

## Explanation

Art by Jeffrey Stern, thoughts on therapy Kirsty Kennedy. 'Big picture' ideas? [jon.sutton@bps.org.uk](mailto:jon.sutton@bps.org.uk).

The client and artist, Jeffrey Stern, says: 'I started this series in 2010, a time for me of bewilderment, melancholy and depression, culminating with my beloved wife succumbing to a brain tumour early in 2014. The oncologist revealed that this tumour had probably been growing for at least five years, disturbing her brain function – a fact that was unclear to us until a few months before her death. In hindsight, this was the subconscious motivator behind my choices for the entire series.'

The male figure in this drawing is based on a small sketch by the Dutch artist Jan Luyken (1649–1712) titled *De Spieghelmaaker* (The Mirror Maker). He struggles to carry a hugely ornate mirror (a traditional emblem of vanity), and I have added a dancer in a flamboyant 18th-century gown and put them both into a context of symbols of time and death; a huge birthday-cake with flaring candles (one already snuffed); an enormous Victorian pocket watch (like the White Rabbit's); windfall apples (wasted, fallen or lucky bounty?) and forget-me-knots (of course). The beautiful dancer may be gesturing her *joie de vivre*, but her glance to the mirror will not show her face, just a waning moon and the starry sky. Is she dead already and her reflection therefore forever lost? In this modern and fragile context, the drawing is dramatising and forecasting the inevitable fact of death at the moment of joy, questioning all her bravery and beauty. Both mirror maker and dancer have inevitably been swept into history by time, with only the moon and stars persisting. Other drawings of mine in this series are also deliberately set in this long-gone Golden Age.'

Dr Kirsty Kennedy is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist in Specialist Palliative Care at South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. She says: 'I saw my client in 2010 after he was referred with queried cognitive impairment within an older adult's clinical psychology service. We undertook a full assessment of cognitive functioning using neuropsychological assessment, but also using phenomenological enquiry to track the moment-by-moment process by which he was addressing information about the world. During the assessment this led to a deeper level of formulation of an existential kind, where we addressed his perceptions of reality as well as his fears about a diminishing cognition, in someone to whom this was a vital aspect of his identity. His scores were not indicative of a dementing illness, certainly not my clinical impression either, although there were some reductions in processing speed and concentration. We reached a relational hypothesis that there may be some mismatch in communication with his wife, which might be where the distress was originating. This eased the sense for this client that he might be "losing his mind" and he could take this home for discussion.'

'At the point of discharge we had engaged in a number of themes relating to mortality and the subjective nature of reality. His art indicates his perceptions vividly. In time it transpired that our inclination that the problem might be relational in nature, rather than organic changes in him, was borne out when his wife was diagnosed with a brain tumour.'

