

Out

Bruno Zhu’s commission for IN SITU takes the form of an imposing system of revolving walls using the exhibition space’s central pillars as an axis. Operating like two engaged, interlocking gears, the artist’s site-responsive passageway disrupts the open space, forcefully creating two separate zones. Polarised yet permeable, the two zones are intermittently connected since the central mechanism is designed to be pushed. What initially appears to be a severe division of space is instead a rousing call to challenge it.

The revolving apparatus reveals a set of forces shaping our agency within institutional frameworks, arguably mirroring the politics of division gripping contemporary society in a literal manner. Yet by reconfiguring the space’s architecture to enforce dualities, the artist sets conditions that, paradoxically, privilege touch and proximity. He invites us to turn the revolving walls, and in doing so, we encounter five baby onesies contorted in various positions. They seem frozen in gleeful poses to the informal eye, but a careful observer might notice an English word most parents will not deem age-appropriate.

Once on the other side, a ubiquitous audio notification from the 1990s announces an email has been received. “You’ve got mail!” says the male voice. However, the ambivalence that permeates Zhu’s proposal elicits a misunderstanding: what if the recording is disclosing “You’ve got *male*” instead? Juxtaposing a sexualised slur with a man’s voice delivering mail or maleness, the artist stages a combative encounter between the assignment of gender, programmatic language, and structural binaries.

Out marks a significant development in the artist’s study of the politics of display, having previously proposed an exhibition

design under a licencing agreement in response to a commissioning program and styled another institution as a cladde velvet jewellery box in which artworks were placed. Zhu’s IN SITU commission choreographs the experience of seeing art, privileging art direction as a medium over art production in a practice that already spans fashion design, publishing, and scenography.

Out’s explicit confrontational quality is deceiving in its stubborn simplicity. Rather than upholding a binary worldview, it is an invitation to push through walls to seek potential states of emergence. Movement invites negotiation, which in turn encourages exchange and transformation.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE ARTIST

Bruno Zhu lives and works between Portugal and The Netherlands. His practice employs methods that cut, stitch, and write against normative alignments of knowledge production and social reproduction. Recent projects include exhibitions at Chisenhale Gallery in London, Para Site in Hong Kong, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Veronica in Seattle, Kunsthalle Zurich in Zurich, What Pipeline in Detroit, and Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. Zhu is a member of A Maior, a curatorial program set in the eponymous home furnishings and clothing store in Viseu, Portugal.

EXHIBITED WORKS

Out features a site-responsive system of revolving walls that serve as both a passageway and a structure to support the artworks.

Listen
1989–2025
Audio recording of *You’ve got mail* by Elwood Edwards, motion sensors
Single-channel audio
Courtesy of the artist

Lesson for one to six months old
2023–2025
60 × 150 cm
Five baby onesies, hardware
Courtesy of the artist

M HKA COLLECTION

In 2024 *Public Service Announcement* (2023) entered the M HKA collection thanks to a donation from A Maior. A Maior is a clothing and home furnishings shop in Viseu, Portugal, managed by Bruno Zhu’s parents. Since 2017, an eponymous curatorial program has been managed by the artist using the store as a site where artistic experimentation materialises in accordance with the shop’s seasonality and daily operations. *Public Service Announcement* (2023) is a 350 × 250 cm billboard image depicting Yu Yan, Bruno Zhu’s grandmother. The two regularly collaborate on a series of lookbooks featuring A Maior’s clothing and accessory lines to mark the fashion seasons of the store. In this work, Yu Yan models A Maior cosmetics line and wears a t-shirt featuring the slogan “Born To Serve Cunt Forced To Work Minimum Wage”. Jessica Zhu, Bruno’s sister, was the makeup artist.

The work was commissioned for an exhibition held at Kunstinstituut Melly in Rotterdam and displayed on the institution’s facade from 8 December 2023 until 1 September 2024. The artwork was in dialogue with the well-known billboard *Melly Shum Hates Her Job* (1989) by Canadian artist Ken Lum. Both artworks, though from different generations, feature women of working-class backgrounds and a statement on labour.

IN SITU

This exhibition is part of M HKA’s IN SITU programme, a series of exhibitions focusing on developing new work and projects commissioned for the largest and most atypical space in the museum.

Curator: Anne-Claire Schmitz
Production: Argyri Platsa
Production Assistant: Noemie Brakema
Technical Lead: Hughe Lanoote, Wouter Nys / Spine Design Studio
Installation Team: Bart Slangen, Jochem Vanden Ecker, Evert Wouters
Mediation: Sofie Gregoor
Communication: Katrien Maes, Anujin Magnaijargal, Karen Werkhoven
Graphic Design: Pauline Scharmann

M HKA would like to thank Bruno Zhu for his commitment and generosity throughout the development of this exhibition.

The revolving wall system was produced by M HKA’s technical team and Wouter Nys / Spine Design Studio based on instructions and sketches made by the artist. The piece’s current materialisation is a technical interpretation of the artist’s drawing.

Out is commissioned and produced by M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Belgium and the Mondriaan Fonds.

EVENTS

Artist talk by Bruno Zhu
Programmed as part of FRONT ROW, a series of artist talks jointly organised by M HKA and NICC.
Thursday 27 March, 19:00

Fiction non Fiction
Public programme: lectures and publication launch
Spring 2025
(practical information and programme of guest contributors will be announced soon)

PUBLICATIONS AT THE M HKA SHOP

Retail Vérité
Published in 2023 by San Seriffe, Amsterdam, €14
Retail Vérité is the outcome of a writing workshop organised by A Maior at San Serriffe. It is A Maior’s first novella, set in a fictional shopping mall in the city centre of Amsterdam.


Fiction Non Fiction, Volume 1
Published in 2024 by Chisenhale Gallery and Mousse Publishing, €18
A series of readers edited by Bruno Zhu pairing voices engaged in literary criticism with the material histories of labour, gender, and race. Each volume proposes a close reading of fictitious and theoretical works to understand how identity politics have been narrativised by liberal institutions across space and time. Volume 1 reflects specifically on notions of space and traces the effects of colonial projects that still employ extractive practices today.

25.01.25–11.05.25

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BRUNO ZHU

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