Art in the asylum

'I spit on life' (1953/54) by **William Kurelek**, courtesy of the Adamson Collection London (copyright estate of William Kurelek and Wynick/Tuck Gallery Toronto).
Words by **Victoria Tischler**, Chartered Psychologist and curator of 'Art in the Asylum'. Send your ideas for 'Big picture' to jon.sutton@bps.org.uk.

'I spit on life' by William Kurelek was painted at a time when the artist was profoundly depressed. Kurelek was a Canadian of Ukrainian heritage who sought psychiatric treatment in the UK. He was treated at the Bethlem Royal Hospital and later at the Netherne Hospital in Surrey, where he worked with Edward Adamson, a pioneering artist who established art workshops for patients there in 1946. Adamson, often referred to as 'the father of art therapy', was an early advocate for the use of art as a form of recovery from mental illness. The artwork, one of several masterpieces Kurelek created whilst a patient at Netherne, featured in the 2013 exhibition 'Art in the Asylum' at the Djanogly gallery in Nottingham.

'I spit on life' is a complex and majestic piece which powerfully illustrates significant events in Kurelek's life related to his mental illness. It will be shown as part of the Adamson Festival (February–July 2014) where Adamson's life and work will be celebrated with a variety of events including the premiere of a feature film about Kurelek, 'The Maze' and an exhibition of art work created by patients who were treated at the Netherne Hospital.

See www.slam.nhs.uk/adamson for information and events, including a discussion about the neuroscience and neuroaesthetics of Adamson's work.