

Foreword

EVERY JULY so far in this millennium an art show in a beacon church on the north Norfolk coast has been gaining in illumination. Salthouse 08 was built around the brilliant work of James Dodds.

An exhibition entitled *SEAhouse LIGHthouse SPIRIThouse*, featuring the work of 70 contemporary East Anglian-linked painters and sculptors, and also containing a major tribute to fisherman-artist John Craske (Norfolk's Alfred Wallis), began with a vision of an ancient and modern altarpiece.

Hailed by Simon Jenkins in his book *England's Thousand Best Churches*, the building near Blakeney had been laid bare by the

James painted an awesome, whale-like presence – with powerful realism steered into poetic depths, on closer inspection, by division into the traditional triptych form of devotional art in the Middle Ages. Here was both a vessel and a broken vessel, a congregation dissolving into abstraction.

The *Salthouse Altarpiece* was cheered by 9,000 visitors, some of whom pleaded in the comments book that it should stay in that sacred place forever. But James's offer of a permanent gift had already been rejected, and his masterpiece had sold to the first potential buyer even before its church launch.

The former shipwright, who has crossed the Atlantic for this



Reformation. The idea now was to restore that lost medieval sense of colour and wonder but in a new form.

As the curator of Salthouse 08, I commissioned James to paint a monumental image of a Cromer crabber in a church long serving a sea-faring community, where 17th century ships' captains had carved images of their vessels in pew backs in a bid for blessings (divine insurance).

new solo show, further confirmed his journey into poetry by addressing one of the most beautiful and mystical poems by Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney.

From Lightenings VIII retells the saga of an Irish monastery whose altar-rail snagged the anchor of a flying ship. A sailor climbed down the rope to free the stricken vessel but struggled in vain. Seeing him flailing and drowning, the abbot told the monks to help him:

*They did, the freed ship sailed, and the man climbed
back*

Out of the marvellous as he had known it.

Sister Wendy Beckett, who opened Salthouse 08 and marvelled at the altarpiece, says the poem "reveals its fullness only right at the end, when we understand that the marvellous, out of which the man climbs, is this very ordinary world of ours. We live in the marvellous. We just do not see it."

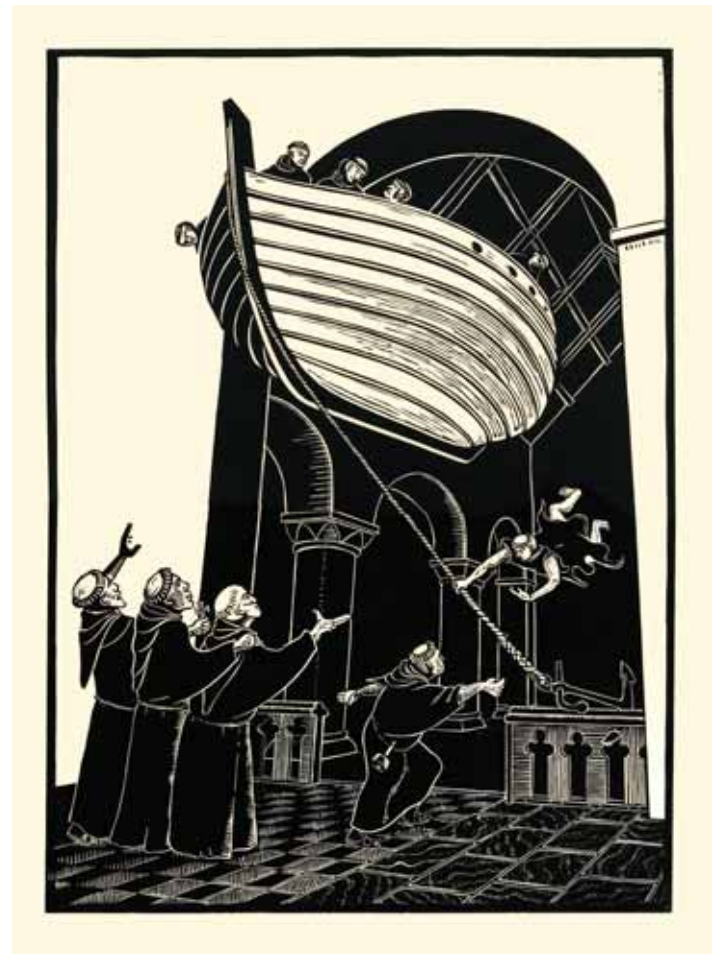
James Dodds sees it – and showed it in an *Out of the Marvellous* oil painting and a linocut entitled *The Monks of Clonmacnoise*. They hung on either side of the altar.



Having encouraged this project, Seamus Heaney was delighted with the outcome. On receiving a copy of the print, he wrote: "Magnificent. A re-vision. The marvellous as he has shown it."

Ian Collins

Ian Collins is an author and curator who will be writing a book on James Dodds to be published in 2010



FLYING BOAT OF CLONMACNOISE

linocut 50 x 36 cms 20 x 14 ins



6 EAST COAST ONE DESIGN, LOOKING FORWARD
oil on linen 76 x 168 cms 30 x 66 ins



14 BOW OF A BLUE-BOTTOMED SMACK
oil on linen 96 x 96 cms 38 x 38 ins