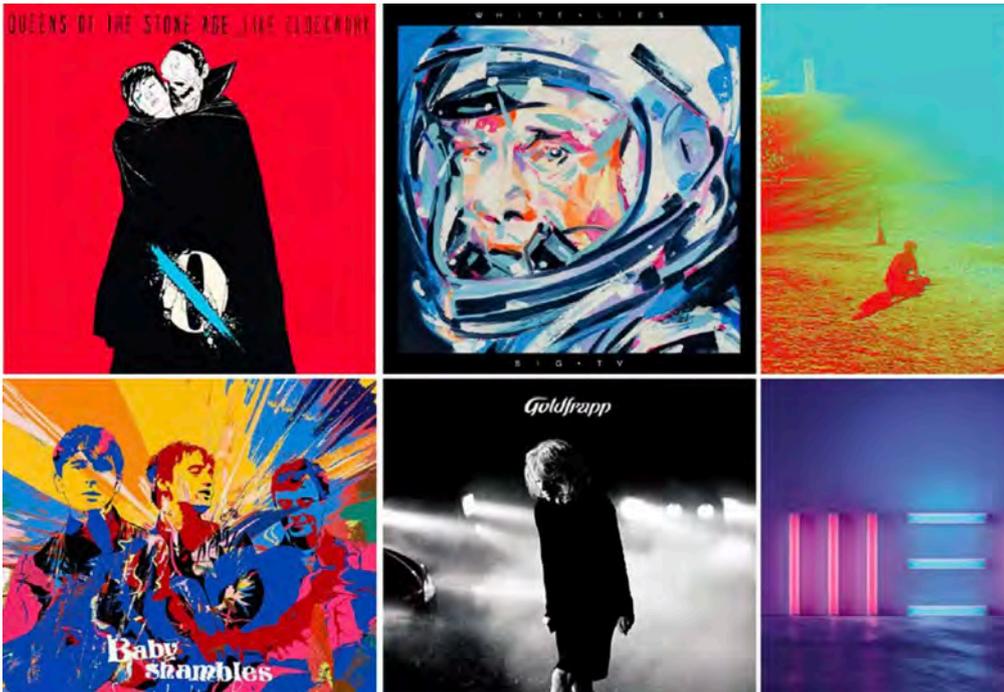


Independent

Their art on your sleeve: The contenders for this year's Best Art Vinyl award include albums by Paul McCartney, Babyshambles and Daft Punk

By Charlotte Cripps, November 13, 2013



In the frame: (clockwise from top left) Queens of the Stone Age's '...Like Clockwork'; 'Big TV' by White Lies; 'The Terror' by The Flaming Lips; Paul McCartney's 'New'; Goldfrapp's 'Tales of Us'; and 'Sequel to the Prequel' by Babyshambles

With record sales rising, musicians are increasingly turning to big-name artists to show off their work, says Charlotte Cripps

We all know the bands and the singers who are Top of the Pops – but what about the record covers? Each year a shortlist of 50 record sleeves are nominated for the Best Art Vinyl award, now in its 9th year, by a panel of industry experts. The designs are exhibited across the UK and online at artvinyl.com from today, where the public can vote for their favourite covers, with the winners announced in January 2014.

Last year's number one winning record sleeve was The Temper Trap's self-titled LP, a beautiful photographic artwork of a turquoise swirl by Italian artist Alberto Seveso, from his "high-speed photographs of a chemical disaster" series. This year the shortlist includes Damien Hirst's album artwork for Babyshambles' *Sequel to the Prequel*, which looks like one of his spin paintings, combined with photography of the band by Pennie Smith, who also photographed The Clash for the album *London Calling*. "This is back to the roots of great classic sleeve design," says Andrew Heeps, the founder of the awards and inventor of the first ever picture frame for vinyl record sleeves at Art Vinyl.

While some albums get the royal treatment, as in the case of Pete Doherty's *Babyshambles*, others this year have gone for the DIY approach. On Edywn Collins' eighth studio album

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Understated, the Scottish artist, formerly of the band Orange Juice, has illustrated the record with a big salmon. After two strokes in 2005 when he lost his memory and could only say a few words, part of his recovery process has been drawing and writing music again from scratch.

"The salmon – it's a lino-cut I did about 10 years ago. I did an eagle, a salmon and a roe deer. It was an experiment, I liked how they turned out. I draw a lot these days, birds and wildlife, but when I looked at the old salmon, it seemed perfect for my sleeve. And a very old drawing, I call it "Mixed Fish" for the inner sleeve," says Collins. "The other thing I did two years ago was to design a font. I do these things for my own pleasure, really, to help my dexterity, my recovery. So, I decided to put my font to good use. A lovely, shiny record sleeve, which satisfies me very much."

The Handsome Family's Rennie Sparks has designed her own album cover work for Wilderness, which looks like William Morris wallpaper but with creepy crawlies on it. The design perfectly coordinates with the album's alternative-country songs including "Flies", "Owls" and "Octopus". Sparks who started the band with her husband Brett Sparks, also gets commissioned to paint people's pets.

The striking horror-inspired album cover for Queens of the Stone Age's ...Like Clockwork of a black-cloaked couple kissing against a scarlet red backdrop is by the British illustrator Boneface. This underground artist from Liverpool, who creates art drawn from Eighties horror, game and comic culture, got an email out of the blue from QOTSA's management, asking if lead singer Josh Homme could get in touch. Boneface also illustrated the lyrics booklet with vivid themes and looks upon this project as his biggest yet.

The cover for Van Dyke Parks's Songs Cycled of a girl in a red bikini top on a bike was illustrated by LA artist Kenton Nelson, who paints figures, landscape, and architecture bathed in light. Artwork for the album's singles were also contributed by a variety of visual artists including pop artist Ed Ruscha, Klaus Voormann who did artwork for The Beatles, Frank Holmes who collaborated with The Beach Boys and the American cartoonist Art Spiegelman. While American artist Charles Ray created two huge sculptures of Parks for "Hold Back Time", which he calls "Side A" and "Side B". It doesn't have to cost the earth to hire big artists for your album artwork either; apparently Parks did not ask them to do it – they contributed the artwork for free.

Paul McCartney's neon-light cover for New, which loosely spells out "new" in nine tubes of light, was created by music video director Ben Ib and inspired by the work of sculptural artist Dan Flavin. Ib made the piece using a computer rendering program, with a logo and concept by Rebecca & Mike, and consultancy and design by YES, saying, "It was a great team to work with under Paul's guidance." Although this was his first-ever print work, he was a safe choice considering he had done lots of visual content for McCartney's songs before, including "Sing The Changes", featuring images of Barack Obama, which was used when McCartney headlined the Coachella Festival in 2009.

French electronic duo Daft Punk's Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo were heavily involved in the artwork on their 12 inch single, "Get Lucky", one of the few singles to be added to the shortlist. The silhouette of a band performing behind a giant orange sunset makes a change from the usual image of the band who perform behind

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helmets of their robot alter egos. "It really captures the spirit of the song of the summer 2013," says Heeps.

White Lies decided upon an oil painting of a spaceman's head by artist Michael Kagan for their album *Big TV*. "White Lies were looking for original artwork for the *Big TV* album back last spring," says Kagan. "A mutual friend introduced them to my work. The guys reached out to me personally and discussed the feel of the album; they said upon seeing my work it was their first choice. We decided on four images of my paintings to be used. All choices were space-themed, with the painting *Pilot 2* being the album cover and the additional images to be used inside the booklet and for the singles."

Lesser-known artists also make the grade; the Detroit electroclash band *Adult* – Adam Lee Miller and Nicola Kuperus – have adorned their bizarre album cover for *The Way Things Fall* with two faceless women in orange hard hats and blue dresses, one falling off a chair. It is a still from a sound-and-video installation they made before the album, which contains "seemingly disjointed fragments of non-thematic absurdist entertainment, unified through rhythm".

"When Best Art Vinyl was first launched in 2005, vinyl record sales were at an historic low," says Heeps. "By showcasing vinyl record covers as an art form, and celebrating the synergy between art and music, the award has been a major contributor to the vinyl revival, highlighting the benefits of a physical music format in a heavily digitally focused music era."

Andy Linehan, curator of popular music at the British Library, says: "In addition to the quality of sound, one of the major attractions of the vinyl LP is the sleeve art and it is great to see this being recognised in this way."