

The Woods of Caledon

memories of Scottish pinewoods

Iain White



Volume One: *oil paintings*

The Woods of Caledon, 2022, Exhibition Catalogue

Oxmarket Contemporary

Woods of Caledon: an introduction

"The **Woods of Caledon**", is an old term for the native coniferous pine forests that once covered much of the Highlands of Scotland. I first visited many of the remaining remnants of these forests in the early 1960s and became familiar with their aesthetic, their ecology and their history.

Dr. Frank Fraser Darling has called the destruction of this forest 'the biggest effect man has exerted on the history of the Highlands', and in his book '**Natural History in the Highlands and Islands**' he describes bitterly the '*almost wonton destruction of the last extensive primeval forest which had no equal in Europe*'.



Distribution of Boreal Forest after Tamm (1976), Vasari (1977), and Pruitt (1978)

The pine woodlands of the Scottish Highlands can be considered as part of the Northern Coniferous Forest, or Boreal Forest. In Scandinavia the dominant tree of this formation, as far north as Lapland is the Norway spruce, *Picea abies*. Further north in Norwegian and Finnish Lapland this species is replaced by forests of pine, *Pinus sylvestris*, and then by birch, *Betula tortuosa*.

The spruce, however, did not migrate back into the British Isles after the last ice age. In the early post-glacial period, forests of birch and pine spread across the country and invaded the uplands and highlands. Ultimately, as climate improved these trees were replaced in the south by a forest of oak, elm, and lime, which in turn extended northwards into the valleys of upland Britain.

So, the potential natural woodlands of the Highlands are made up of oak woodlands flooring the valleys up to perhaps 150m to 200m. Here on the mountain slopes, particularly in the east and central Highlands, they gave way to forests of pine which reached altitudes of over 700m in places. (the highest natural pines today are at 603m on Creag Fhiaclach in Glen Feshie in the Cairngorms).

In the west pine woods were also extensive but restricted to more moderate slopes and confined to lower altitudes than in the east. At higher altitudes still the pine gave way to woods or scrub of birch and/or juniper. While, in the north and northwest Highlands pinewoods, were replaced by native birch woodlands.

The Paintings: the Barbizon School and the Sous-Bois Genre

All works in this volume seek to capture the nature and the spirit of Scotland's Caledonian Forest and in so doing owe a debt to the **Barbizon School** and the *Sous-Bois genre* that followed and developed from it through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

The **Barbizon** school of painters were part of an art movement, active from c. 1830 to c. 1870 towards realism in art. Its name derives from the village of **Barbizon** in France on the edge of the **Forest of Fontainebleau**. Most of the works by this group of artists were landscape paintings, but several of them also painted genre scenes of village life. Some of the most prominent features of this school are its tonal qualities, colour, loose brushwork, and softness of form.

In the spring of 1829, **Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot** came to Barbizon to paint in the Forest of Fontainebleau. He returned to Barbizon in the autumn of 1830 and in the summer of 1831, where he made drawings and oil studies, from which he made a painting intended for the Salon of 1830; *View of the Forest of Fontainebleau* and, for the salon of 1831, another painting of the same title. While there he met the members of the Barbizon school: **Théodore Rousseau, Paul Huet, Constant Troyon, Jean-François Millet**, and the young **Charles-François Daubigny**.

Rather than painting the scene from afar like traditional landscape painters, the Barbizon artists presented a close-up view of the subject of the painting, recording their experience within the forest. Many of the paintings have a portrait (vertical) rather than a landscape (horizontal) orientation. Paintings of this type became known as **sous-bois** a French term referring to a forest-floor or undergrowth.

It came to be applied to both the 19th century painters who cast aside tradition and journeyed into the forests to paint close-up, rather than

from a distance and to the genre of painting they produced. In German, the painting of interior forests was called **Waldinneres**, meaning enclosed woodland space.

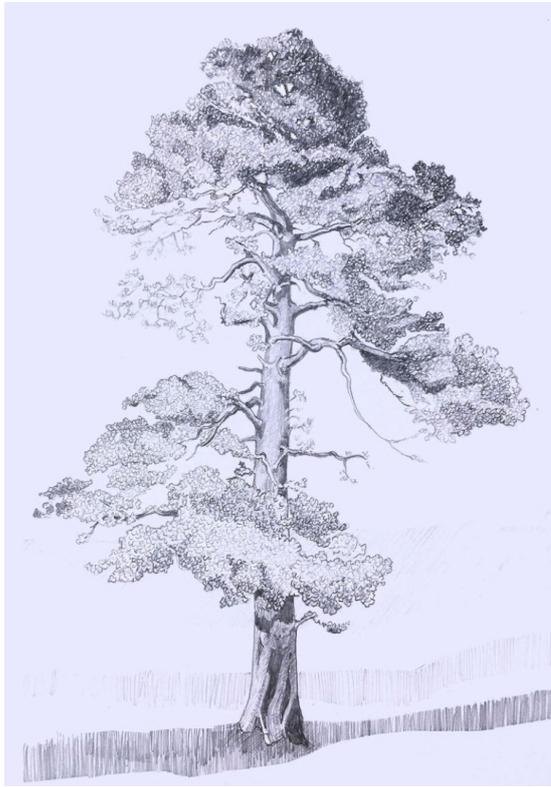
These paintings focus on tree trunks and forest understorey rather than on the wider scene. The sky and horizon are often absent, or if present are barely visible, just glimpsed through the branches. This type of composition was rare before the 19th century when artists of the Barbizon School made paintings of forested areas in the Fontainebleau region of France.

During the late 1860s, the Barbizon painters attracted the attention of a younger generation of French artists studying in Paris. Several of whom visited and painted in Fontainebleau Forest. Amongst these were **Claude Monet**, **Pierre-Auguste Renoir** and **Alfred Sisley** who, in the 1870s with others, developed the art movement we now call **Impressionism** practising *plein air* painting.

The **Post-Impressionist** painter **Vincent Van Gogh** was influenced and inspired by the impressionists who explored this genre. Van Gogh also studied and copied several of the Barbizon painters as well, especially Millet and did three paintings in Daubigny's Garden. His contemporaries, **Paul Gauguin** and **Paul Cezanne** also produced works which qualified as the sous-bois genre, indeed Cezanne explicitly titled a number of works 'sous-bois.'

At the end of the 19th and into the 20th century, works of a similar kind appeared sporadically within different art movements from symbolism and cubism through expressionism, romanticism and modernism. Often it was the mystical and metaphysical dimension of dense forest interiors that is central to many of these works as they attempted to embody the spirit of the forest in some way. In a similar fashion some works in this exhibition seek to transcend the literal figurative representation of the forest interior and capture the essence of that spirit in paint or pastel.

Pinus sylvestris, the Scots Pine



The Scots pine, *Pinus sylvestris* L., has a very wide distribution outside Scotland. Indeed according to Stevens and Carlisle (1959) it is the most widely distributed conifer in the world, with a latitudinal range from coastal Finmark to the Spanish Sierra Nevada. Longitudinally it occurs from the North Atlantic seaboard in Western Scotland and in Scandinavia to Okhotsk in Siberia and perhaps even through to the Pacific coast of Russia. This distribution represents a great range of climates. Maybe its continental distribution as a whole, however, is suggestive that it evolved under continental conditions and is still basically a tree of such environments. In its great range of adaptations to different environments it displays considerable variation in morphology and also probably in physiology.

This fact has led to the recognition of different geographical races, or subspecies of the Scots pine. Some authors regard the native pines of Scotland as an endemic subspecies; *Pinus sylvestris* ssp. *scotica*, but Stevens and Carlisle prefer to regard it as a geographical variety *Pinus sylvestris* L var. *scotica* Schott. with close affinities with var. *septentrionalis* Schott. of southern Sweden. Whatever the justification for subspecies status, the reality of the morphological differences probably reflects the distinct Holocene origin of the current highland pine population. Even within Scotland, however, the Scots pine shows great variability in growth habit, bark, cone size and leaf length, and in duration of leaf life, for example. Some of these variations appear to be genetically controlled morphological differences which probably parallel physiological differences of adaptive significance.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Oil Paintings

The oil paintings of Scottish pinewoods in this exhibition fall into approximately two groups:

1. largely figurative, impressionist works based on real places, albeit with some latitude for interpretation. These include works that would fall into the sous-bois category, but also other more conventional landscape works.

2. semi abstract and often expressionist works intended to capture the essence of the forest in some way other than a literal representation. Again some of these works are akin to later symbolist, cubist, expressionist and modernist manifestations of the sous-bois genre.



No: 1

Banks of the Luineag

oil on canvas,
61cm x 45cm,

Iain White, 2019, £385

80 to 100 year old mature pines growing in the narrow zone (the lagg) between the River Luineag and the 'raised bog' (ombrotrophic mire) which has developed at the western end of Loch Morlich during the post glacial period (the Holocene).



Alt Rabhaig: sunlight and shadow

oil on canvas, 50 cm x 50 cm,
Iain White, 2019,
£385

No: 2

Sunlight bathes the understorey of dwarf or subshrubs on the forest floor in a clearing in dense young growth of pine. This composition is typical of the **sous-bois** genre.

Sunlight on the Forest Floor

oil on canvas, 40 cm x 40 cm,
Iain White, 2019,
£360

No: 3

Sunlight dappling the forest floor in this area of relatively dense growth of regenerating pines. The work emphasises the pattern of light and shade at the expense of the detail of the trees themselves.





No: 4
Rothiemurchus
Forest
oil on canvas,
41 cm x 51 cm,
Iain White, 2019, £375

The structure of the Rothiemurchus forest reflects its long history of timber extraction. The largely segregated age classes seem to reflect past periods of felling and regeneration. Here a mix of ages including mature trees 80 - 100 years in age form the closed canopy, while in the foreground is a cleared area of open pine heath. Although clearance here probably dates from World War II, there has been relatively little regeneration because of uncontrolled grazing by red deer.



No: 11

Forest Bog or Muskeg

oil on canvas, 40 cm x 40 cm,
Iain White, 2019,

£365

Some of the more open areas of the forest carrying scattered stunted growth of pines are wetland areas where peat has developed in depressions. These are forest bogs or mires. In the Canadian Boreal Forest such areas are known as 'muskeg', the standard term in Western Canada and Alaska. The term became common in these areas because it is of Cree Indian origin; *maskek* meaning low-lying marsh.

No: 9

Edge of Clearing

oil on canvas, 40 cm x 40 cm,
Iain White, 2019,

£350

A path through the hummocky dwarf shrub understorey on the edge of a clearing in an area of dense young pines.





No: 16

Pines around Lochan Mors

oil on canvas, 60 cm x 60 cm,

Iain White, 2019,

£600

Here mature pines on the banks of a small lochan. The size and shape of the lochan reflects its origin as a dammed reservoir supplying water involved in the extraction of timber in the 18th & 19th centuries. Erosion of the fluvio-glacial material along the shore reveals the shallow roots of the pines.



No: 52

Rothiemurchus, *sous-bois*

oil on canvas, 61 cm x 51 cm,

Iain White, 2019,

£285

Rothiemurchus has a long history of timber extraction culminating during World War II in felling to fulfil strategic timber requirements. This complex history has affected the forest structure. Today the tree density varies from recent dense areas of regenerating young trees to areas that are quite open almost pine heath in structure.

Elsewhere more mature trees 80 to 100 years in age form a more closed canopy while throughout old post mature trees 200 or so years in age are scattered in groups or individually throughout the forest. These largely segregated age classes seem to reflect past periods of felling and regeneration. Here, in relatively open forest, trees of intermediate age form the canopy.



No: 13

**Glenmore from Loch Morlich
(winter)**

oil on canvas, 60 cm x 60 cm,
Iain White, 2019,

£525

Loch Morlich is a so called “kettle hole”, ie. it is a lake or loch formed when a mass of dead or stagnant ice, detached from a retreating glacier or ice sheet, melts into the depression formed as the glacial and/or fluvial glacial sediments in which the stagnant ice was buried collapse inwards. Within the forest there are many small lochans or wet mires occupying enclosed depressions that also originated as kettle holes.



No: 10

Slopes of Creag Fhiaclach

oil on canvas, 40 cm x 40 cm,

Iain White, 2019,

£370

High climbing pines within the valley of Allt Coire Follais just to the south of Creag Fhiaclach, where the pines reach their highest natural tree line in the UK at 603 metres OD

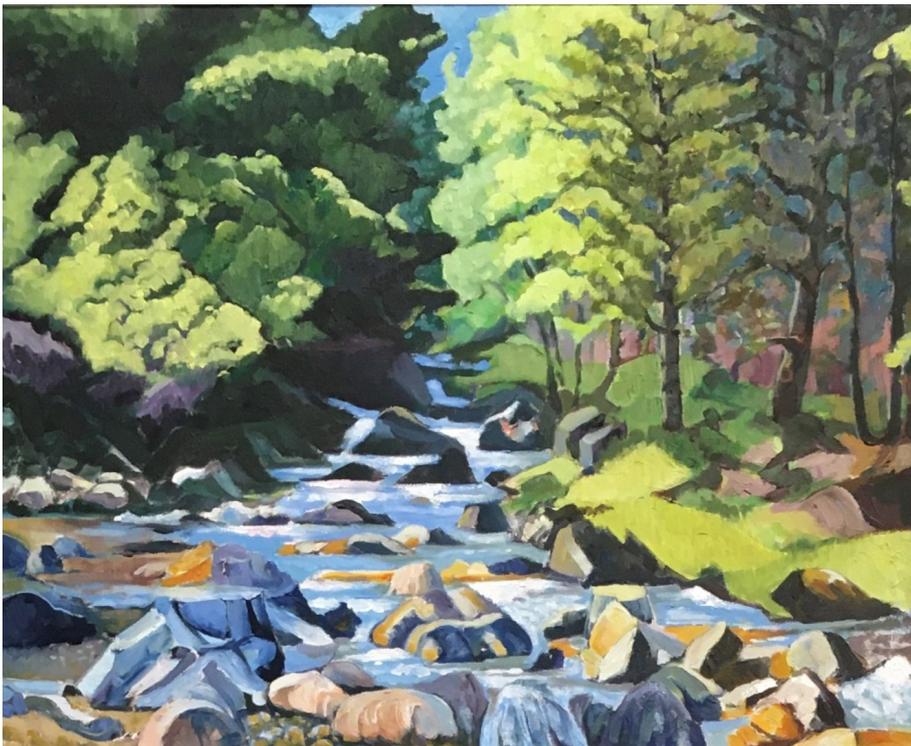
No: 28

The Headwaters of the Allt Mor

oil on canvas, 50 cm x 50 cm,
Iain White, 2020,

£350

Allt Mor flowing into the Gen More Forest just below the confluence of the Allt a' Choire Chais and the Allt Creag an Leth-choin on the northern flanks of Cairngorm. These streams vary enormously in discharge over the year becoming torrential when swollen by spring snow melt from the corries, higher slopes and mountain plateau.



No: 29

The Headwaters of the Allt Mor, 2

oil on canvas, 51 cm x 41 cm,
Iain White, 2020,

£360

Flood waters frequently uproot and sweep away trees shrubs and soil leaving a zone of recolonisation by trees such as birch and rowan and young pines along these streams draining the flanks of Cairngorm.



No: 30

Reflections, Loch an Eilean

oil on canvas, 50 cm x 50 cm,
Iain White, 2019,

£385

An expressionistic, abstracted work seeking to convey the still reflections of pines growing on the banks of the loch in the shallow waters of the northern shore.

No: 33

Close by the Cairngorm footbridge

oil on canvas, 50 cm x 50 cm,
Iain White, 2019,

£400

A classic sous-bois composition this work conceptualises the forest floor in a deliberately expressionist treatment. It emphasises both the hummocky growth of the sub-shrubs (*Calluna*, the *Ericas* and *Vaccinium spp.*) and the uneven nature of the substrate reflecting the glacial or fluvio-glacial origin of the deposits and disturbance by windthrow, and timber extraction.

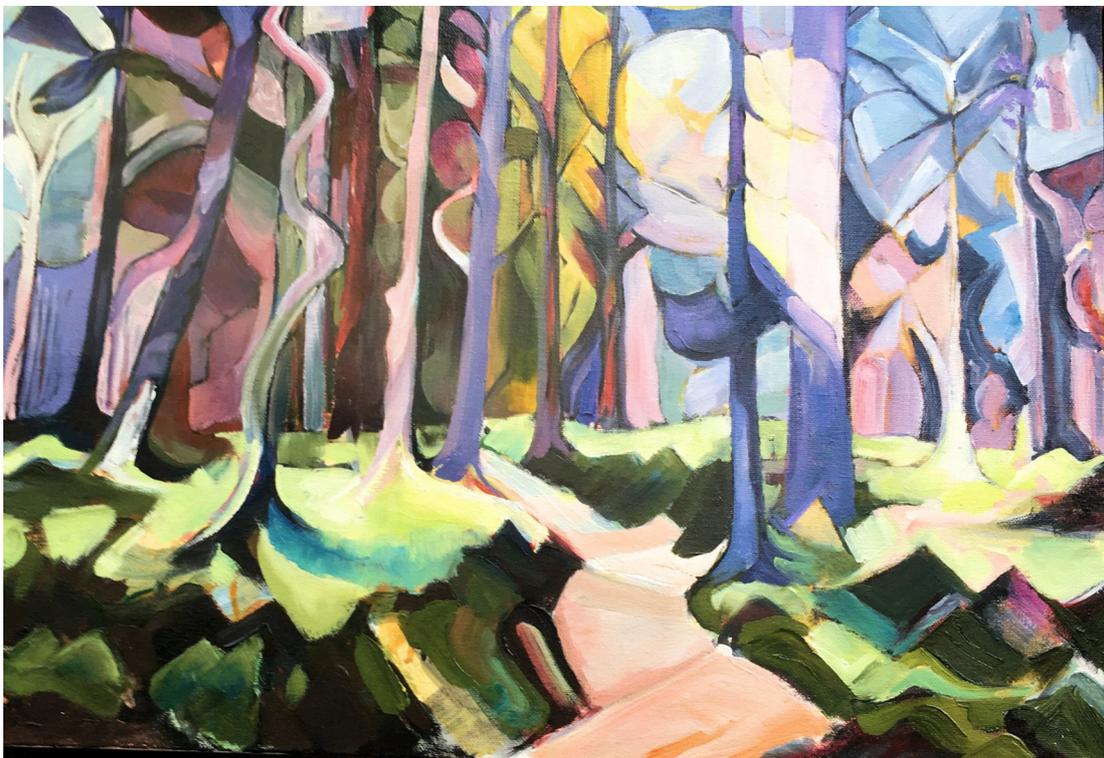


No: 50

After the Fire, looking west across the Spey to the Monadhliath

oil on canvas, 61 cm x 51 cm,
Iain White, 2019, **£385**

Looking west across the **Spey** valley to the **Monadhliath Mountains** showing the slow regeneration of pine in the foreground after a large scale fire in the late 1950s



No: 25

Into Glen Feshie

oil on canvas, 51 cm x 41 cm,
Iain White, 2019,
£375

This work is an attempt to interpolate and convey the mystical, metaphysical essence of the closed forest in Glen Feshie as a feeling rather than a literal representation

No: 63

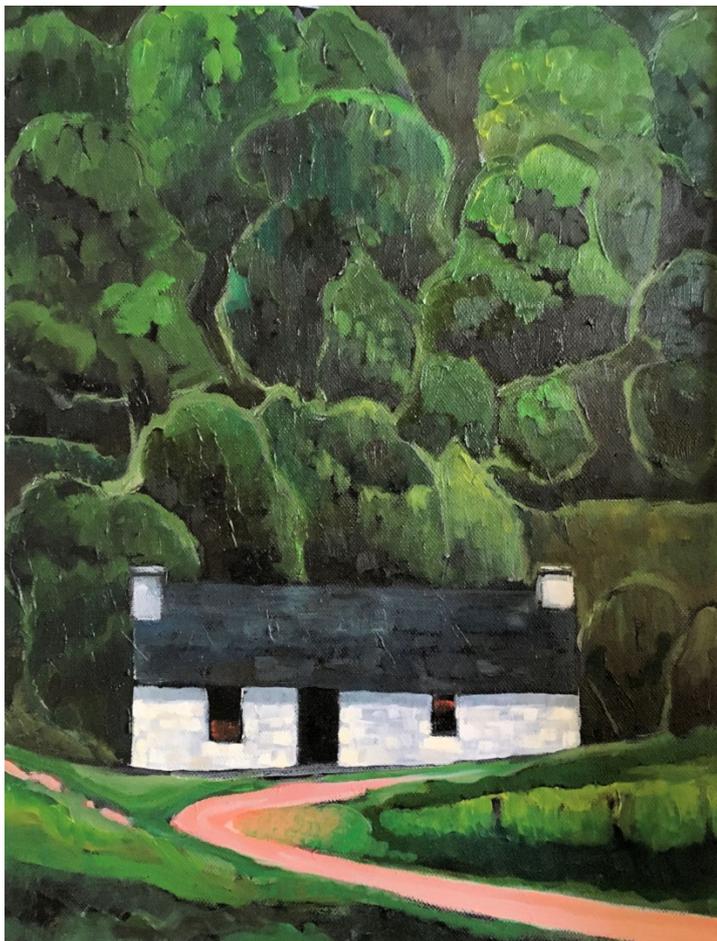
**Forest Bothy below
Aigoid-Meall**

oil on canvas, 50 cm x 50 cm,

Iain White, 2019,

£385

One of several bothies scattered through the remnants of Caledonian forest. Some are former shielings, or forester's huts, some are refuges for walkers and climbers.



No: 46

Cottage at Lochan an Eilein

oil on canvas, 36 cm x 46 cm,

Iain White, 2019,

£340

A former estate worker's cottage, now converted to an interpretation centre for the Rothiemurchus estate, nestles below pines and birches on the slope above.



No: 42

**Regenerating Pines after
wartime clearance**

oil on canvas, 51 cm x 61 cm,
Iain White, 2020,

£400

Regenerating pines after wartime clearance in
Glean Eanaich or Glen Einich in fairly open pine
heath with a young even aged stand beyond.



No: 5

**Mature Pines on edge of
wartime clearance**

oil on canvas, 41 cm x 51 cm,
Iain White, 2020,

£385

Here a pair of mature pines, roughly 80-100 years of age, frame a view across a regenerating area of wartime clearance

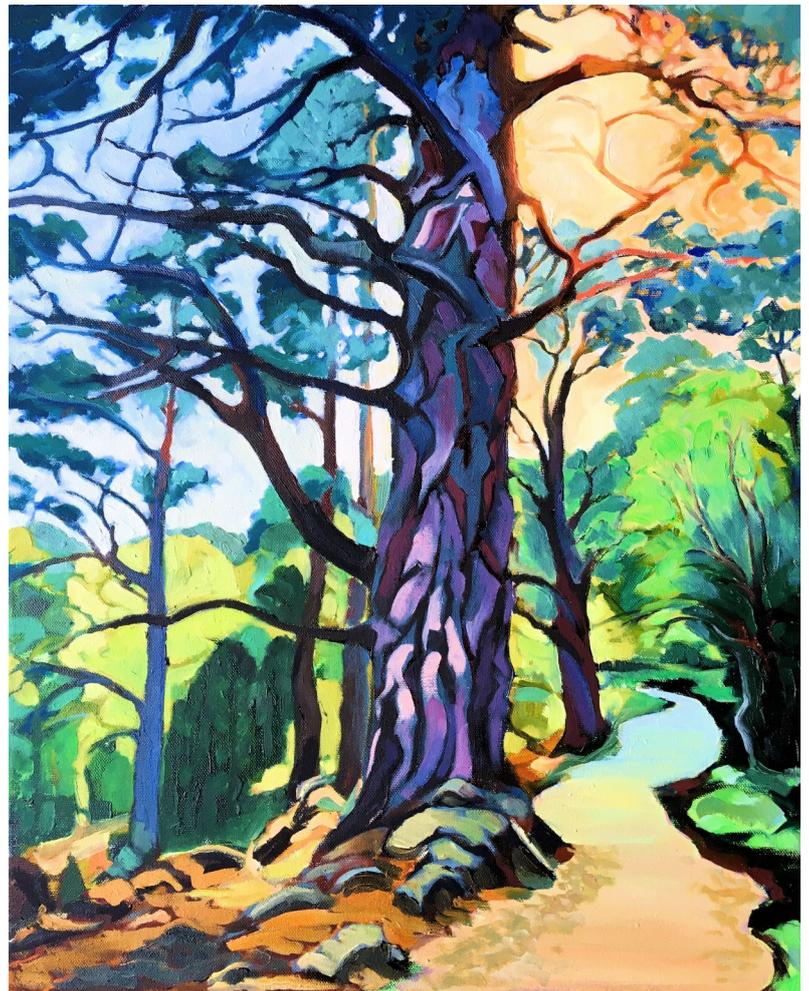
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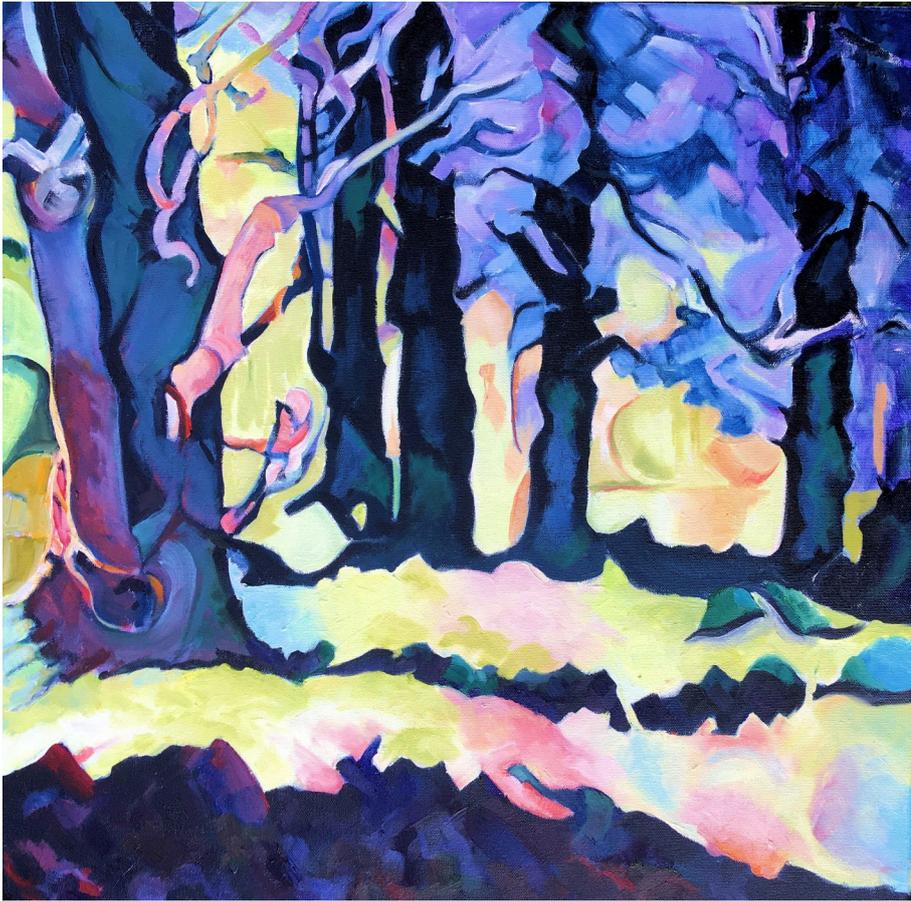
**Ancient Pines flanking path
above Loch an Eilein**

oil on canvas, 41 cm x 51 cm,
Iain White, 2020,

£385

Ancient pines on the northern shore of Loch an Eilein, bordering the path. These fine specimens are probably at least 250 years old and have survived deer grazing, forest fires and timber extraction.





No: 32

**Group of ancient
Pines, Inshriach**

oil on canvas, 50 cm x 50 cm,
Iain White, 2020,

£375

A free expressive interpretation of a group of ancient pines emphasising that in contrast to dark, dense plantations, the relative open structure of the -natural woodlands allows an intriguing interplay of light and shade.

No: 53

**Sunlight and shadow,
Abernethy Forest**

oil on canvas, 50 cm x 50 cm,
Iain White, 2019,

£320

Today the tree density varies from recent dense areas of regenerating young trees as here in the background, to areas that are quite open almost pine heath in structure often with evidence of relatively recent felling and timber extraction.





No: 6

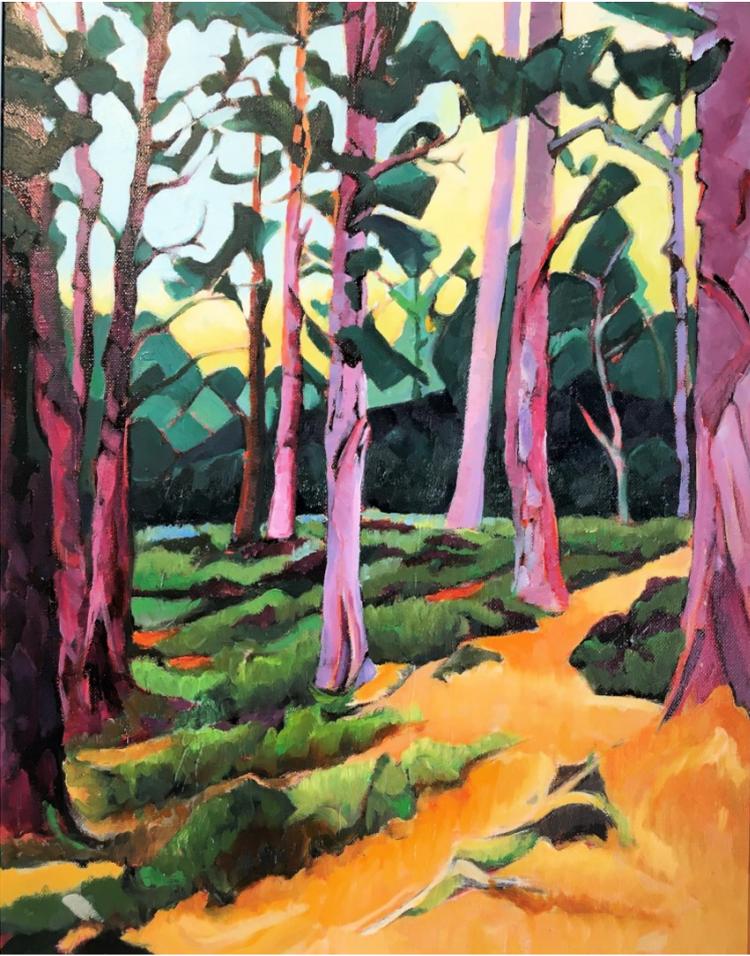
Ancient Pines in the Ryvoan Pass

oil on canvas, 41 cm x 51 cm,

Iain White, 2020,

£375

Surviving ancient pines (c. 200 years of age) bordering the path through the Ryvoan Pass



No: 65

Below the Bothy

oil on canvas, 41 cm x 51 cm,

Iain White, 2019,

£250

Pines on the lower slopes of Aigoid-Meall below the Bothy featured in the oil painting No:63

No: 47

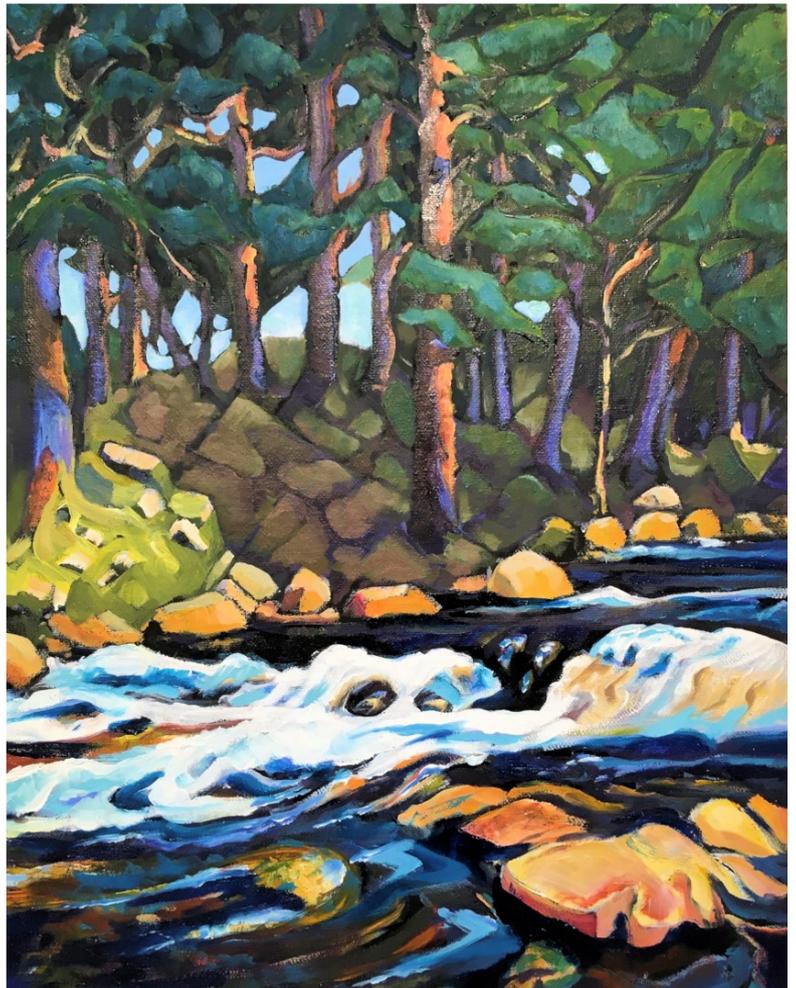
Banks of the Allt Druidh

oil on canvas, 36cm x 46cm,

Iain White, 2019,

£290

The River Druie just below the confluence of the River Luineag and the Am Beanaidh above Coylumbridge. Both tributaries flow down through native Caledonian Pine Forest, carrying snow meltwater from the northern corries of Cairngorm and the Larig Ghru respectively



No: 44

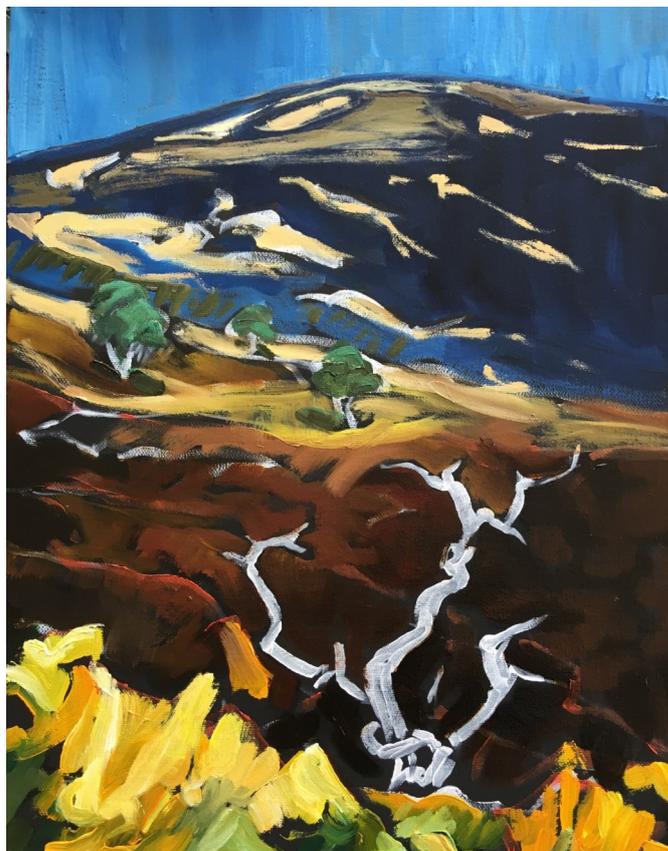
Artificial treeline on the slopes of Meall a' Bhuachaille

oil on canvas, 51 cm x 61 cm,

Iain White, 2020,

£360

Over much of the Highlands the current treeline is entirely artificial having been suppressed by felling and timber extraction, grazing by deer and sheep, and/or muir burning to manage the habitat for grouse. Often all that remains are isolated and often stunted trees, tree stumps or bleached dead trees. In the past the pine forests would have been succeeded at altitude by sub-alpine woods and scrub of birch, willow, and or juniper depending on local conditions.



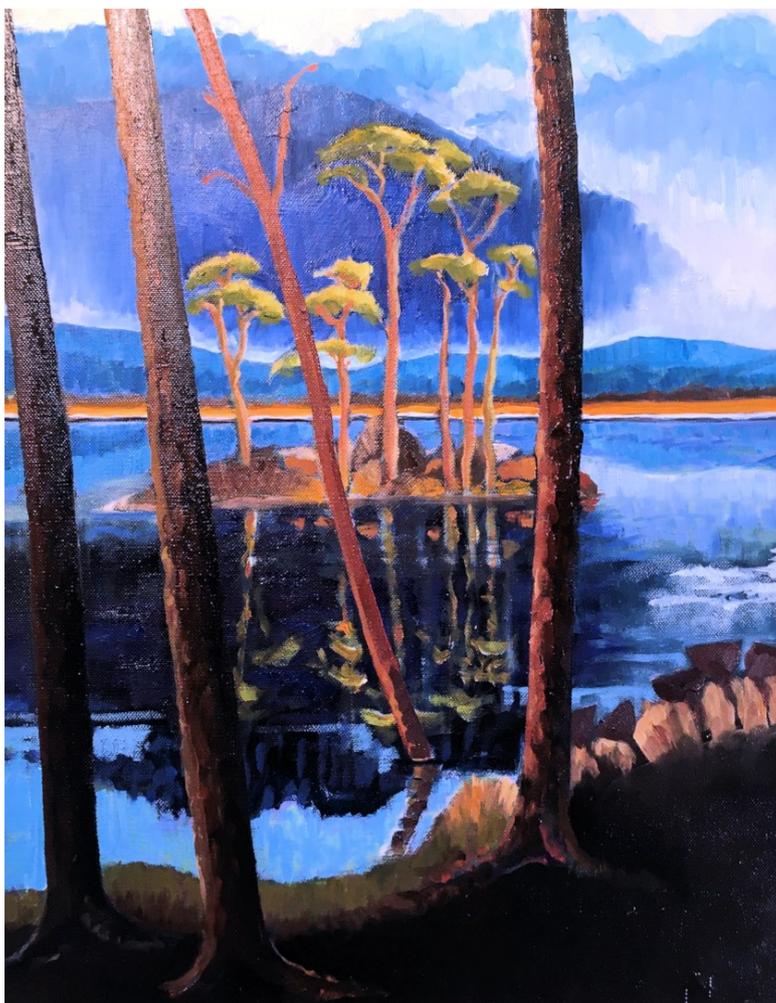
No: 45

Approaching storm

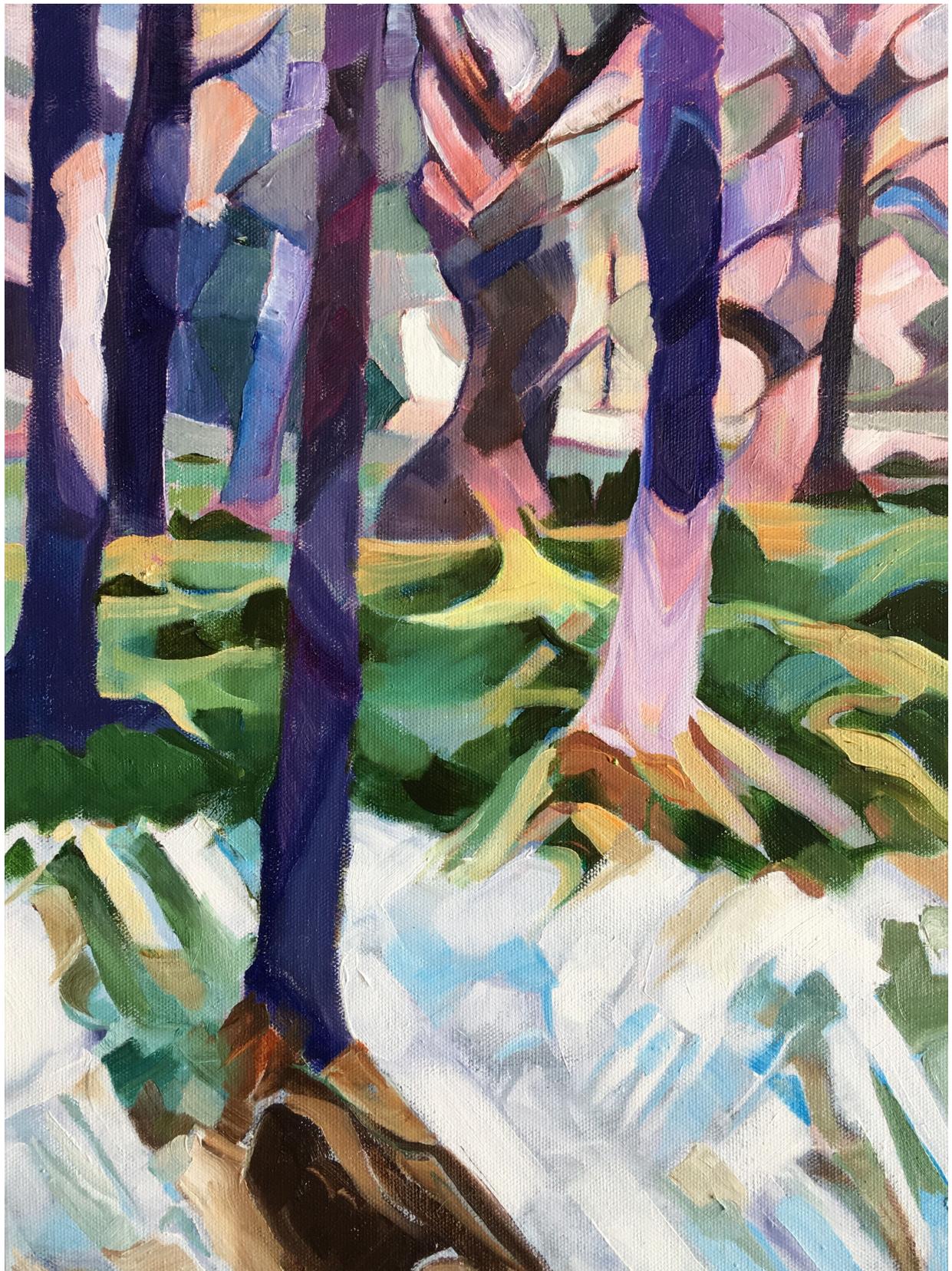
oil on canvas, 51 cm x 61 cm,

Iain White, 2020,

£360



A storm approaches from the southwest as the wind blowing across the loch increasingly disturbs the pines on the small islet in the middle distance.



No: 26 Flooded with Light

oil on canvas, 31cm x 41cm, Iain White, 2019, £280

Sunlight flooding the forest floor in this area of largely closed canopy in mixed age forest. The treatment is deliberately expressive and surreal in colour and form, capturing the essence of the pinewood.



No: 67

Pine heath

oil on canvas, 61 cm x 51 cm,
Iain White, 2020,
£395

An almost cubist interpretation depicts an ancient pine in open pine heath with scattered young regenerating trees in the middle distance set against a background of a denser stand of regenerated pines.



No: 34

Forest Clearing

oil on canvas, 50 cm x 50 cm,
Iain White, 2019,
£365

The more extensive remnants of the pine forest occupy large intermontane basins such as those of Abernethy and Rothiemurchus. During the last Ice Age these carried large piedmont glaciers that rather than retreating up valley in the Holocene simply decayed in situ, leading to a terrain of irregular relief and indeterminate drainage. Here in this clearing one such area of poor drainage and waterlogged soil restricts tree growth and determines the ground vegetation.



No: 7

**Ancient Pines near Loch
an Eilein**

oil on canvas, 41 cm x 51 cm,

Iain White, 2020,

£390

A group of ancient pines (c. 200+ years old) that have survived exploitation at the northern end of Loch an Eilein in the valley of the Milton Burn.



No: 37

Inshriach Forest, by Creag Far-leitire

oil on canvas, 20 cm x 30 cm,

Iain White, 2019,

£120

One of three impressions within the canopy of tall pines and birch on the steep slope and rocky outcrops of Creag Far-leitire in Inshriach Forest.



No: 41

The lip of the quarry

oil on canvas, 40 cm x 32 cm,

Iain White, 2021, **£260**

A view into the trunk space of the forest exposed above the lip of the face of a small quarry exploiting the fluvio-glacial sand and gravel. The treatment is emphasising the abstract shapes the trunks of the trees make against the canopy and sky.



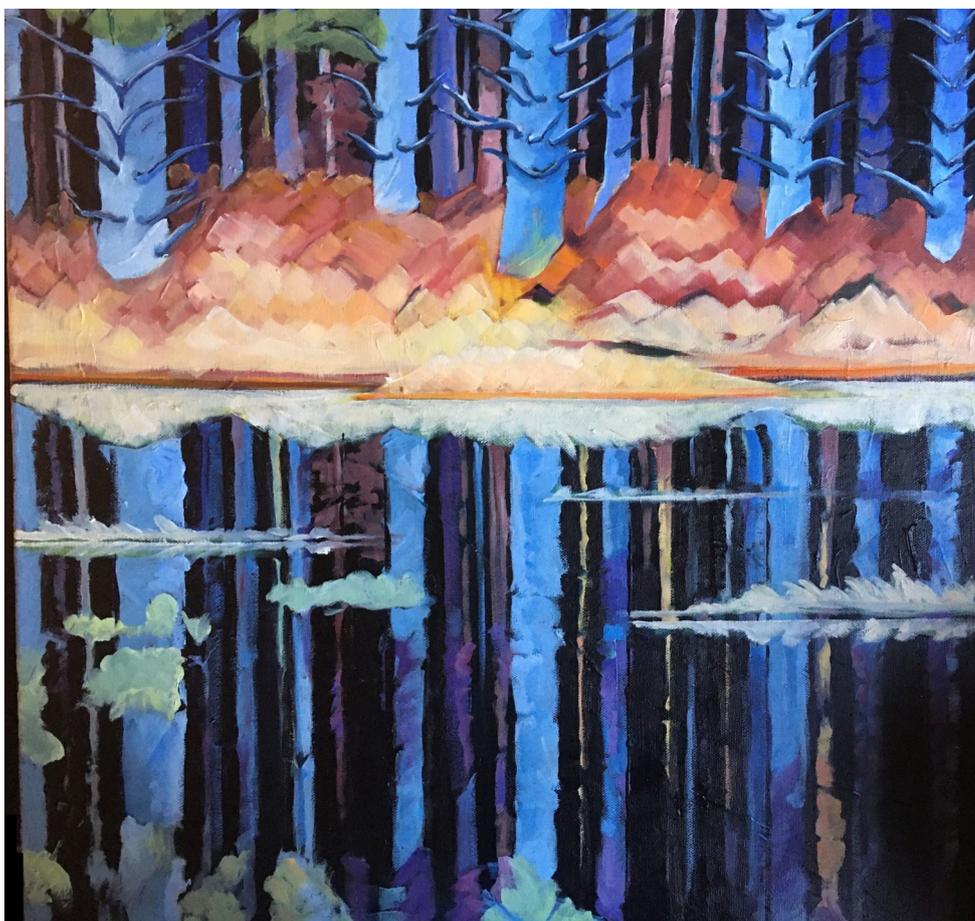
No: 27

Carn Eilrig and the Lairig Ghru

oil on canvas, 80 cm x 60 cm,
Iain White, 2019,

£650

The Lairig Ghru is a mountain pass bisecting the Cairngorm massif running roughly from The Rothiemurchus basin to the north to Deeside in the south. It formed as a glacial diffluence valley created when glaciers originating in the high corries of Baeriach, Carn Toul, and the Angel's Peak diverged and flowed both north and south carving out the Lairig Ghru.



No: 22
Reflections, Loch Garten

oil on canvas, 60 cm x 60 cm,
Iain White, 2019,

£550

Stylised treatment of the reflections of the trunks of an even aged stand (plantation) of native pines in the still waters of Loch Garten in the Abernethy Basin.

No: 40
Inshriach Forest

oil on canvas, 50 cm x 50 cm,
Iain White, 2021,

£300



This oil painting seeks to capture the effect of sunlight in the canopy of tall pines and birch on the steep slope and rocky outcrops of Creag Far-leitire in Inshriach Forest.



No: 57

Path to the Chalamain Gap from above the footbridge

oil on canvas, 36cm x 56cm,

Iain White, 2019,

£360

The scene here looks across the valley of the Allt Mor and its tributary the Allt a Choire Chais to the path to the Chalamain Gap from the 'sugar bowl', above the footbridge.

No: 35

Light and Shade

oil on canvas, 50 cm x 50 cm,

Iain White, 2021,

£380

Much of the pine forest consists of even aged stands reflecting natural regeneration after historical clearance or fire events. Here the forest lacks a tall shrub layer. Under more natural mixed age stands with variable tree densities there was (as in the foreground here) a tall shrub storey of Juniper, *Juniperus communis*, rowan, *Sorbus aucuparia*, and perhaps bird cherry, *Prunus padus*, as well as young birches





No: 51

**Abernethy Forest through the
Ryvoan Pass, from Airgiod-
meall**

oil on canvas, 80 cm x 60 cm,
Iain White, 2021,

£685

This panorama looks down from the summit of **Aigiod-Meall** across the Forestry Commission's pine plantations of what is now **Glenmore Forest Park** through the **Ryvoan Pass** to the **Forest of Abernethy** beyond.



No: 43

Old Pines at the forest edge

oil on canvas, 40 cm x 40 cm,
Iain White, 2021,

£380

One of a group of ancient (c. 200+ years old) pines that have survived exploitation at the northern end of Loch an Eilein in the valley of the Milton Burn.

No: 69

An old (200+years) “mother tree”

oil on canvas, 40 cm x 40 cm,
Iain White, 2021,

£365

An old (200+years) “mother tree,” the trunk dappled by the shadows of the tracery of branches. Trees such as this are so called because they act as the source of seeds from which the forest regenerates after setbacks such as logging, fire, or heavy grazing.



Furthermore, these trees nurture seedlings and saplings through the interconnection of their root systems mediated by symbiotic mycorrhizal fungi.

No: 62

Shallow roots of the Scots Pine

oil on canvas, 40 cm x 40 cm,
Iain White, 2019,

£320

The shallow rooting system of the pine, *Pinus sylvestris*, is seen clearly here, exposed by the erosion of a bank bordering a woodland path. These shallow roots make the tree particularly susceptible to wind throw, especially at higher altitudes and in more exposed situations.



No: 56

Through the Lairig Ghru to Deeside

oil on canvas, 40 cm x 40 cm,
Iain White, 2019,

£285

Through the Lairig Ghru to Deeside as the pines give way to open moorland below Castle Hill and Creag a Chalamain.



No: 23

Estate Cottages

oil on canvas on board, 60 cm x 60 cm,
Iain White, 2019,

£450

Estate cottages in a clearing in an area of densely planted Scots pine on the Rothiemurchus estate.

