



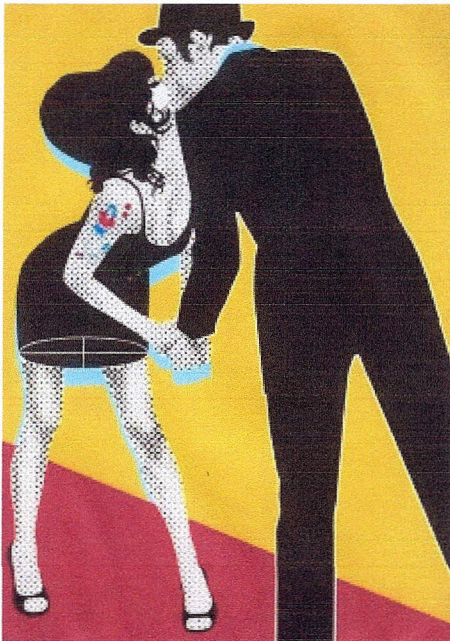
Review: Gerald Laing's pop-art memorial to Amy Winehouse

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It is less than four months since the tragic and sad death of this now legendary artist and the memorials, accolades and book projects keep piling up, raising her profile to that of a national treasure.



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The Kiss (Gerald Laing)

Controversial during her short life, the extraordinary singer keeps challenging us from her resting abode, this time through the stunning selection of recent paintings and drawings by Gerald Laing, one of Britain's leading exponents of Pop Art, at an elegant Mayfair gallery.

Laing pioneered the painting of enormous canvases based on newspaper photographs of models, astronauts and film stars. His 1962 portrait of French film goddess Brigitte Bardot is an iconic work of the period and regularly features in major Pop retrospectives.

I am not partial to nepotism, but this time I broke my own rules and decided to bring along my daughter Camille, 17, for a good reason. She is at the Camden School for Girls 6th Form, and Amy had been inspiring her and her mates for years; the local girl turned superstar. They all went together to keep a vigil at Camden Square after they heard of her sudden death.

But it was more for her bias for art that she came along and helped me to interpret the works. She liked the way the whole show was balanced, with the smaller drawings and watercolours pacing themselves with the bigger oil on canvases. She was especially impressed by Belshazzar's Feast, which shows Amy indulging in a banquet with Biblical references, and influenced by a Rembrandt painting. "There is a deep balance between the dotty pop art technique that characterizes Amy in this painting and throughout the show, and the surroundings, which are pixilated, and, along with the empty bottles, gives a sense of loneliness and dependence, but also shows the subject as a festive being, full of life and in need to enjoy her existence," was Camille's conclusion.

We talked to the artist, who admits he never met Winehouse, but was always stirred by her music. He referenced the images from media pictures, which is an apt way to orientate your work in these days of mass communications. Laing said: "I have always been connected with what is going on in my own time, and my own time is a very long time. Amy was unique, a sort of a gift to an artist because of her amazing graphic possibilities. Her life seemed to be made up of a series of mythological events that passed into the general culture."

Asked why he incorporated brushwork to a very bald pop art theme, he responded: "My very early paintings were all red, white, blue and black, but now I do what I want; if I feel I need a heavier brush I use it, and if I don't I won't."

His Domestic Perspectives, one of my favourites, shows Amy Hoovering her flat, with a jukebox in the background. But the vacuum cleaner takes a life of its own by coming out of the frame to meet the viewer; the carpet and the singer's headband in salient yellow unison giving a striking tone to the oil.

With prices at an average of £100,000 for the big canvases, well out of the reach of most young people, I wonder how this work is going to be accessible to a younger – and poorer – audience. But Laing thought about it beforehand: "I made limited edition screen-prints at very affordable prices, and I think they are going to become very popular." They are available through geraldlaing.com

Mitch Winehouse, Amy's father, could not come to the opening, but sent a message of thanks to the artist and the gallery, since 20 per cent of the sales are being donated to the recently formed Amy Winehouse Foundation, set up in her memory to support charitable activities that provide help and care to vulnerable young To find out more visit amywinehousefoundation.co.uk

The Thomas Gibson Fine Art gallery is at 31 Bruton Street, London W1J 6QS. The exhibition runs until Thursday, November 10.

www.julioetchart.com