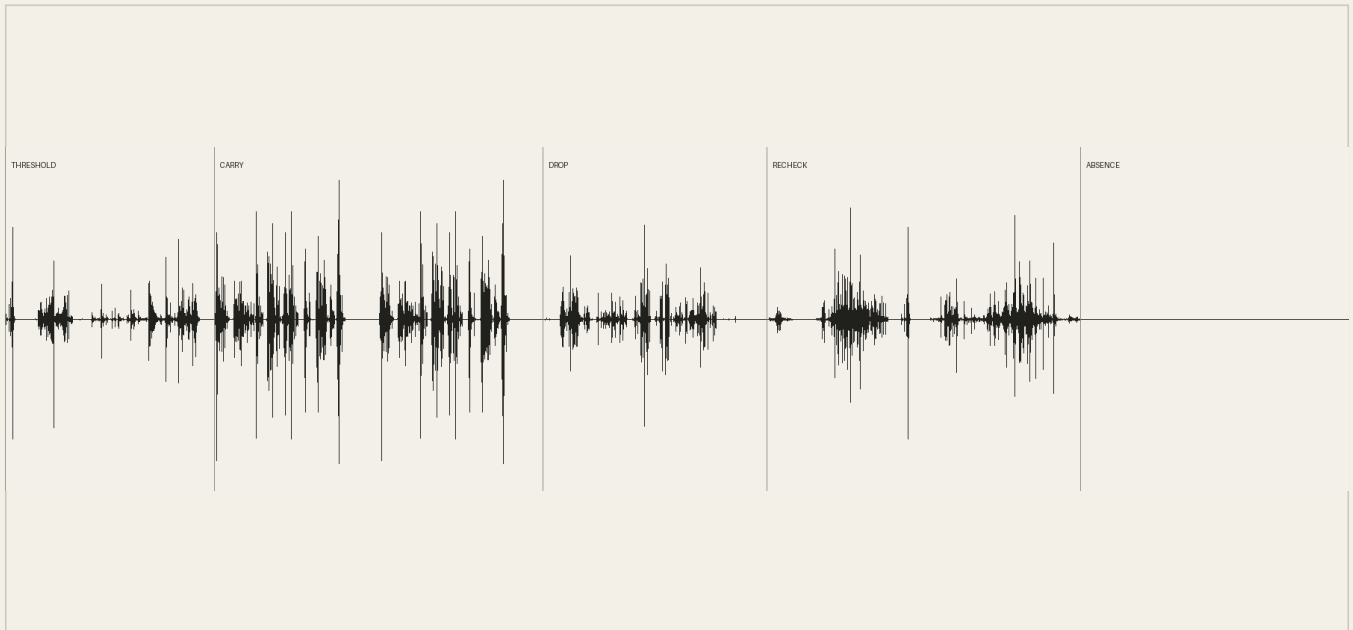
04

Material test

Only a form that survives handling, reversal and discomfort may become a physical object. The AI studies are not fabrication instructions.

This submission presents an ongoing concept and its verified decision process. It does not claim that the proposed object has already been fabricated.

Borrowed keys and composed absence



Borrowed Key Study No. 2: A Credential in Motion, 2026, approximately 90 seconds. Edited from external CC0 recordings and composed silence. It is not Scarlett Guan's field recording.

- Threshold (00:00-00:14): hotel-door unlock and house-key activity.
- Carry (00:14-00:36): repeated carrying passages separated by a pause.
- Drop (00:36-00:51): keys fall, followed by interruption.
- Recheck (00:51-01:12): reversed domestic fragment, renewed unlock and carrying.
- Absence (01:12-01:30): composed silence.

The borrowed recordings make the missing physical key audible. Distance and attribution are part of the work's method, not hidden production details.

Authorship, AI use and rights

AI usage note

AI-assisted image generation was used to make provisional studies of a two-sided pendant, a shield-shaped credential and a heraldic device. Scarlett Guan selected the questions of front and reverse, portability, inscription fields and authority, then rejected the generated marks, inherited symbolism and apparent completeness. The images are retained as process evidence, not final objects or fabrication drawings. The exact model and platform are not claimed because they are not preserved in the current project record.

Rights and source record

- Artist text, concept, selection, rejection and process structure: Scarlett Xuan Guan.
- Generated images: submitted only as clearly labelled visual studies; no third-party logos or live credentials are asserted.
- Sound: edited from four documented Freesound CC0 recordings; composed silence added by the artist-led project process.
- No flat number, door code, active credential or private access information is included.
- Museum objects and other artists informed research but are not reproduced in this submission file.

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