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## A pop artist's tribute to Amy Winehouse

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Despite devoting more than 30 years to sculpture – and creating magnificent work such as the 27ft bronze statue of rugby players outside Twickenham Stadium (2010) – Gerald Laing is perhaps still most famous for his 1960s pop art paintings of celebrities. His canvases from that era are made up of hand-painted monochromatic dots, like the tiny dots that made up the printed newspaper images that inspired them – a reminder that this was how the subjects were viewed by the media, and hence the public, of the day. Viewed from further away, the dots organise themselves into clear pictures of, for example, Brigitte Bardot and Anna Karina (1962 and 1963) and *Lincoln Convertible* (1964), Laing's depiction of the assassination of John F Kennedy.

When Laing found himself drawn back to painting celebrities after seeing the almost daily media images of the troubled singer Amy Winehouse in 2007, little did he know that the latest of his subjects was also to meet a tragic end. He says: "These paintings date from 2008 – a time when each episode in Amy's increasingly complex life was being portrayed by the media. My work is concerned with myth, and portrays her as she appeared to us, the public, via the media."

So at an exhibition of Laing's complete collection of Amy Winehouse paintings at

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London's Thomas Gibson Fine Art (from October 11), we see Laing's first picture of Winehouse in which she's kissing her then husband Blake Fielder-Civil, again partly in monochrome dots. In *Belshazzar's Feast* (2007; £100,000, pictured), the beehived Winehouse reaches for a bottle of champagne surrounded by glasses, bottles, untouched food and a pixelated, voyeuristic audience transfixed by her every move. The presciently-titled *Thus Far and No Further* (2008; £115,000) shows the singer as "little girl lost", stopped by a high-visibility arm, probably belonging to a policeman, a high-visibility presence throughout Winehouse's short life.

As Laing says, "Now the drama has ended, and all is quiet, I hope [the body of work] will be seen as a tribute from one artist to another." He is also donating 20 per cent of all sales of these paintings to the Amy Winehouse Foundation, which supports charitable activities in the UK and abroad that "provide help, support or care for young people, especially those who are in need by reason of ill health, disability, financial disadvantage or addiction" – a wonderful way to commemorate Britain's 21st-century Billie Holiday.