

press release



From September 12 to October 26, 2025,
Le Clézio Gallery presents *The sun is at the door*

A retrospective exhibition of
Li Shuang

Opening

Friday, **September 12**, 2025, from 4pm to 7pm

157, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré Paris 8
in the presence of the artist

Le Clézio

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A part of the Stars Collective in 1980. In the front row: Qu Leilei, Li Shuang, Zhong Acheng, and Ma Desheng. In the second row: Wang Keping, Yan Li, Huang Rui, and Chen Yansheng. Photo © Helmut Opletal / AC Films, Inc.

Paris — Growing up on the margins of History, Li Shuang never accepted to endure her fate. Fighting against constraints and breaking taboos, the artist has continuously challenged norms and refused imposed roles, through a body of work she has shared with the world for over forty years.

Echoing the group exhibition *Freedom of Art. The Stars, Beijing, 1979*, presented at the Centre Pompidou in late 2024–early 2025, *The Sun is at the door* retrospectively traces the artistic, political, philosophical, and spiritual journey of an artist nurtured by a dual culture, both Eastern and Western.

A life path that invites us not to reflect on “who we are,” but rather on “how we became what we are.”

1 - Shadows Speak in Colors

(from 1956 to 1983)

Born in 1957 at the university hospital of Tsinghua University at the crossroads of two opposing lineages (a paternal branch rooted in the authoritarian and conservative Mandarin tradition, and a maternal Tibetan lineage enamored with modernity and the West), Li Shuang grew up in Beijing during the “Great Leap Forward” and the “Cultural Revolution,” marked by turmoil and repression. During her adolescence and youth, her fiery spirit defied the storm’s breath. Driven by a fierce determination to challenge the constraints of her time, she began early on to reflect on notions of identity, culture, and truth.

In the summer of 1978, a group of young artists gathered independently in Beijing to defy collectivism and the official ideology of socialist realism. From this upheaval was born Xingxing (The Stars), a collective of twenty-three artists including Ma Desheng, Wang Keping, Huang Rui, and Li Shuang — the only female founding member of the groupe.



Li Shuang, "Freedom", 1980, woodblock print on rice paper, 16 x 16.5 cm. Ed. 2/30. Photo © Li Shuang.
Courtesy Le Clézio Gallery.



Li Shuang, "Freedom", 1980, original carved woodblock, 16 x 16.5 cm. Unique piece. Photo © Li Shuang.
Courtesy Le Clézio Gallery.

On September 16, 1979, their initiative culminated with the first public art action in Beijing: nearly one hundred and fifty works were hung on the outer fences of the park housing the city's Museum of Fine Arts. Li Shuang notably presented ***Romance in the Rain*** (雨中情, 1977).

Self-taught, she began exploring woodblock printing in 1980, guided by the advice of Ma Desheng. She carved incisive subjects into wood, printed with ink on delicate rice paper sheets. Becoming an emblem of the Stars movement, ***Freedom*** (挣脱, 1980) depicts a muscular, tortured body emerging from the shadows and pushing aside the bars of its cage, facing an outside bathed in light. Her art—symbolic, direct, and expressive—is deeply marked by questioning the body, the self, gender, and fate.

But very quickly, her destiny collided harshly with the political power. On September 19, 1981, Li Shuang was arrested in downtown Beijing by the Public Security Bureau of the Ministry of the Interior, then imprisoned until July 28, 1983, in a "reeducation" camp.

Officially, she was accused of violating the law forbidding any intimate relationship with a foreigner—in this case, a French diplomat stationed in Beijing, Emmanuel Bellefroid. Between the silence of cold walls and the deafening roar of interrogations, her art whispered. Drawing became for her an act of survival and resistance. The vivid and colorful drawings, made with oil pastels, felt-tip pens, and graphite pencil on paper—such as ***Combing*** (梳头, 1983)—burn with a desire for freedom, while bearing the marks of her silencing.

"I paid for The Stars. For weeks, I was only interrogated about this movement. The police wanted me to denounce them. I was tortured, placed in total darkness—in what I believe was a well, which reeked of everything you can imagine—for a duration I estimate to be twenty-five hours. But I never signed the papers they presented to me. For the first year, I was not allowed any visits. I was only released after two years, after François Mitterrand raised my case with Deng Xiaoping." she tells us.

II. Coming to Terms with Exile

(from 1983 to the late 2010s)

Upon her arrival in France on November 28, 1983, Li Shuang reunited with Emmanuel Bellefroid, with whom she shared her life and married in 1984. It was during this period that her first collages were born — **See You Soon** (回头见, 1984) — made from the many wrapping papers from wedding gifts. She cut, tore, and fragmented them to recompose bodies and scenes of life, sometimes imbued with lightness, sometimes with symbolism. “The universe leads our lives to be constructed like collages in which colors, textures, countries mingle; so many varied elements that juxtapose, overlap, and superimpose,” she says.

Nourished by aesthetic and philosophical research on Chinese, Indian, and Tibetan cultures, as well as Zen, meditation, and the myths of ancient civilizations, Li Shuang then quickened her step toward a life path filled with spirituality, seeking to soothe her acute feelings of solitude, exile, and cultural wandering.



Li Shuang, “See You Soon”, 1984, cut and pasted papers on paper, 45 x 65 cm. Unique piece.
Photo © Li Shuang. Courtesy of Le Clézio Gallery.

At the end of the 1990s—a period she describes as both blurry and complex—appeared a series of stylized portraits of women, depicted in bust form, hieratic, with fixed gazes and closed mouths. With **Gazes Turned Inward** (反观内照, 2002), the moment calls for introspective silence and observation of the world. The Word becomes superfluous for her: only painting now speaks.

In 2002, Li Shuang suddenly experienced a near-death event. This marked a turning point in her life: she then decided to gradually withdraw from the art scene to catch her breath and regenerate her spirit in the open air, in the countryside. Far from a radical break with the world—and even though she grew increasingly wary of the art market despite her renown in the Parisian scene—these fifteen years of withdrawal became an opportunity for a slow alchemical reconciliation with herself, at the heart of a purifying nature.



Li Shuang, “The Harvest”, 1984, cut and pasted papers on paper, 30 x 50 cm. Unique piece.
Photo © Li Shuang. Courtesy of Le Clézio Gallery.



Li Shuang, "Gazes Turned Inward", 2002, oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm. Unique piece.
Photo © Li Shuang. Courtesy Le Clézio Gallery.



Li Shuang, "Time", 1982, pastel, felt-tip pen and graphite pencil on paper, 16 x 16.5 cm. Unique piece.
Photo © Li Shuang. Courtesy Le Clézio Gallery.

III. The Mirror of the World

(Now and tomorrow)

Behind a black curtain, a secret room is revealed. A traditional armchair invites us to sit, to enter a suspended time between memory and introspection. Facing oneself, a dialogue between past and present.

The physical and psychic confinement of the past embodied by **Time** (时间, 1982) transforms: it is no longer about telling a personal tragedy, but about traversing the deep layers of being and Life through Li Shuang's new colorful pictorial chapter.

Through the presence of mythological figures — deities from the Chinese Shan Hai Jing, Shiva, and the Egyptian and Greco-Roman pantheons — the artist summons universal archetypes, timeless beings, between visible and invisible, to explore the structures of our human psyche and our energetic and spiritual dimension.

"When I was young, every time a work was completed and the momentum faded, I would fall into confusion: why did I paint this way? What had I truly represented? I relentlessly tried to explain the image, but never succeeded. In truth, it was only my ego, wearing itself out in vain attempts to define a universe that exceeded it.

It took me many years to glimpse a meaning. Until the day the gaze of death fell upon me: then, my once-clouded thoughts became clear. I finally understood that the 'possibility of rebirth' had never been far away. What matters is being able to recognize that presence before it imposes itself—because it is always ready to offer us that gift, if only we are willing.

And so, I immersed myself in this unknown universe, like a deep sea, carried by the wave of creative impulse, without judgment, without analysis—free, light, impetuous. That, to me, is the true grace of art.

For me, everything—now—is only just beginning."

Li Shuang

Born in 1957, Beijing, China. Lives and works in Fontainebleau, France.



Portrait of the artist © Chinese New Art

Li Shuang, born in 1957 in Beijing, comes from a family of richly diverse cultural origins: her mother descends from uprooted Tibetan nobility exiled to the coastal province of Shandong, while her father belonged to a family of intellectuals persecuted during the successive political campaigns in China.

This mix shaped both her resilience and her artistic journey. Briefly a set designer at the National Youth Theatre, she was dismissed in 1979 for joining the very first Chinese avant-garde art group, the Stars, and for participating in its artistic and political actions.

In 1981, she was arrested by the police on the charge of cohabitation with a foreigner. During her incarceration, she refused to denounce her fellow members of the Stars group, which led to a two-year prison sentence, half of which she spent in solitary confinement. Shortly before her sentence was completed, she was released following an intervention by French President François Mitterrand.

In 1984, she moved to Paris to marry her fiancé, Emmanuel Bellefroid, and settled there permanently. After her release, the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs adopted new, more flexible regulations regarding marriages between Chinese citizens and foreigners.

Since 2007, Li Shuang has lived in a small forest village near Fontainebleau, where she finds renewed inspiration in the nature she holds dear. After 2020, she published several books in Chinese, including *Celebrating Death and Return Across the Seas of Sand*.

Her uncensored autobiography, *Shuang 爽*, published to great success in China in 2013, bears witness to her courage in the face of adversity, while her artistic vision continues to illuminate her path:

“Art, a gift from the stars, carries within it an awakened consciousness—a flame to preserve in every moment of creation.”

Founders



Portrait d'Antoine et Yan Le Clézio. Photo : Laurence M. Courtesy Le Clézio Gallery.

Antoine + Yan Le Clézio

Le Clézio Gallery, founded in 2023, embodies a deep commitment to art and intercultural dialogue.

The gallery is dedicated to promoting artistic voices from all backgrounds, regardless of medium or origin, celebrating the richness and diversity of contemporary creation.

Antoine and Yan Le Clézio, whose paths and cultures intersect in meaningful ways, are the driving forces behind this initiative.

Antoine, originally from Brittany, studied art history with a research master's in medieval art and a professional master's in contemporary art. His experience as a gallery manager in Paris's Saint-Germain-des-Prés district allowed

him to engage with a broad range of artistic practices across the European and Asian markets, while building a valuable professional network.

Yan, born in China, moved to France at the age of 19. In 2015, she founded her own translation and interpretation studio, working with high-profile political figures such as former French presidents Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande. In 2020, she co-founded an art curating company with a partner based in Dubai, organizing exhibitions in collaboration with museums in France, South Korea, and China — a testament to her commitment to fostering meaningful cultural exchange.

Le Clézio Gallery



Vue de la façade de Le Clézio Gallery. Photo : Bruno Pellarin. Courtesy Le Clézio Gallery.

Sensitive to notions of impermanence, memory, and transculturality, Le Clézio Gallery is committed to promoting contemporary artists from a wide range of backgrounds.

The gallery highlights both emerging talents and established artists — often overlooked or never before exhibited in France — with the aim of bringing their work to light on the French and international art scenes.

To foster dialogue across diverse audiences and share the depth of thought and creativity of its artists, Le Clézio Gallery offers a rich and varied program of exhibitions held in the gallery, at art fairs, and through off-site projects.

This program is complemented by interdisciplinary events combining live performance, talks, book signings, and children's workshops, contributing to an ongoing exchange between art and society.

1. Impermanence

Living as authentically as possible by embracing the fact that everything around us is in constant motion and energy.

2. Memory

Embedding individual narratives within the social fabric to strengthen collective identity and human connection.

3. Transculturality

Exploring the richness of cultural interactions to foster encounters and meaningful exchange.

4. Play

To welcome the absurd with playfulness, as a way to resist chaos without confronting it head-on. A means to let go, to accept unpredictability with amusement, and to dance with uncertainty rather than fear it.



Useful information

website www.lecleziogallery.com

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opening hours Wednesday – Sunday, 11 a.m. — 7 p.m.
Monday – Tuesday (by appointment)

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[metro line 1](#) : station George V
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