



# Jewel purpose

With her financial background and art-world connections, Louisa Guinness has created a gallery with a unique offering: a showcase for artists' jewellery



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When Louisa Guinness set up her Mayfair gallery in 2013, dedicated to selling jewellery by artists, some of her old City friends were only just catching up with the fact she'd left the Square Mile over a decade previously. "Ah! So that's where you've got to!" they'd say. I loved the City so much it looked as if I were there to stay,' laughs Guinness.

After a holiday stint as a blue button in 1987, Guinness was so eager to start working in the City that she eschewed a place at St Andrew's. 'I was one of the only girls on the Stock Exchange floor,' she remembers. 'It was such a boys' club, but I liked the environment. I had two uncles who were stockbrokers and had loved playing poker as a child, so the City seemed the natural place for me.'

Without a degree, Guinness was initially only able to find temporary work, but she was quickly upgraded to a research-assistant position. She spent two years at Barings when the Stock Exchange was at its peak and Christopher Heath was famous for earning over £1m. But at 22, Guinness found the responsibility of being a night trader overwhelming and quit to go into financial PR. 'But I was still obsessed with prices,' she says, 'and I wanted to be back in the heart of things in the City.'

So she returned, working for James Capel and then Hoare Govett, before taking a role in Hong Kong, followed by one in the States. 'Even when I was living in America, I was still dealing with Asian markets and taking clients there. In Asia, you tend to meet the chairmen of small companies, so I learnt from the horse's mouth about growth and sales and saw first-hand which companies make money, which don't and why,' she says.

In 2000, Guinness took a sabbatical. Back in London, she began exploring areas of design she'd always been interested in. 'My father had a steam-engine museum in Ireland,' she explains. 'Aesthetics were always a big thing in my family and I've always loved beautifully presented things.'

That the artists' jewellery in her gallery is beautifully presented is an understatement. Clients sit in an elegant atelier on charming little sofas on an oval of deep-blue carpet and admire jewellery created by artists ranging from Picasso and Man Ray to Anish Kapoor and Grayson Perry. Her offering is unique – it's the only gallery to showcase jewellery by artists. She laughs about her switch into the world of art: 'I had a client in San Francisco who read my stars. He told me I was in the wrong industry and should be in the arts. And here I am.'

Guinness's initial interest was in classic design. 'I've never been into fashion or fads, but I love things that will endure. I always admire a really well-made pepper mill or pair of scissors,' she says. 'Originally I was interested in furniture but, wearing my City hat, I knew enough about money to see I would struggle to break into that market as a newcomer. I didn't have enough of an edge.' Nevertheless, Guinness opened the first-ever space to exhibit artist-designed furniture, showing work by Donald Judd, Ron Arad and Rolf Sachs. And, in Christmas 2003, she decided to put on a show of artist-made jewellery.

'I borrowed everything I could lay my hands on and asked other artists I met to make jewellery,' she explains. By now Guinness was married to one of London's top gallery owners, Ben Brown, and meeting artists daily. Her inaugural exhibition at Brown's gallery showed jewellery by Gavin Turk, Tim Noble & Sue Webster, Anish Kapoor and Claude Lalanne, among others. To keep her overheads down, she worked from a room at the back of the gallery and began commissioning work and buying jewellery by modern masters such as Alexander Calder and Max Ernst. When Brown moved to a new gallery in 2012, Guinness decided it was time to branch out on her own.

She had spotted a space in Conduit Street in 2012 but it took over six months to confirm her occupancy and another three to design and refurbish, with architects Maybank and Matthews.

'The best thing I've learnt from the City is the importance of cash flow,' she continues. 'I can look at a forecast and make a better decision than someone without a financial background. I'm very cautious, so my returns are perhaps not as great as they could be. But I'm not doing this just for money. I love giving artists a window and enjoy people coming in to see their work. Paradoxically, the most important lesson I've learnt from the City is that not everything is about financial reward.'

[louisaguinnessgallery.com](http://louisaguinnessgallery.com)