

# ST. BRENDAN AND THE UNHAPPY JUDAS

## Harry Clarke RHA (1889-1931)

Born in 1889, Harry Clarke was the son of a Dublin craftsman; he worked with his brother in the family studio from an early age. At a time when medieval-style stained glass was enjoying a revival, Clarke was one of its greatest innovators. He was a member of **An Tur Gloinne**, a studio established by Sarah Purser which raised the standard of stained glass design in Ireland.

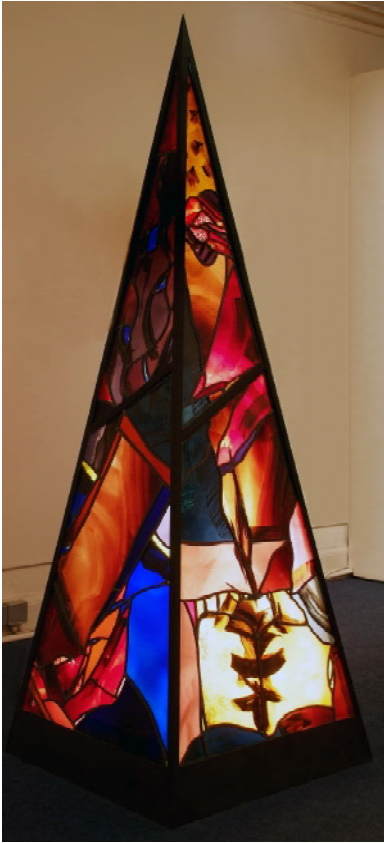


Clarke won many awards and commissions for both clerical and secular work: the windows of the Honan Chapel in Cork and *The Eve of St. Agnes* are just some of the 130 glass pieces he created. As well as stained glass, Clarke also illustrated 6 major books.

*St. Brendan and the Unhappy Judas* shows St. Brendan and his men in their boat just as they encounter Judas. Judas is being punished for his betrayal of Jesus. Part of Clarke's technique was to make the leading (this joins the pieces of glass together) become part of the drawing. The strong painterly look of the panel, the texture of the waves and intense colours show Harry Clarke's skill.

## DISCUSSION

- In stained glass, each piece is worked on separately, often fired in the kiln again and again. How many individual pieces of glass do you see in this panel?
- Clarke has managed to make Judas look very solid and three dimensional, how has he done this?
- Can you read the expressions on the faces of the men? What can you tell from their expressions?
- Harry Clarke was an expert craftsman working in the tradition of medieval-style stained glass. His blending of ancient techniques with modern developments in glass production led to his very unique work. Do any pieces of glass from *St. Brendan and the Unhappy Judas* look as though they have been crafted differently from the others, what different marks or techniques can you see?



**In the gallery**, look at this abstract stained glass work by artist Maud Cotter. It is called *Straight as Lemons Meet Fish* and dates from 1987. Can you see any similarities between these works in terms of colour, movement, and mark making? What differences do you see?

Look at the series of watercolours that Clarke did as prep-work for his *Eve of St Agnes* window. Can you tell by the style that the drawings are for stained glass? What marks are similar?

Look at the image of the completed window; do you think the drawings translated well to stained glass?

This work has been described as a 'revel in blue', is that a good description? Follow the movement of blue through the window; what other words could you use to describe it.

## HANDS ON



Much of Harry Clarke's graphic work was for book illustration. This pen and ink drawing is an example of his gothic drawing style, it illustrates a scene from *The Pit and the Pendulum* by Edgar Allan Poe.

Select a poem or story that you like. Think of an image from it that is dramatic and appeals to you visually. Try styling your image after Clarke's graphic work. (Stylised and elongated figures, patterned and embellished clothes and background, stark black and white contrasts.) Use pen and ink for the project.

Experiment with design in line and shape using black ink and drawing pens. Draw eight squares on an A3 sheet and draw one random shape in each square, using these shapes as a basis for your designs, add line and marks to explore the possibilities of pen and ink.