

# The Woods of Caledon

*memories of Scottish pinewoods*

Iain White



Volume Two: *works on paper*

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*



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

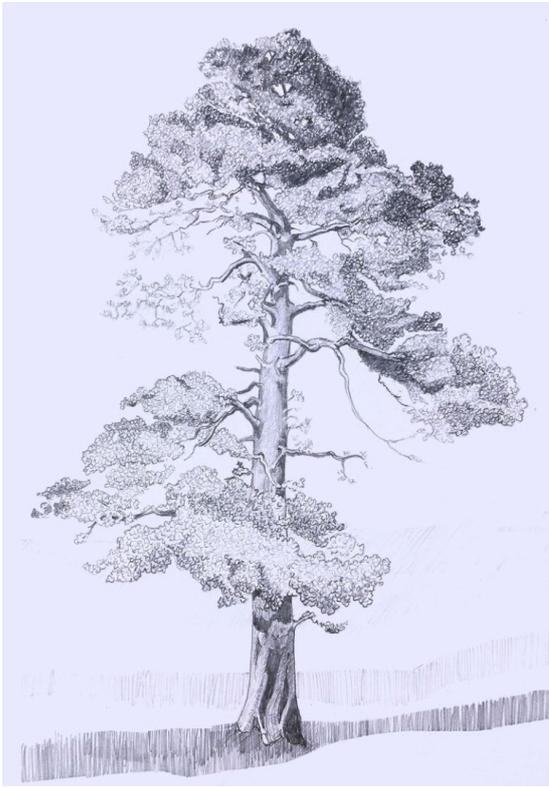
The pine woodlands of the Scottish Highlands can be considered as part of the Northern Coniferous Forest, or Boreal Forest. In Scandinavia the dominant tree of this formation, as far north as Lapland is the Norway spruce, *Picea abies*. Further north in Norwegian and Finnish Lapland this species is replaced 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 north-west Highlands pinewoods, were replaced by native birch woodlands.

## *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.

## The *Sois-bois* genre

In seeking to capture the nature and the spirit of Scotland's Caledonian Forest many of the works on paper in this exhibition owe a debt to the **Barbizon School** and the **Sois-Bois genre** that developed from it through the nineteen and into the twentieth century.

Unlike traditional landscape painters, the Barbizon artists presented a close-up view of the subject, many of their works having a portrait (vertical) rather than landscape (horizontal) orientation. Works of this type became known as **sous-bois**. This French term *sous-bois* refers to a forest-floor or undergrowth, and to the 19th century artists who cast aside tradition and journeyed into the forests to work close-up.

The focus is on tree trunks and forest understorey. If present the sky is barely visible, just a glimpse sometimes penetrating the branches. This type of composition was rare before the 19th century until the artists of the **Barbizon School** made paintings of forested areas in the **Fontainebleau** region of France.

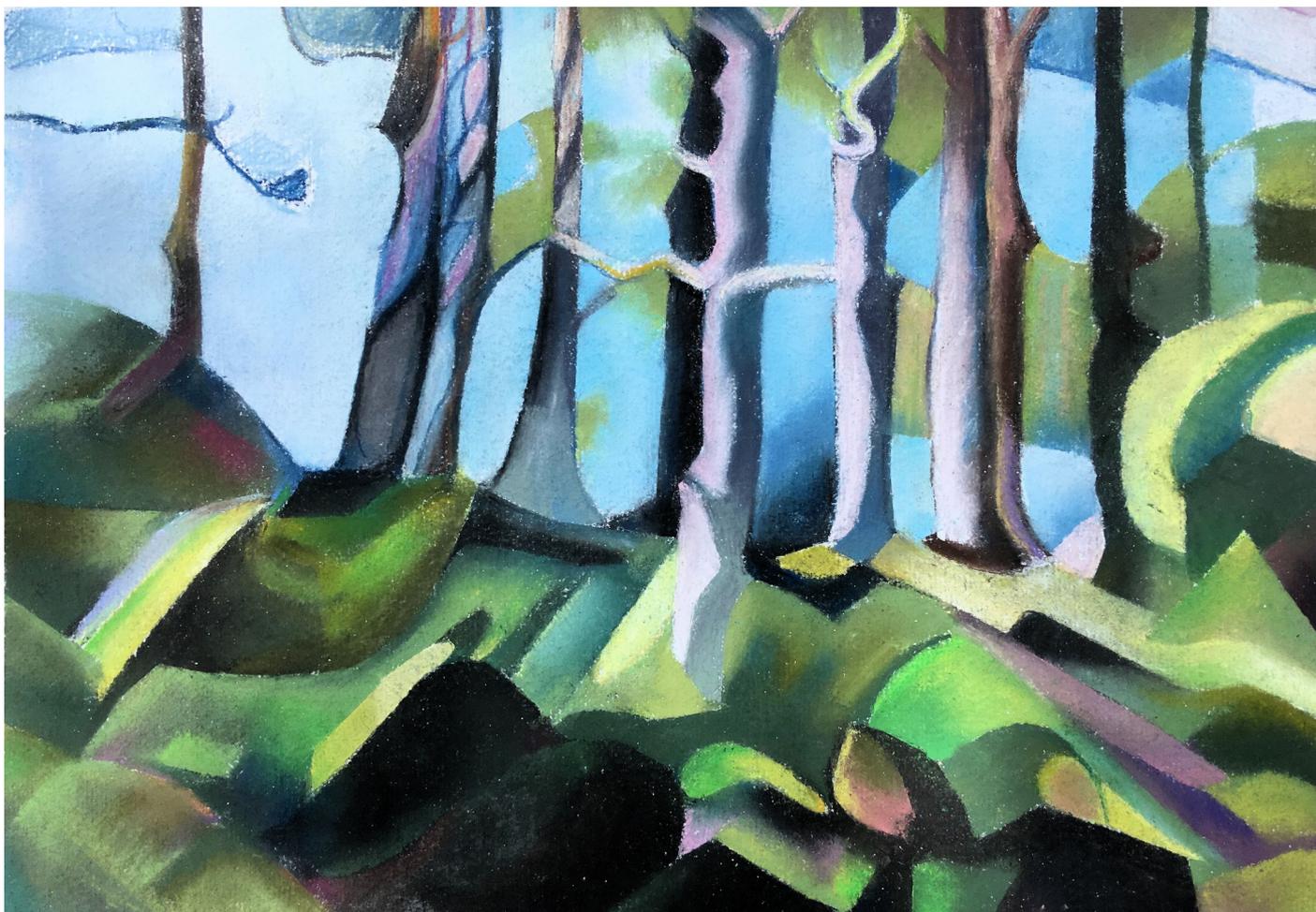


# EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Works on Paper

The works of Scottish pinewoods on paper and on card in this exhibition as with the oil paintings again fall into two groups. However, by far the majority are ...

... semi abstract and often expressionist works executed in soft pastel on a variety of supports or in oil pastel on card (often acid free mount board). They exploit the possibilities of the media used in order 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.



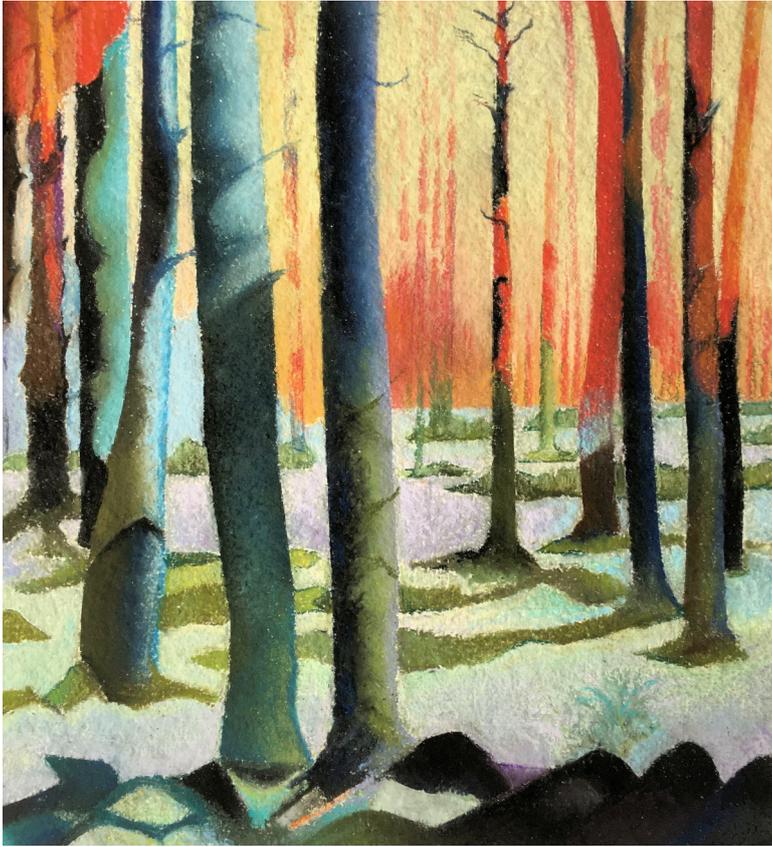
### **Slopes of Creag Fhiaclach-2 :**

soft pastel on '*Khadi*' watercolour paper,

32cm x 24cm, Iain White, 2019,

**£252**

This abstracted pastel work treats a similar location to that represented in one of the oil paintings, just downslope from Creag Fhiaclach where the pines reach their highest natural tree line, in a different way facilitated by the difference in media.



### **Young pines at sunrise**

soft pastel on Khadi watercolour paper,

46 cm x 43 cm,

Iain White, 2020,

**£252**

**No: 14**

A soft pastel capturing a stand of young pines in Glenmore at dawn as the early morning sun filters through the trees bathing the forest in a golden light.

### **Young pines at sunrise II**

soft pastel on Khadi watercolour paper,

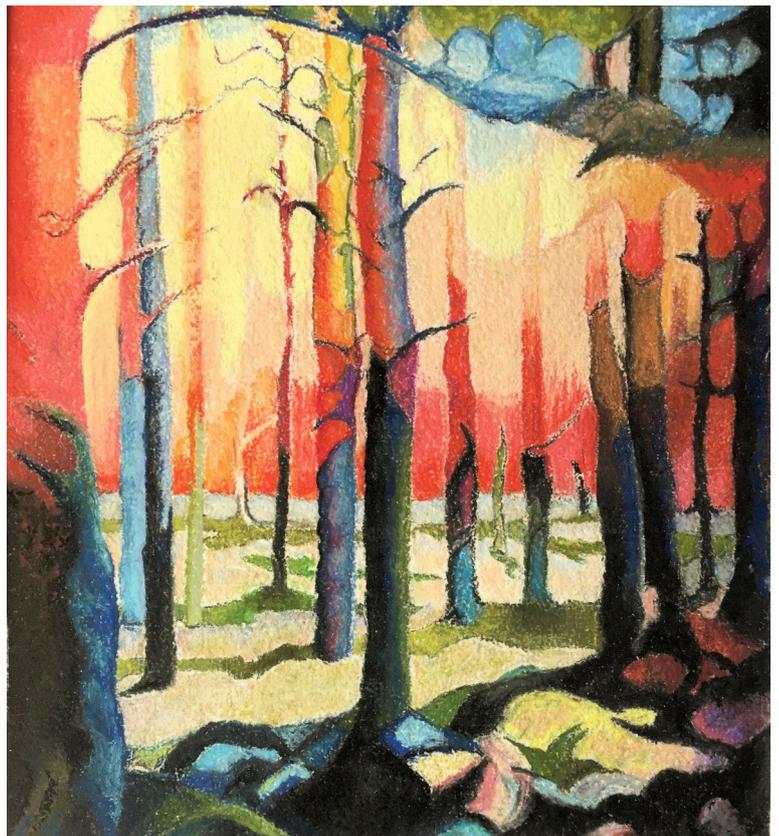
48 cm x 44 cm,

Iain White, 2020,

**£265**

**No: 15**

A companion to No: 14, again the forest is caught at dawn in this soft pastel as sunlight streams through this stand of even aged pines in Glenmore



**No: 17**

## **Pine canopy**

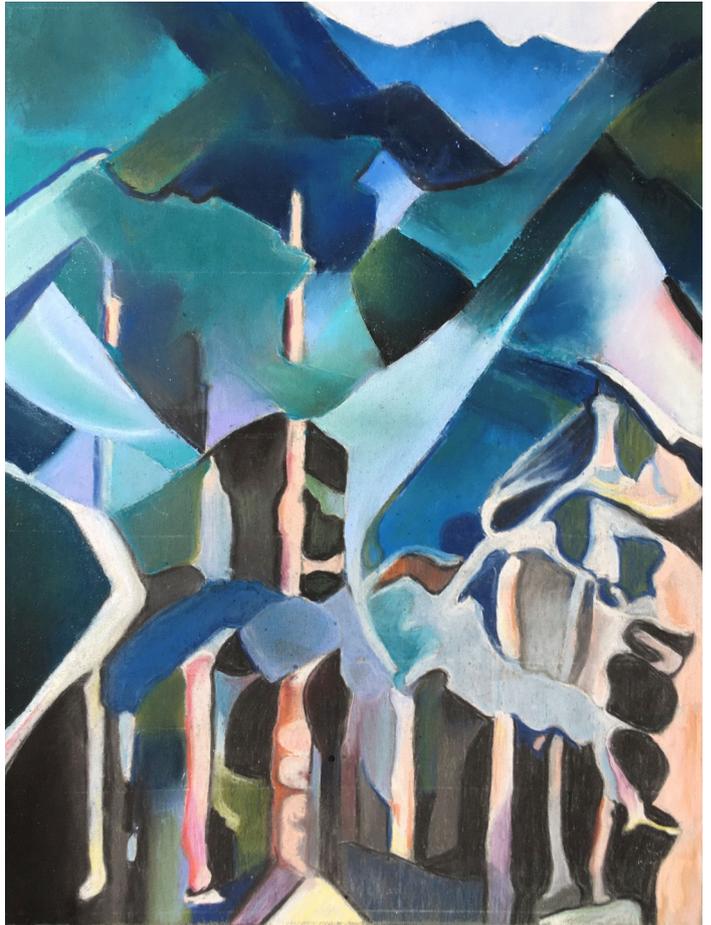
soft pastel on Fisher 400 pastel paper,

48 cm x 40 cm,

Iain White, 2021,

**£255**

This soft pastel portrays the dense canopy of pine in closeup. The treatment is inspired in part by the works of Emily Carr in the forests of British Columbia.



**No: 18**

## **In the canopy**

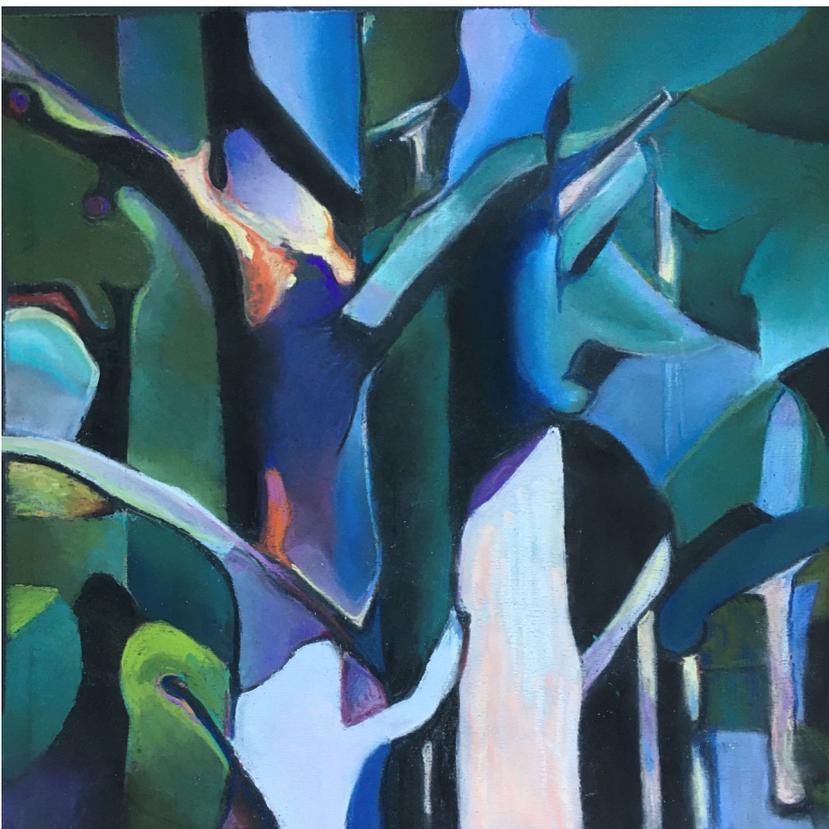
soft pastel on Fisher 400 pastel paper,

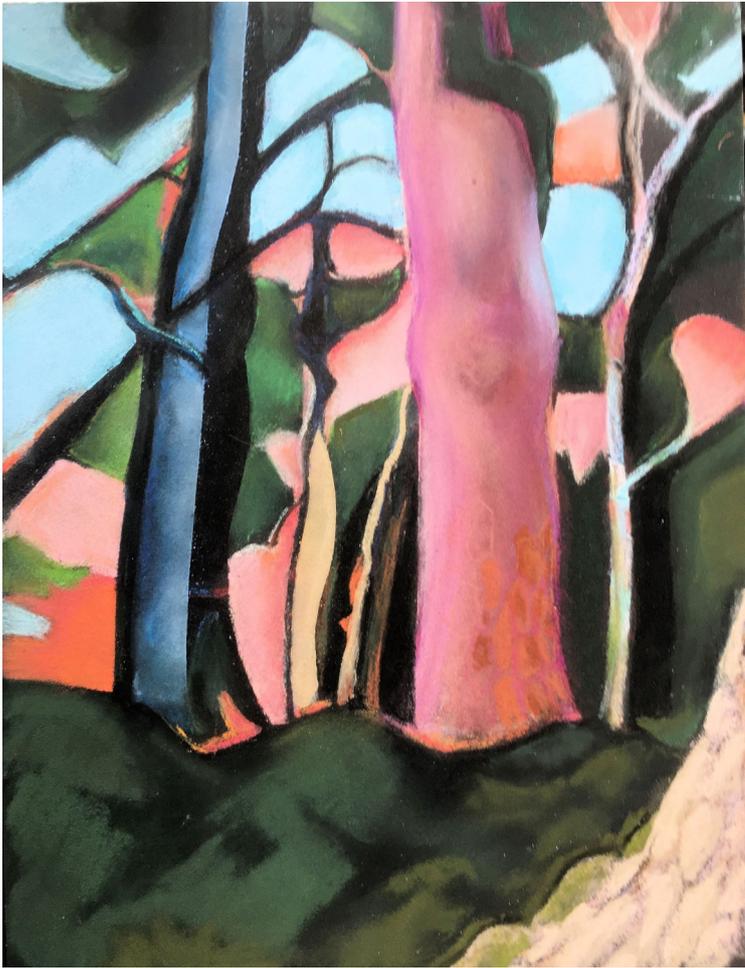
43 cm x 40 cm,

Iain White, 2021,

**£265**

The paintings and drawings of the forests of the Pacific Northwest by Emily Carr, associated with although never a member of the Canadian Group of Seven, have profoundly influenced my rendering of the 'Woods of Caledon' particularly, as here, in the works in soft pastel.





**No: 20**

### **Old trees at sunset**

soft pastel on Fisher 400 pastel paper,  
48 cm x 40 cm,  
Iain White, 2021,

**£280**

Mature pines on the slopes of Ord Ban rendered in soft pastel on watercolour paper and interpreted in a semi-abstract and expressive manner.

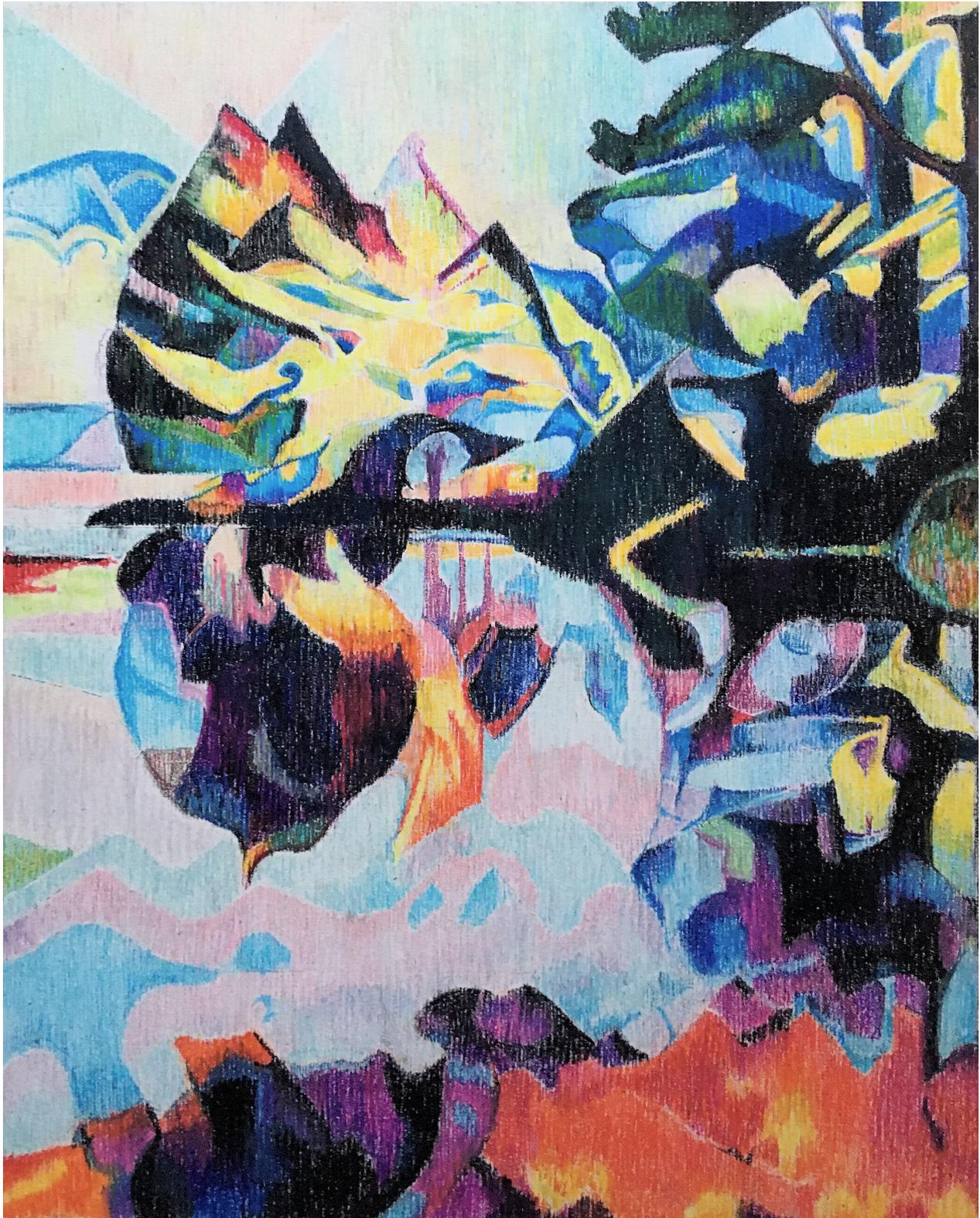
**No: 21**

### **Old trees at sunset II**

soft pastel on Fisher 400 pastel  
paper,  
43 cm x 40 cm,  
Iain White, 2021,

**£252**

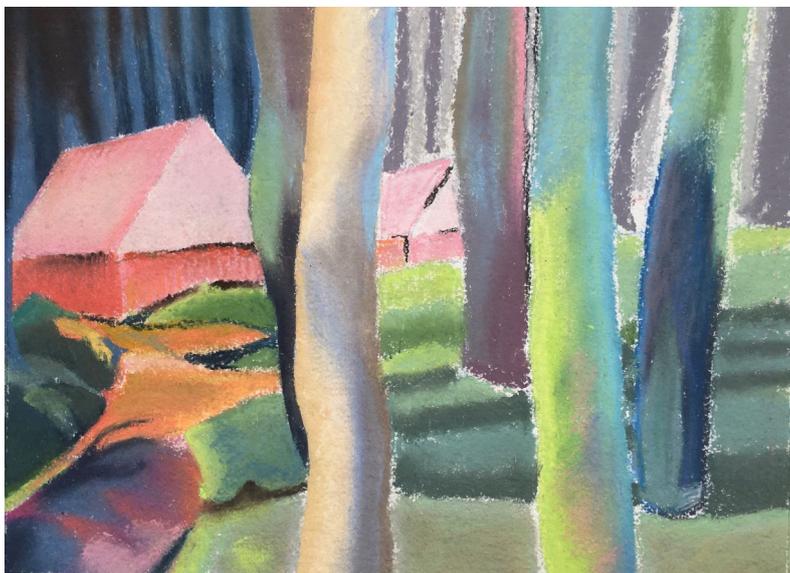




**No: 31**

**Reflections, shores of Loch an Eilean**, oil pastel on acid free card, 60 cm x 51 cm,  
Iain White, 2019, **£312**

A deliberately expressionistic representation of the reflections of pines on the shore of Loch an Eilein rendered in oil pastels and oil based colour pencils. Here the blending of colour to achieve mixing and shading is optical rather than physical in a manner akin to the pointillism of the impressionists and post impressionists.



**No: 24**

### **Deep in the woods ...**

soft pastel on Fisher 400 pastel paper,  
43 cm x 40 cm,  
Iain White, 2019,

**£250**

A re-interpretation of the motif executed in oils in No: 23 in soft pastels on watercolour paper. Estate cottages in a clearing in an area of densely planted Scots pine on the Rothiemurchus estate.



**No: 48**

**Glen Affric pinewoods**, soft pastel on Khadi watercolour paper, 48 cm x 46 cm,  
Iain White, 2020, **£250**

Pinewoods in Glen Affric, a soft pastel on watercolour paper.



**No: 49**

**Inshriach Forest**, soft pastel on Fisher 400 pastel paper, 48 cm x 50 cm, Iain White, 2021,  
**£300**

A soft pastel work on Fisher 400 pastel paper beneath the canopy of tall pines and birch on the steep slope and rocky outcrops of Creag Far-leitire in Inshriach Forest.

**No: 54**

## **Along the “Great Glen”**

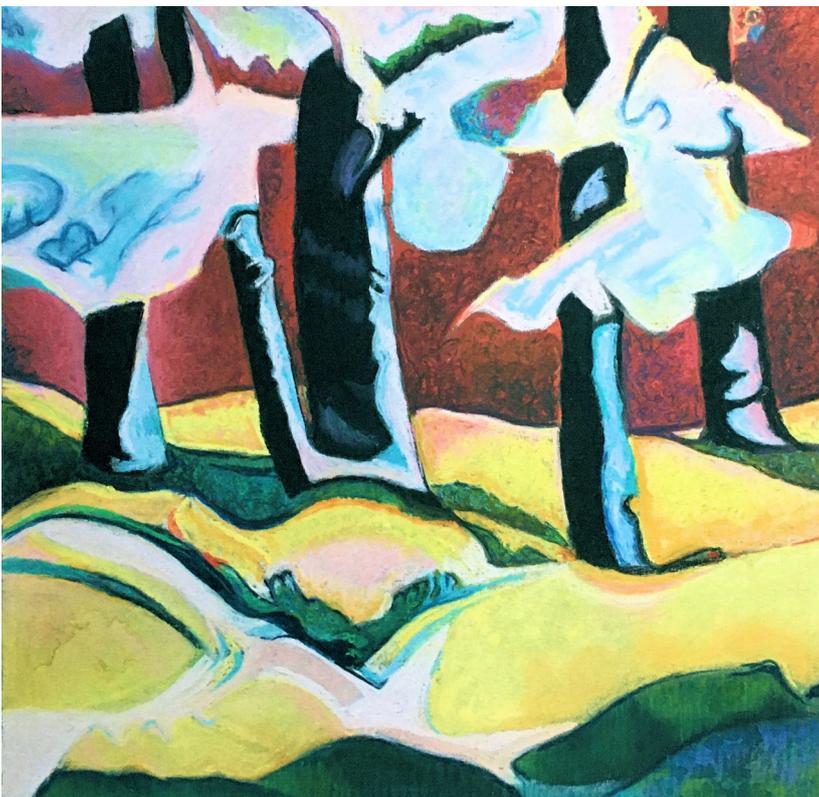
soft pastel on Fisher 400 pastel paper,

64 cm x 55 cm,

Iain White, 2021,

**£340**

Away from the main contiguous areas of native pine forest including those areas replanted with indigenous stock, pines exist as small groups of trees open to grazing and with a depleted biodiversity. Such is the case here along the Great Glen above Loch Lochy



**No: 55**

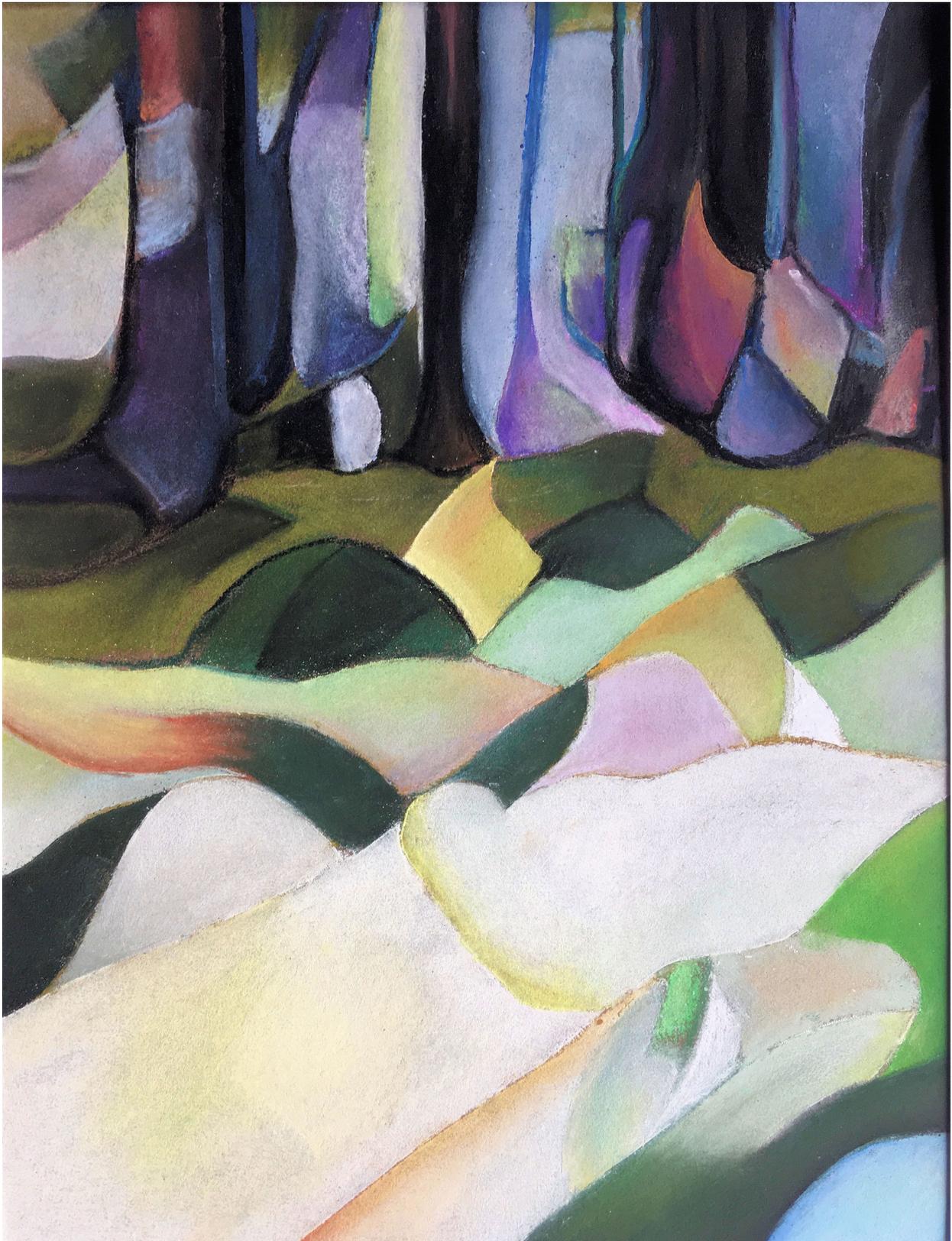
## **Dwarf or Sub-Shrubs of the woodland floor**

soft pastel on Khadi watercolour paper,  
43 cm x 40 cm,

Iain White, 2019,

**£252**

This soft pastel work conceptualises the forest floor in a deliberately expressionist treatment. A companion piece to the similar oil painting it emphasises both the hummocky growth of the sub-shrubs and the uneven nature of the substrate.



**No: 58**

**Sois-bois, undergrowth & tree trunks**

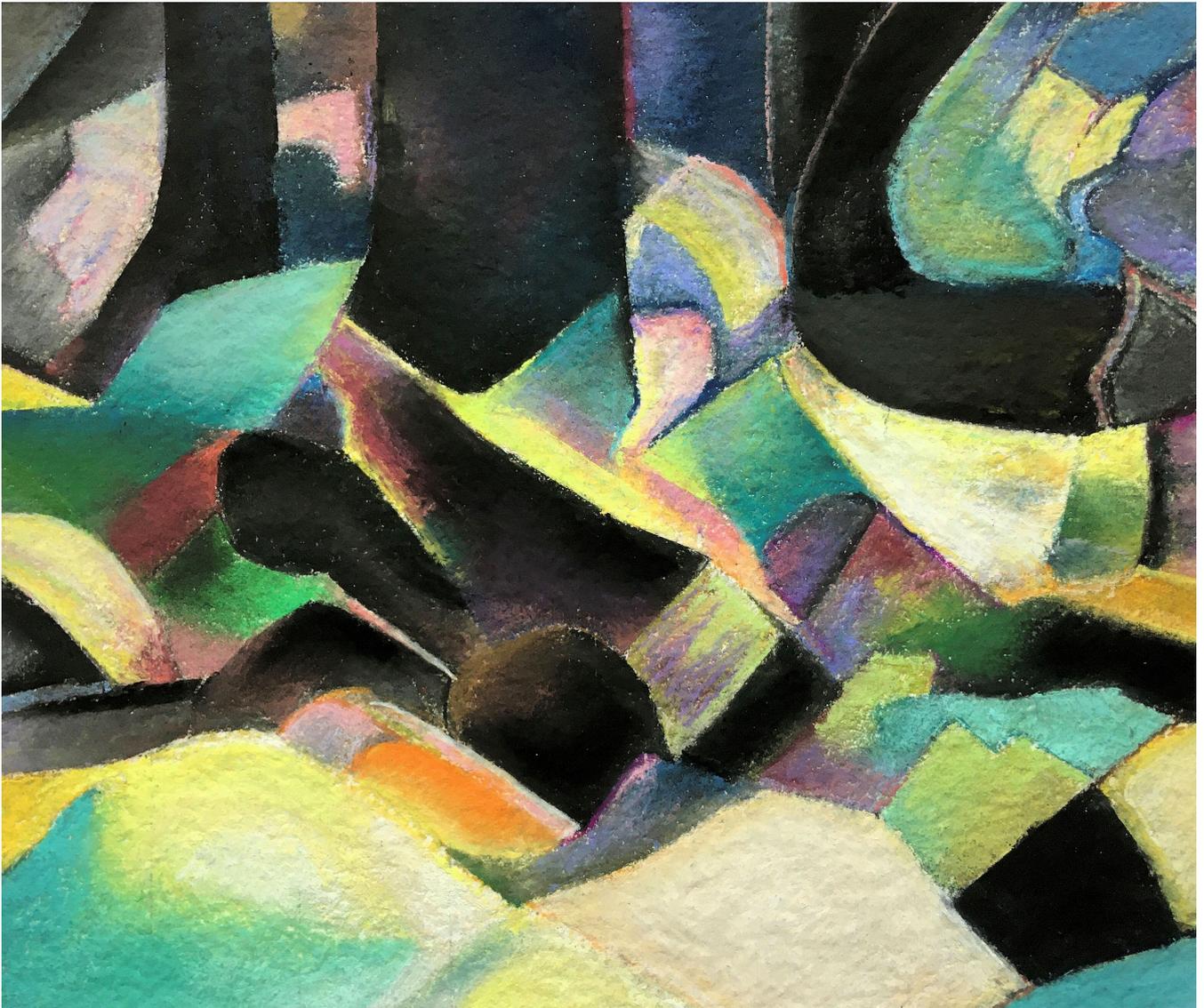
soft pastel on Khadi watercolour paper,

51 cm x 44 cm,

Iain White, 2020,

£290

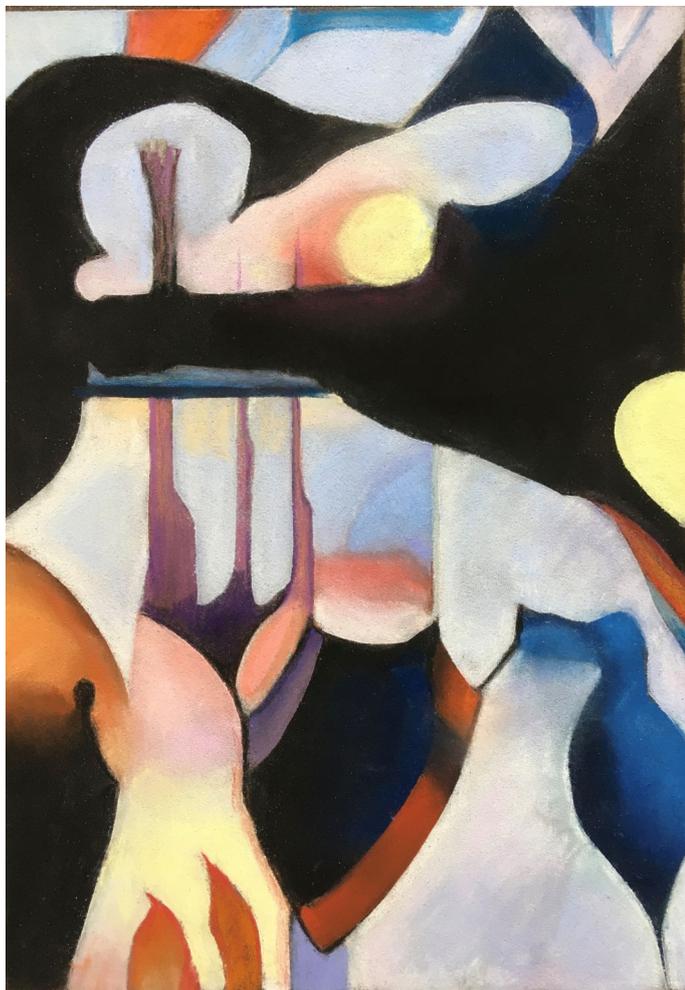
This soft pastel work simplifies the *sois-bois* composition into abstract shapes representing the hummocky forest floor and bases of the tree trunks.



**No: 59**

**Sois-bois, undergrowth & tree trunks II**, soft pastel on Khadi watercolour paper,  
43 cm x 40 cm, Iain White, 2020, **£252**

Adopting a reductionist approach to the hummocky forest floor and bases of the tree trunks, this soft pastel work simplifies the *sois-bois* composition into abstract shapes. Nonetheless their juxtaposition and colour convey much to the viewer. The browns, pinks and purple of the *Ericas*, the heather, the bell and cross leaved heather; the light greens and yellows of the bilberry and cowberry; the yellow green and white of the weft forming pleurocarpus mosses, liverworts and lichens are all evident beneath the dark trunks.



**No: 60**

### **Reflections II**

soft pastel on Fisher 400 pastel paper,  
45 cm x 35 cm,  
Iain White, 2021,

**£252**

A cropped and close up soft pastel consciously expressionistic representation of the reflections of pines on the shore of Loch an Eilein

**No: 61**

### **Overlooking Loch Mors**

soft pastel on Fisher 400 pastel paper,  
51 cm x 44 cm,  
Iain White, 2019,

**£280**

Semi-abstract soft pastel on Fisher 400 pastel paper providing a different perspective on the pines above Loch Mor shown in the oil painting, No: 16.





**No: 64**

### **The red tree**

soft pastel on Fisher 400 pastel paper,  
51 cm x 44 cm,  
Iain White, 2021,  
£285

A semi-abstract soft pastel on Fisher 400 pastel paper interpreting the forest structure and canopy in such a way as to capture the essence of the forest in summer sunshine.



**No: 65**

**Between the pines**

soft pastel on Fisher 400 pastel paper,

48 cm x 43 cm,

Iain White, 2021,

**£275**

Here a manipulated and abstracted view within the trunk space, probably at dusk, conveying unease and perhaps foreboding.



