

WADDINGTON CUSTOT

PRESS RELEASE

Acclaimed Artist and Designer Jiang Qiong Er Brings 'Gardiens du Temps' to Waddington Custot for her UK Debut

The creative force behind SHANG XIA – dubbed the 'Hermès of China' – reimagines ancient universal mythologies and endangered women's scripts for a 21st-century audience

Friday 7 November – Tuesday 23 December, 2025



Jiang Qiong-Er, *The Twelve Calls*, exhibited at Musée Guimet, Paris, 2024.

- Waddington Custot brings the **best of contemporary Chinese art & design** to London with 'Gardiens du Temps', a first-of-its-kind exhibition of **limited-edition furniture, sculptures and installations** by globally renowned designer Jiang Qiong Er.
- Design is thriving worldwide: recent **record-breaking auction results** and new collectors are fuelling unprecedented demand. 'Gardiens du Temps' leans on this momentum with works that blend **heritage and innovation**, crafted from **exceptional materials using centuries-old artisanal techniques**.
- Jiang Qiong Er is the granddaughter of pioneering painter Jiang Xuanyi and daughter of Xing Tonghe, the visionary architect of the Shanghai Museum, representing a **rich creative lineage**.
- **Co-founder of SHANG XIA, a brand launched in partnership with Hermès**, Qiong Er has redefined contemporary Chinese luxury design on a global scale.
- The exhibition features **rare, artisanal techniques** such as metal embroidery and bamboo marquetry, a traditional craft from Zhejiang dating back to the Qing Dynasty, reimagined for a 21st-century audience.

Waddington Custot is proud to present 'Gardiens du Temps', the first UK exhibition by acclaimed Chinese artist and designer Jiang Qiong Er, who is internationally recognised for bridging traditional Chinese craftsmanship with contemporary design. Coming at a moment when design is commanding record prices and attracting a global collector base, 'Gardiens du Temps' captures the energy of this thriving market while offering a meditation on heritage, renewal and cultural memory.

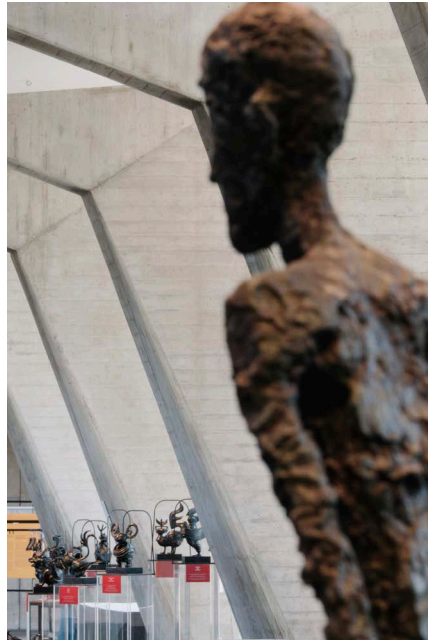
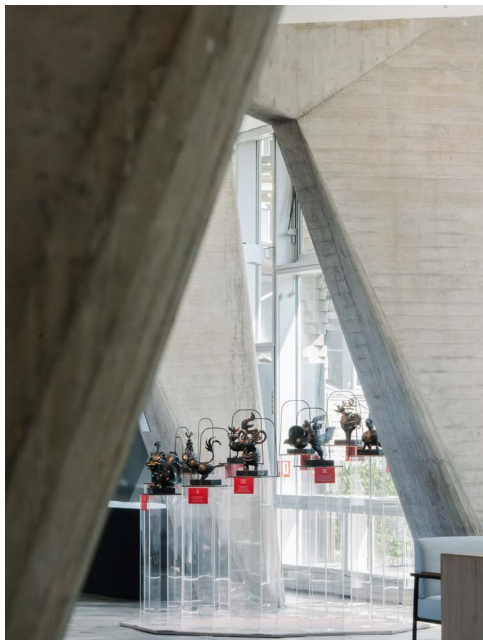
The exhibition features sculptural installations, wax paintings and design objects that reimagine and blends ancient Chinese, Mayan, Egyptian and Indian mythologies and cultural symbols from around the world through a distinctly modern lens. Qiong Er's practice celebrates the dialogue between past and future, using exceptional materials and artisanal techniques to create works that are as culturally resonant as they are visually arresting.



XII Calls on the facade of the Musée Guimet, Paris, June 2024.

At the centre of the exhibition is 'XII Calls', a bronze installation inspired by mythical creatures from ancient civilisations. Each figure embodies a universal value: Bravery, Wisdom, Equality, Nature, Fraternity, Exploration, Time, Inclusion, Benevolence, Authenticity, Peace and Freedom. These hybrid, syncretic beings form a contemporary bestiary addressing urgent questions about cultural preservation in a rapidly evolving world. First unveiled on the façade of the Guimet Museum in Paris in 2024, one set of 'XII Calls' has since been acquired for UNESCO's permanent collection, displayed at the organisation's Paris headquarters alongside Alberto Giacometti's 'Walking Man', testament to the enduring, universal values represented by Qiong Er's designs. The acquisition reflects Qiong Er's inclusion in other prestigious permanent collections worldwide, such as the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum. As Qiong Er explains:

"Art is a gentle form of cultural dialogue. It transcends borders and ideologies, reconnecting people through emotion and symbolism... It can be heard by the world without having to be translated."



XII Calls at the UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, June 2025, alongside Alberto Giacometti's 'Walking Man'.

In 'XII Calls – Wax Paintings', a series of wax paintings debuting in London, Qiong Er extends her exploration of time and transformation into wax for the first time. Each work begins as a charcoal drawing, transferred to a silicone plate and overlaid with molten wax at around 80 °C, repeated dozens or even hundreds of times. Through this accretive process the image is absorbed, inverted, and embedded within the wax, whose white expanse becomes the artist's 'new paper.' For Qiong Er, wax is both medium and metaphor: a substance capable of solidifying and melting, moving backward and forward, holding time in suspension. In these works, memories and emotions are not fixed to a surface but preserved within a luminous, tactile depth, where image and temporality converge.

Another highlight is 'HER VOICE', a powerful installation dedicated to *Nüshu*, an endangered women's script of Hunan province. Translating literally as 'women's script', *Nüshu* was the only writing system in the world created and used exclusively by women, offering them a secret mode of communication in a patriarchal society. Taking impetus from this powerful symbol of bravery, the work takes inspiration from other Chinese, calligraphic methods: a cursive calligraphy that symbolised freedom, the power of authenticity from 'Oracle Bone Script', and the beauty and core strength from 'Seal Script', Qiong Er creates a 21st-Century *Nüshu*. By integrating its flowing characters into wood-and-carbon-fibre cabinetry, Qiong Er reclaims and amplifies a tradition once hidden from public view. Subtly tilted shelves within the cabinetry challenge conventional design, continuing the script's tradition of coded resilience and communication.

Qiong Er's unique ability to fuse heritage techniques with modern innovation is perhaps most famously embodied in SHANG XIA, the luxury design brand she co-founded in 2010 with Hermès. SHANG XIA has become synonymous with contemporary Chinese craftsmanship on a global stage, known for its futuristic textures, classically tailored silhouettes and daring details. Like SHANG XIA, 'Gardiens du Temps' demonstrates Qiong Er's conviction that tradition and modernity can be reconciled.

In works such as 'Whisper Cloud', a display of bamboo marquetry panels, screens and tables, Qiong Er revives a craft first prized by China's literati and introduced to the imperial palace during the Qing Dynasty. This intricate process begins with the careful winter selection of mature bamboo, followed by precise cutting into thin strips and the masterful notching that transforms them into relief designs of classical elegance. These materials, transformed by centuries-old skills and contemporary imagination, are central to the spirit of 'Gardiens du Temps'.



Jiang Qiong Er, *Whisper Cloud*, Table, 2025

In 'Gardiens du Temps', Qiong Er reminds audiences that ancient symbols and forgotten scripts are not static relics but evolving languages. Her design practice offers a powerful cultural dialogue that "transcends borders and ideologies, reconnecting people through emotion and symbolism", in the artist's words.

The exhibition also marks a significant milestone for Waddington Custot. While the gallery has long expressed interest in the design market, having previously showcased works by Pablo Reinoso and Bernar Venet's sculptural furniture, 'Gardiens du Temps' is its first dedicated, design-focused exhibition. This

landmark presentation reflects Waddington Custot's commitment to elevating design, building on Stéphane Custot's deep connection to the field. Custot co-founded the prestigious PAD fair in Paris in 1998, a pioneering platform for collectible design. By presenting Jiang Qiong Er's groundbreaking work, the gallery reaffirms its vision of bringing the best of Chinese design to an international audience, while highlighting the rising influence of contemporary design within today's art market.

About Jiang Qiong Er

Jiang Qiong Er (b.1976, Shanghai, China) is an interdisciplinary artist, designer, and cultural ambassador. Qiong Er's practice draws on China's centuries-old craftsmanship traditions, blending them with contemporary aesthetics and techniques. Born into a family of artists and creators, from the age of six, Qiong Er was taught traditional ink painting and calligraphy by renowned Chinese masters. Qiong Er's grandfather, Jiang Xuan Yi, was one of the first Chinese artists to travel and study abroad, pioneering Western art in China, while her father, Xing Tong He, is a well-known Chinese architect. After graduating from Tongji University's design school, Qiong Er studied furniture and interior design at the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. After returning to China, she forged a career as an entrepreneurial artist and designer across painting, furniture, jewellery, graphic and interior design, bridging Western approaches with Eastern traditions.

In 2008, Qiong Er was approached by Hermès CEO Patrick Thomas to work on the launch of a new Chinese luxury brand. In 2009, she co-founded SHANG XIA, a contemporary lifestyle brand, in partnership with Hermès, serving as artistic director for ten years. During the same period, the French government recognised her contribution to cultural exchanges between China and France, appointing her a Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres de la République Française (2013) and Chevalier dans l'Ordre National du Mérite de la République Française (2016). Alongside this, Qiong Er was awarded Cavaliere dell' Ordine della Stella della Solidarietà Italiana by the Italian government in 2023. In 2024, she continued developing her artistic language, exploring the essential and metaphysical issues in her practice through her solo exhibition *Guardians of Time* at the Guimet Museum, Paris. As part of the exhibition, Qiong Er developed *XII Calls*, a set of sculptures that draws on Chinese, Egyptian, Mayan, and Indian mythologies and modern technology. *XII Calls* was acquired for UNESCO's permanent collection.

Qiong Er's art and design work is also part of The British Museum, London; The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences, Sydney; and the Shanghai Museum East. In 2024, Qiong Er curated and showed works in two exhibitions, *Nature, the Muse!*, *Maison & Objet Design Factory*, Hong Kong, and *Jeux de Mains*, for Comité Colbert, Zhang Yuan W4, Shanghai.

About Waddington Custot

Waddington Custot was formed through the partnership of French art dealer Stéphane Custot and long-time London art dealer Leslie Waddington, in 2010. Located in Cork Street since 1958, formerly as Waddington Galleries, the gallery has a rich heritage and an international reputation for quality and expertise in works by modern and contemporary masters, with a particular focus on monumental sculpture. The gallery now has three locations internationally: London since 1958, Dubai since 2016, and with a new gallery opening in Paris in October 2025.

Notes to Editors

Title: *Gardiens du Temps*, by Jiang Qiong Er
Venue: Waddington Custot, 11 Cork Street, London
Dates: Friday 7 November–23 December 2025
Private View: Thursday 6 November, 6–8pm

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