

“I’ve been kissing things lately,” Bruno tells me on a Zoom call. At his recent solo show at Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, he smooched the wall text with a bright red lipstick; for a fundraising edition for the Chisenhale Gallery in London, he kissed each edition’s matte in a different shade. For future work, he’s thinking about kiss marks as wayfinding, adding up to an arrow, pointing toward the exit. Experience shows that a kiss can mean nothing, and it can mean everything. It can also be devastating: there’s the kiss-off, the kiss-and-tell, the kiss of death. A kiss can give you cold sores. In Bruno’s work, the point is not to “reveal” the pernicious underside of banalities like kisses (as if we didn’t know!). Rather, the point is to grasp, and even weaponize, the heady contradictions that add up to the dumb, flat things that appear to us as commodities—and to reflect that flatness back into the subject.

Bruno’s work is pitched against subtlety, against withholding. For contemporary art, this is a breath of fresh air. At Veronica in Seattle, he stitched oversized men’s shirtsleeves in the shapes of letters that spilled from the wall across the floor: G, A, Y. Get it? In case you didn’t, on the adjoining wall there was an accompanying exclamation mark, made of two skirts—one long and outstretched, above a short one tailored into a circle to make the “point.” More shirtsleeves appeared on the Grand Palais’s mezzanine for Art Basel Paris 2024, this time in myriad patterns, spelling out “VOILÀ!”—a mixed message that loomed over the entire fair. Elsewhere, he has stapled rows of sealed condoms into walls, making the shapes of crosses and peace signs. The lube leaks out over time, and the synthetic smell drifts. These works are forward-dated to match the condoms’ expiration dates (e.g. 2024–2027), now voided by punctures.

In accounts of his practice, Bruno’s training in fashion design is often one of the first things mentioned. But what does this fact say, really? On the one hand, this background can suggest airy outsidership: high art still tells itself that it’s somehow less vulgar than fashion, but the artist who unites the two can play it both ways. On the other hand, there’s a serious commitment to craft, as in his series of oversized Patek Philippe watches which are functional, despite being made of fabric. They are fitted with quartz clock movements, which are configured to run backwards. These two

aspects of the “fashion-artist” are familiar enough. But with Bruno, the straddling of fields doesn’t elevate something profane (design) into something sacred (art)—in fact, if anything, he chafes at art’s supposed profundity, its assumption that nuance and meta-questioning have inherent worth. “I’m not ‘interested in’ shopping, I shop,” Bruno tells me. “I’m not ‘interested in’ fucking, I fuck.” This economy of means, this brutal bluntness, reminds me that nuance is conventionally the privilege of native speakers in native lands. For people struggling to communicate through unfamiliar tools, effectiveness outweighs eloquence. This can produce its own kind of poetics.

With recent projects, Bruno has come to think about artists’ function as service providers for institutions: how artists fill a slot in the calendar, and how they substantiate line items in the budget. For his 2024 exhibition at Chisenhale, *License to Live*, he took the commission as an opportunity to create an exhibition design template, rather than produce new objects. The work itself is a license agreement which is available for other institutions or individuals to adopt for a fee, which kicks back to Chisenhale and the artist. The document lays out rules for how to display artworks in a series of four rooms, each with its own character, constructed but empty in the Chisenhale show. One room requires objects to match an aggressive polychrome color scheme; another requires fabric bows to be wrapped around every item in the room, including any gallery attendants. The third contains an intense four-sided mirrored vitrine, each side bearing a cavity shaped as one of the four playing card suits. The fourth is a historical period room flipped on its side: parquet on one wall, ceiling molding across from it, and ornate wallpaper in between. I’m taken with the notion of an artist-made period room whose period is now, or the future; it reminds me of El Lissitzky’s fabled *Abstract Cabinet* (1928) in Hanover. But maybe my favorite thing about this project is that the contract stipulates Bruno’s participation and facilitation in any future implementation. A different version of the license agreement could set up a means of passive income, like royalties. Here, instead, the artist doubles down on a commitment to future work.

Service providers also solve problems, seeking maximum impact through minimal means. Bruno’s exhibition at Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, *Out* (2025), attempts to solve a problem of architecture. A kite-shaped gallery has two thin columns in its center, support-

ing an overhanging room above; past the columns, the ceiling opens out to double height. Nothing about the space is not arbitrary. What can be done? Bruno decided to turn the two columns into axles for two sets of revolving gallery walls, each in a plus-sign configuration, exaggerating the room’s latent split. The walls didn’t revolve on their own—viewers had to push them, in a cheeky conflation of participatory art and coerced labor. And each wall pushed the other, sort of like gears, which degraded through contact over the course of the show. All the moving walls were blank except for one, which had five baby onesies pinned to it, each posed whimsically like a cherub. They also spelled out the word WHORE. Those who pushed through to the other side found an empty room; a motion detector greeted them with the classic AOL sound bite, “You’ve got mail.” You’ve got male?

If the exhibitions tend toward the minimal, they find a counterpoint in Bruno’s curatorial project, A Maior, which he runs out of his family’s home goods store by the same name in the outskirts of Viseu, Portugal. The store itself has the visual busyness typical of any down-market emporium: the bizarre discontinuities of the global marketplace are on full display, softened and made singular by the care, imagination, and time that goes into running any family-owned shop. Since 2016, Bruno has overseen subtle insertions of other signals into this already rich tableau: artist videos play on a massive, outdated flatscreen TV; angels once appeared above the shelves, cardboard box effigies resembling the store’s staff; tucked behind clothing racks are life-size photo cutouts of fit pics by Bruno’s friends, obscured by garments unless they sell out. He collaborates with his grandmother Yu Yan, who lives in China, on photo editorials where she models the latest clothes, jewelry, and makeup from the store. In Rotterdam, at Kunstinstituut Melly, he hung a banner depicting her on the building’s exterior in a red top with black bold text. “BORN TO SERVE CUNT, FORCED TO WORK MINIMUM WAGE”: destiny versus fate, battling it out in the marketplace.

Bruno



Zhu



Out, 2025 Photo: Kristien Daem Courtesy: the artist and MHKA, Antwerp
(pp. 350–351)



License to Live, 2024 Commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London
 Photo: Andy Keate Courtesy: the artist and Chisenhale Gallery, London (p. 352)
True!, 2024 Photo: Jueqian Fang Courtesy: the artist and Veronica, Seattle (p. 353)

