Bruno Zhu. Belas Artes

The exhibition follows 'Licence to Live', an ongoing project centred on a license agreement authored by Bruno Zhu that details a step-by-step guide to exhibition design. The principle behind the agreement is similar to contracts seen in entertainment and publishing industries: purchasing the license grants the licensee permission to enact the exhibition model. In consultation with the artist, the design guidelines can be customized to fit future exhibition sites.

The license was first presented in 2024 at Chisenhale Gallery, in London, who had commissioned Zhu to develop a project. While no objects were displayed at the time, the exhibition design positioned itself both as an 'installation' and a space that could accommodate objects from museum collections.

The agreement provides a template for four exhibition spaces where colour, ornamentation and spatial orientation define one's interaction with them. These rooms display objects from the CAM Collection and historical mannequins from Museu Nacional do Traje selected by the artist.

The room where the spatial orientation was reconfigured – the entrance door transforms into a ceiling, a floor appears on the opposing wall, and the surface beneath our feet resembles a wall – borrows a modernist vernacular nodding to elements of the Gulbenkian Foundation's head office such as its signature striped concrete wall and opal glass lamps.

The inclusion of artworks from the CAM Collection prompted a review of their conservation status. In some cases, an update of their inventory records was made as with the tapestry by José de Almada Negreiros and two plaster busts by Yvonne Mortier. Detailed information about these procedures were added to the works' captions.

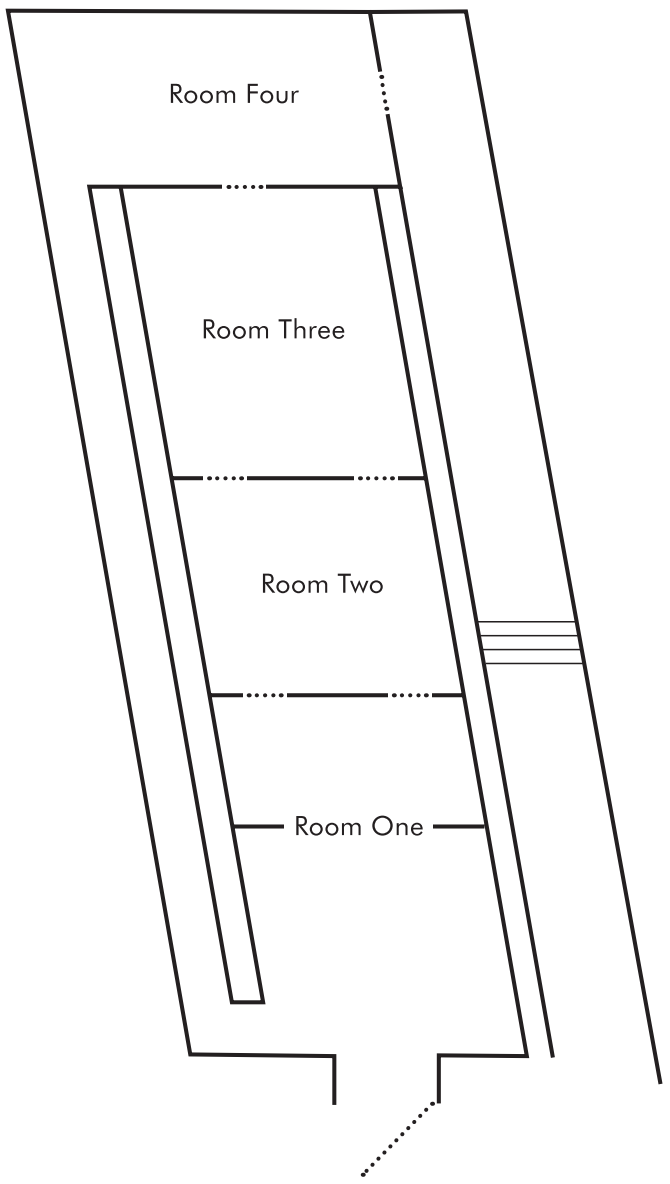
Belas Artes is complemented by a wall text unrelated to the exhibition itself. As per Zhu's open-ended invitation to describe another exhibition, we chose to describe the 'total installation' by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, a remarkable work presented in this exact gallery space at CAM in 1995.

The second volume of Bruno Zhu's reader series *Fiction Non Fiction* is being published in parallel to the exhibition. The reader surveys the role of dress in colonial and postcolonial contexts.



Project Space

Bruno Zhu's guidelines to stage the exhibition rooms



Room One

— This room is a recreated period room lying sideways.
— All objects on display in this room should follow the coordinates defined by the decor of this room.
— The design of the room is composed of three primary components: wallpaper, custom flooring and ceiling decor.
— Each primary element of the decor should be discussed and decided between the Artist and the licensee. At CAM, the virtual floor is carpeted and the ceiling painted with sand paint. The carpet and opal glass ceiling lamps were salvaged from the renovation of the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum.
— The design of the room sets the custom virtual floor vertically, on a wall.
— The design of the room sets the custom ceiling vertically, on the wall opposite to the custom ceiling.
— The design of the room sets the wallpaper on the remaining walls and floor.
— Artworks or objects on display should follow the orientations determined by the recreated room.
— A floor-based object or artwork should be mounted on the custom virtual floor.
— A wall-based object or artwork should be mounted on the walls lying sideways.
— A ceiling-based object or artwork should be mounted on the custom ceiling.
— No object can be displayed without following the orientations set by the decor.

Room Two

— This room is composed of four custom-made vitrines.
— All objects or artworks on display in this room should be placed inside the custom built vitrines.
— The vitrines can be arranged in several ways.
— The interior of each vitrine should be fully mirrored, and lit by built-in spotlights.
— The face of each vitrine should feature a large opening in the shape of a playing card suit – a club, spade, heart and diamond. The openings should not have a protective surface (i.e. glass).
— Supporting structures – small plinths or shelves – can be incorporated into the design of the vitrines. These should also be fabricated with mirrored surfaces.
— Objects or artworks displayed inside the vitrines can protrude out of the opening, if this effect is desired by the licensee.
— No object can be displayed outside of the four vitrines in this room.

Room Three

— All surfaces in this room, except for the ceiling, are painted.
— All north-facing surfaces are painted in Vermilion (cinnabar).
— All south-facing surfaces are painted in Scheele's Green.
— All east-facing surfaces are painted in Naples Yellow.
— All surfaces facing west are painted in Cobalt Blue.
— The floor is painted in Perkin's mauve. Given the duration of the exhibition at CAM, a polyvinyl flooring was chosen to ensure the longevity of this surface.
— Any structures necessary for the display of objects or works of art – plinths, shelving, etc. – should also follow the surface colour code above.
— Objects or works of art displayed in this room, composed of the colours listed above or similar hues, should be placed on the painted planes accordingly.
— No objects or works of art with colours and hues differing from the colour code can be displayed in this room.
— No moving-image artworks may be displayed in this room.

Room Four

— All objects or artworks, animate or inanimate, on display in this room have to sport a bow.
— The bow is custom-made for each object on display.
— A single design will be replicated respecting the scale of the objects or artworks on display.
— The design of the bow should be discussed and developed by the Artist and the licensee.
— The design of the bow should take into account conservation aspects – if dealing with a delicate object or artworks; and mobility issues – if displayed or worn by an animate/kinetic object or artwork.
— Supporting vitrines/plinths/cases can be used in order to protect fragile objects. In this instance, the bow would go over – wrap around – such protective measures.
— No object can be displayed in this room without a bow.

Doors

The rooms are connected by doors. Each door should have its surfaces painted according to the colour code set in Room Three.

— North side of the door is painted in Vermilion (cinnabar).
— South side of the door is painted in Scheele's Green.
— East side of the door is painted in Naples Yellow.
— West side of the door is painted in Cobalt Blue.
— The top side of the door is painted in Perkin's mauve.