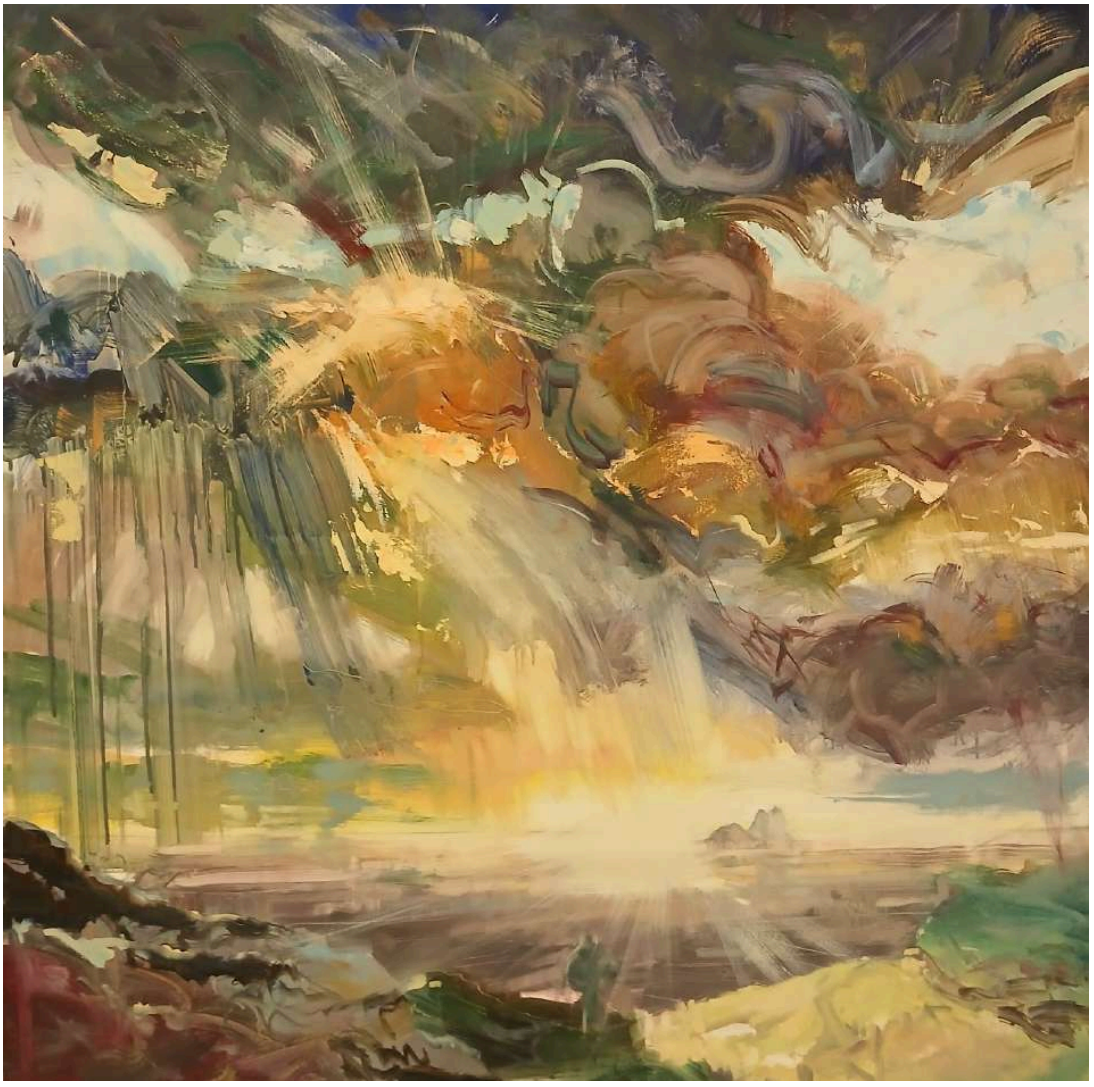
THE ALDE VALLEY SPRING FESTIVAL

CHRISTMAS EXHIBITION 2025



Skellig Michael - 'We just have to go…" Oil on Canvas, H1000mm W1000mm

IAN SEDGE

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Sea Roads, Saints and A Soft Land

For all sales enquiries: enquiries@aldevalleyspringfestival.co.uk

Introduction

Earlier in the year, we presented a collection of beautiful new paintings by Ian Sedge that explored a theme of A New Arcadia in the historic landscape of the Vale of Great Glemham – once the home of the poet George Crabbe and the writer Ronald Blythe. We will certainly return to this theme in the future, but for the Christmas Exhibition Ian has let his focus move downstream from the woodlands and glades of the Upper Alde Valley to the broad estuary at Snape and Iken, and beyond to the sea.

This shift in attention is both geographical and spiritual. A few months ago, Ian kindly showed us some new paintings he was entering into a competition. One of these was extraordinary : a slither of land beneath two towering columns of clouds, parted by a burst of the brightest, most golden light. It was a revelation in the truest sense : I saw Ian's work in a new way; and it revealed how he, too, was experiencing the world as we seek to discern, both within ourselves and without, a path towards light.

This first painting – its quiet yet magnificent presence - prompted a discussion about what it means to be alive and how we find faith, in whatever path we choose. This grew out of many walks we had shared in the landscape, which had a therapeutic quality to them. But it also reminded me of the Atlantic Coast of Kerry in Eire : of the many bee hive cells and early monastic sites that cling to hill sides and rock promontories; of the ethereal island of Skellig Michael [Sceilg Mhichíl] , that often seems to float, on quiet sunlit days, in a sea of liquid gold.

It is from this wild Atlantic coastline that some of the earliest Celtic Christian evangelists journeyed along the ancient sea roads to Iona, around Scotland to Lindisfarne – and to Suffolk. St Fursey and his brothers Foillan and Ulltan were among those early Celtic travellers who brought the Irish Church from the rocky cliffs of Kerry to the soft lands of the Suffolk coast.

I first visited Kerry in 2009 for an artist residency at Cill Rialig on the edge of Waterville Bay. I arrived thinking I would continue with line drawings of livestock and the landscape, which was my practice at the time. But my normal daily practice seemed somehow redundant or mundane. The gift of time was transformational. It demanded – or quietly invited – a complete rethink of my work, and I ended up drawing mostly in rainstorms, at dusk or by moonlight – when form rather than line and the feeling for a place came to the fore.

I was fortunate to be able to return to Kerry in 2016 to stay with the poet Paddy Bushe at his family home in Waterville Bay. He revealed more of the early monastic sites in the local landscape – and explained that both St Brendan the Voyager and St Fursey had their roots in Kerry. I continued to explore the local landscape around Waterville, visiting Bolus Head to the north and Hogs Head to the south. At times, Sceilg Mhichíl would drift in and out of view

in passing mists; or stand dazzling in pools of gold on bright, calm sunlit days. The presence of the early monastic sites on the hills and in the valleys became more prominent in my consciousness of the landscape and the rocky shoreline – and of the sea.

On returning to Suffolk, I kept the drawings safely in my studio. But in meetings with Ian in the autumn, as he described his own journey of faith – of finding an inner light and seeking to follow an outer one too – the early Irish evangelists came to mind. These were men and women who lived on a land that braced itself against the immense weather systems of the Atlantic. In Suffolk, a large wave is 10ft tall. In Kerry, a fierce Atlantic swell can drive waves almost four times higher than this on to the cliffs, throwing up spray and plumes of water at least as high again. In journeying on this sea in small currachs or timber boats, braving storms and rocky shores, it is easy to imagine the Irish travellers – the early saints – carrying their faith as quiet yet fiercely bright embers burning within their hearts and souls. With only a thin layer of cured hide or lapped timber beneath their feet, they must have travelled with a sense of immense, bright hope as well : trusting that their travelling must one day lead them to a soft land in which they could fan their embers to create a mighty light in their new surroundings.

In talking to Ian over the past months and in witnessing the emergence of many extraordinary paintings, it is clear that the works appearing from his studio beautifully capture this sense of journeying with faith, hope and light in one's heart ; and the desire for this to merge with a greater sense of the divine – the more subtle light of love that envelops us at all times, if we seek it out and let it shine into our own lives. In this sense, Ian's work feels brave and courageous - and filled with love. His paintings illuminate his own journey and, in doing so, shed light on a path that we can all follow. As he has very beautifully explained, it involves letting go of the past and deciding to seek out and lay hold of light, joy and compassion instead. It feels a great privilege and blessing to welcome his work to the farm as part of the Christmas Exhibitions 2025.

Jason Gathorne-Hardy, Director/Curator

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Foreword | In Conversation with Ian Sedge

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A transcript of a conversation that took place between Ian and associate curator Naomi Russell on 3 December 2025 in preparation for the exhibition.

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Naomi Russell (NR): *You've said to me, and Jason, that the feeling of not understanding is part of your practice and that as you paint, you discern. I am curious to know, how does this work?*
Ian Sedge (IS): My creative process throws up ways of finding answers to life, the answers come from certain places, one of those is that act of creation, getting comfortable with the known. It means beginning with a lack of expectation. In the past if I could see visually what I was painting that was really helpful for me. But then it began to do the opposite, nothing matched up to the reality. I'd be pissed off that things hadn't worked out. And then, in this exercise of standing in front of a canvas with no clue about what I am going to do, sloshing on paint and seeing what happens, something happened.

NR: *And how does that find a form in these new paintings?*
IS: I suppose what's emerged is that in every single painting there has been that one constant, which has been this sense of light, this sense of light in a dark place. Light is my practical guide in front of a canvas. That's been my sort of mantra lately. It's been that sort of when things have gone wrong, when things are a bit tough in life and things are a bit fearful, and I'm mulling over myself ahead of what I should be doing. Should I be doing this? Should I be doing that? Well, what if I do that? It's all going to go tits up. Within that I can have that picture of what I've been painting, and the mantra "just head towards the light". Every moment I've got my head in a bad place, I just think of one of those paintings and say to myself, just head towards the light, that's what we need to do. Head in a vague direction.

NR: *Can you talk about one of the paintings where the bursts of light are found?*
IS: Well, the triptych (St Botolph's Lantern) certainly contains it, but others do too. Going back to the first painting, noticed by Jason, which was Skellig Michael. There's a familiar landscape at the back of my studio in Butley: marshes, the river, it feels like an ancient burial ground - there's something very magical about that place. It's a very comforting and consoling place of healing. I always go and stand on the marshes after a shitty day, with a face full of air - wind - that's where the spiritual side comes in, connected to the landscape. The place holds a certain power, and that's what this piece turned out to be - about everything connecting. That here on earth and in the sky and the heavens, the idea of the unknown - everything is linked. Some of the energy in that painting - my own worries - forcing them up

into the light. Somehow the light isn't overcome by it. Light always hits the land. That cyclical aspect stayed with me.

That's what the feeling of peace turned out to be, it was about everything connecting. That was what was going on in my mind, that here on earth, and in the sky, in the heavens, in the idea of the unknown, in the light, that everything is linked. That's the sort of energy in that painting I wanted to create on the canvas when I was doing it, it's about my fears and my own worries and worldly crap that's going on. And there was almost this forcing up of that into the light, and the light somehow not being overcome by it at all. And then in the process of that light still coming down and hitting the land, with that circular idea of, I don't know, when it's about, maybe it's about pain and forgiveness that that light does something to it. And that's the start, what got things rolling. I think I've been embarrassed about putting ideas of faith. and spirituality into words. Anything going on in my head, or my thoughts, or my soul was a bit frightening.

NR: *I'm reading a book about one of my favourite Dutch authors, Louis Couperus. It's called "Angst en Schoonheid" which in translation means "Fear and Beauty". I'm picking up that as you paint you have found a way to face fear and move towards beauty. To hold those things in balance. There's a lot of weight to these new paintings, they are potent, certainly to me as a viewer.*

IS: Yeah. There is a depth to it. It feels very anchored at some level. If you talk about the sort of fear and beauty. I think of it as the value of the negatives in contrast, those things that we could do without: we could do without fear, we could do without pain, you know, without any suffering. And reflecting on some of what we talked about earlier in this conversation, understanding their purpose is a bit of a strange one. But I try to. I know that I don't understand their purpose. Other than knowing that it has a purpose. There is value in the negatives. Those are things we think we can do without - pain, suffering, we want to get rid of them. But not understanding their purpose is a strange one. I know that I don't understand their purpose. The beauty of those contrasts, and the beauty of not needing to know.

Maybe these paintings have been a bit more of an exercise in my own experience coming to terms of why they're needed in life and not being frightened of them either. The darkness is there. The darkness is always going to be there. I like that title of the book, which is my sort of thing. I think when we have that fear it can prevent us from looking at the light, and there's no need, there's no need for that to happen. I can get so bogged down in the idea of things not working out as I think they should. Then I forget that the light's there, or I don't even notice it, or I can't be bothered to look towards light and love. I can get so wrapped up in my own self pity of darkness and fear, when all I had to do, yet again, you just turn towards the light, and something there's something that eases everything, just in that conscious action.

NR: *Three of the new paintings have the shared title 'The Still Point at the Centre". Is the still point the light, or something else?*
IS: The light is all something else. Light is about interpretation of love and personal faith. That warmth is what I look toward and what it gives. That for me is God. Look toward light, love and warmth. I can do that even when there are storms and darkness and fear around me. It has taken time and it's taken practice to draw my gaze from that absorbing sort of darkness to look towards light. It's not exactly easy and it just hasn't meant just just do this and it will all be all right. That hasn't been my process at all, but through constant reminders, constant repetition, constant practice, that these things start to slowly, occur.

NR: *This new body of work also sees a different focus in terms of territory. Your gaze has moved downstream to the estuary at Snape and Iken. What was the pull?*
IS: It was a suggestion through Jason. The triptych at Iken represents light and openness and freedom.

Another starting point was how to paint the sky. I had a fear of painting the sky. How to interpret it. It's not a matter of recording - it's about showing what's in me on the canvas. Something about breaking out, the fear of allowing anyone to see the real me. Expectations of what I should paint and how it should be seen. The guidance from Jason and allowing myself to be open to another's point of view has been very important. So much of what I have done before has been about self imposed isolation, in the woods, amongst the trees. Making sense of things on my own. That's not what we're meant for as human beings.

And then, where that triptych is concerned it's about, I suppose it's about light and openness and freedom. It's almost like a person is breaking out of the woods, into the forest out of that contained, safe, space that is almost like a cage. Yes, a breakout into that sense of light and freedom and I suppose so much of this started with this thing of sky, and this fear of representing sky. This new phase of work has been about how to open myself to being with other people.

NR: *Talk about that a bit more*
IS: I had a fear of allowing anyone to see the real me: expectations of how I should be, what I should be painting, how it should be seen. In this new work there has been a letting go of that and following, whether one might call it instinct or intuition or faith or trust. Someone else's idea. Someone else's inputs. Letting out more of me, letting in more of other people, and more of an understanding of where I sit in relation to faith, and where we all sit has been part of the process. It's allowed me to follow my instinct and intuition.

NR: *TS Eliot's Four Quartets have been influential in these new works haven't they? The title of one begins with the words of the second quartet, East Coker, "In the beginning is my end". How do the quartets percolate into the paintings?*
IS: I remember the first time I was reading it, actually. It was the most bizarre thing. I was watching my son play football. Okay. I probably should have been watching him play football

rather than reading the poems, but that's what I had always done. And that feeling of reading it for the first time stuck with me. I was able to allow myself to go along with a feeling of what I was reading, without fully understanding exactly what was being written.

It's that more than anything that has spilled into the work, and maybe spilled into life as well, getting comfortable with the unknown, getting comfortable with not knowing where I'm headed, not knowing where a painting is going and not having to understand. Through the slow release of re-reading I re-interpret things and they can be of more relevance at certain points. A poem, or part of a poem, can have moments of power in different circumstances. The same passage can mean something different at different times.

Maybe there's something in the paintings, which is about my interpretation of being a sort of a vague idea of faith, love and hope, and a journey that I feel am on and perhaps we're all on, which is we don't really know where it's going, but it's the direction I seem to be heading seems to be vaguely sort of right, and it seems to be vaguely, a bit sort of warm and company, and field of light. And I think that's what I'll always spring back to when things get a bit ropey and things get a bit tough or things get full of fear and frustration or anger.

That phrase in the beginning, that first, I think, yeah, that first line of, do you say it was the second quartet “in the beginning is my end”, it's about a sense of faith, love, and I suppose infinity. I think that that's a bizarre thing to sort of try and get comfortable with, an idea of infinity. And knowing that you'll never get to it, to the destination.

That sums it up. I’ve found a way to be comfortable in knowing that I'll never get to that source. Nothing needs to be perfect. Nothing is perfect. Nothing will ever be concluded exactly the way I want it to. Things will never turn out exactly how I want to. And thank God that it won't. Because when I'm constrained by my own thoughts and ideas of how something is going to be, and that being especially in my painting, I've already set myself a limit to how far I can go. There is something vital about releasing myself to an idea that I don't know: it opens up space and distance and that opens up possibilities.

NR: *Can we end with some final reflections about walking and journeying? You walk regularly with Jason. You've called one of the paintings, Skellig Michael “We just have to go…” which is inspired in part by work from Jason’s residency in Ireland in 2009. For me the title crystallises how in life we just keep moving, somehow.*
IS: Yeah. I think it goes about that fear thing, that the fear can kill something before we've even started. An idea can be there, and that can be as far as it goes. And that's certainly my experience. I think it's when I start thinking: there's no point starting this journey, because it won't. How could it possibly end in a positive way?

Those walks I did with Jason were the first time I started to use the word “we”. That spiritual journey can’t be done on my own. It has to involve other people. Walking with Jason, became

a process of healing, sharing, having the courage to talk about the inside to another human being.

So this body of work is almost a tribute to the idea of moving into we. Singularity moving into humility means allowing someone's input to be allowed into my space. I have always struggled with the idea of letting someone in. Sharing one's experiences and physical material possessions, desires, hopes. I am part of a community, and learning to embrace that has been difficult. It takes practice. More importantly, those answers to contemplation, in my very small experience, have always been they have only ever come through people. Not through a concept of within me, no internal sudden realisation, it comes in the mundane, often experience of sharing with other people. It's too easy to miss out on those experiences of sharing time because of fear of or shame.

There are some messages that only seem able to be delivered through another human. In that way, those shared experiences with Jason have become transmuted into the painting. There is something about walking and the landscape that allows things to be said, something in the surroundings that gives me courage to say things. A journey laid out in a different form, the softness of forgiveness inhabiting the physicality of the territory around me that makes it easier, that seems to soak up some of the pain and the shame of what one might say to another human being. Another kind of journey.

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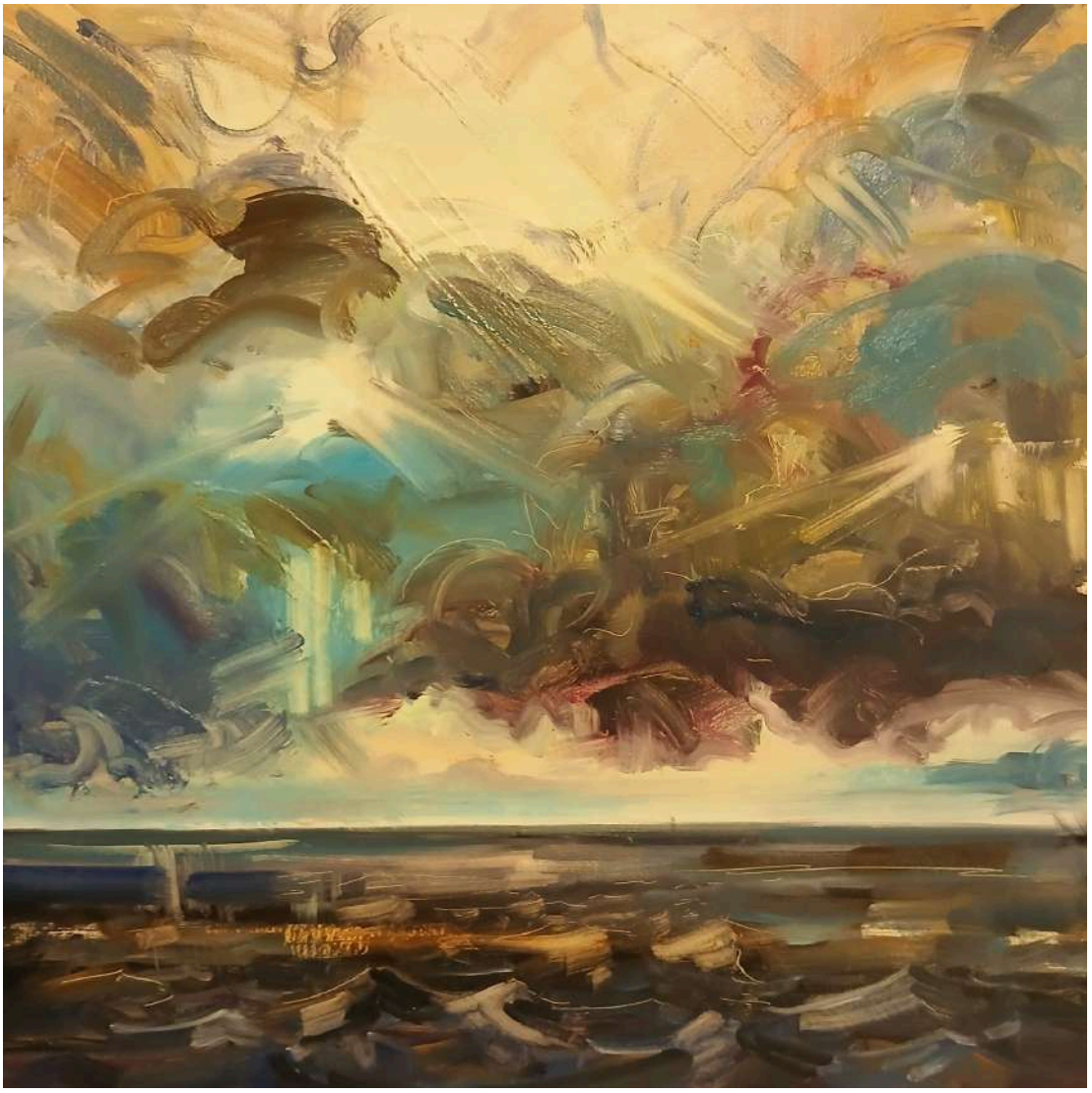
St Botolph's Lantern

Oil on Canvas, H1500mm W1000 mm x 3 (Triptych)
£10,000

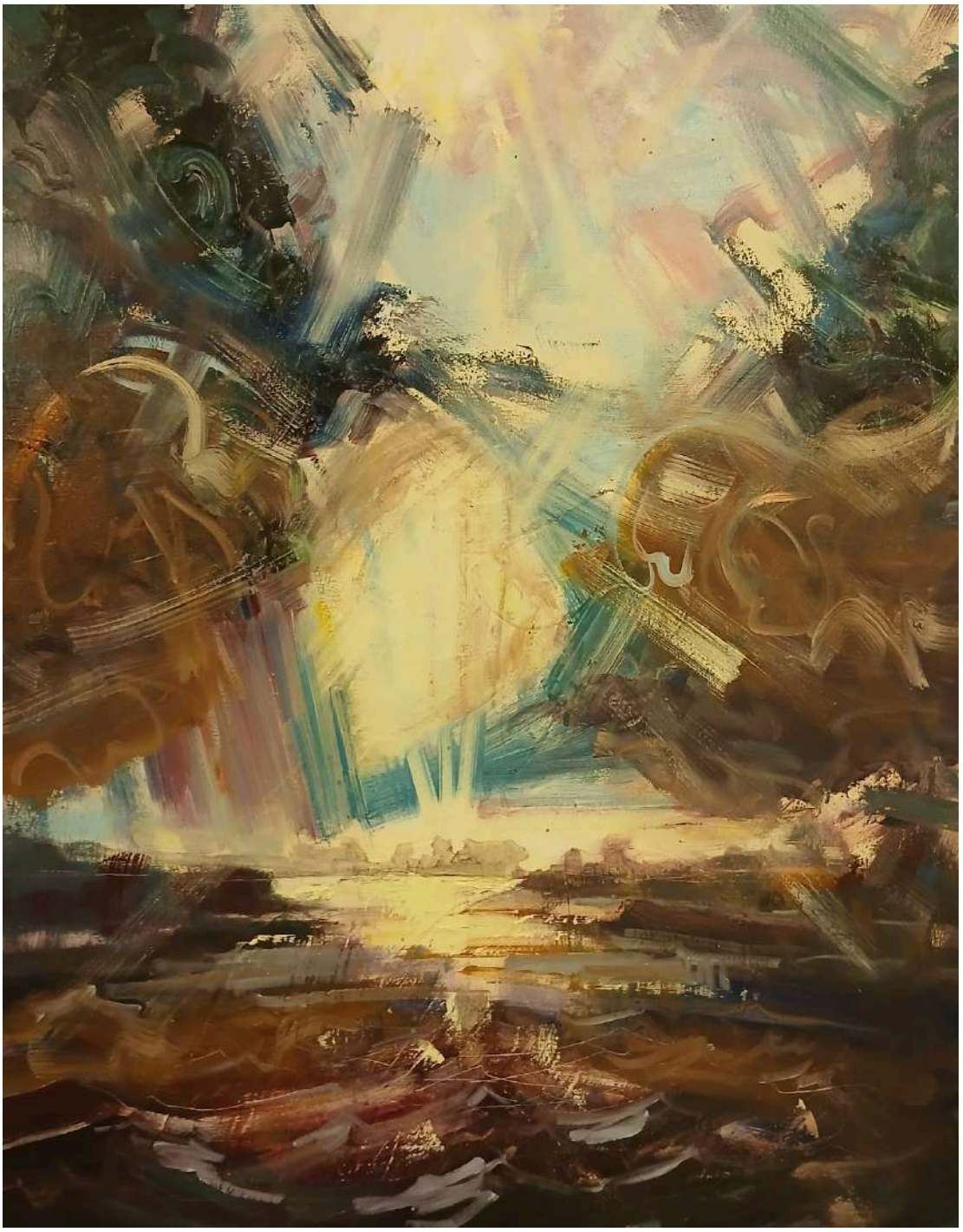
In my Beginning is my End

Oil on Canvas, H1220mm W1220mm
£3,500



Set Adrift

Oil on Canvas, H820mm W820mm
£1,850

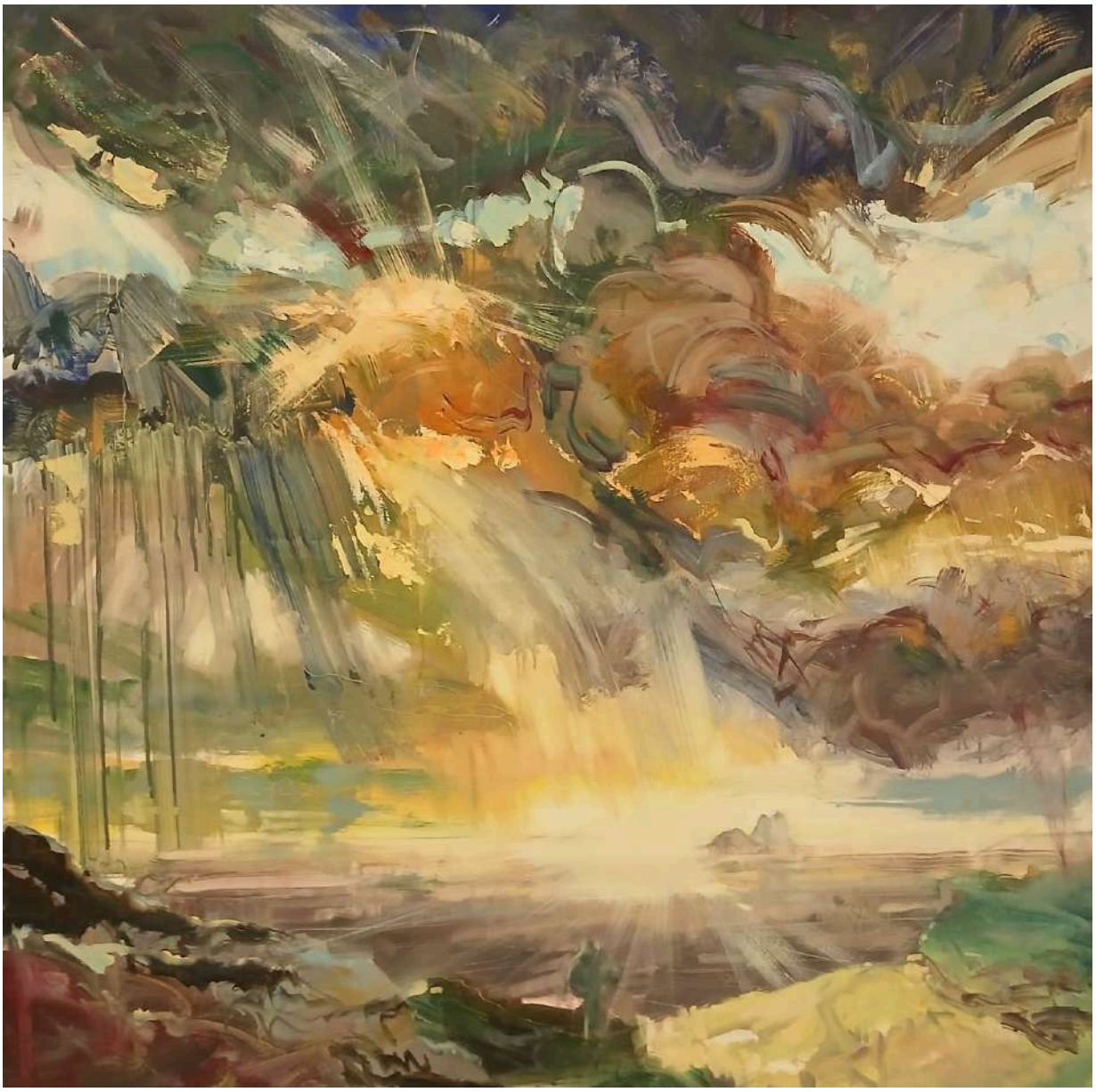


The Light be my Guide

Oil on Canvas, H1020mm W820mm
£2,000

Heavenly Solitude

Oil on Canvas, H1500mm W1000 cm
£3,750



Skellig Michael - 'We just have to go…"

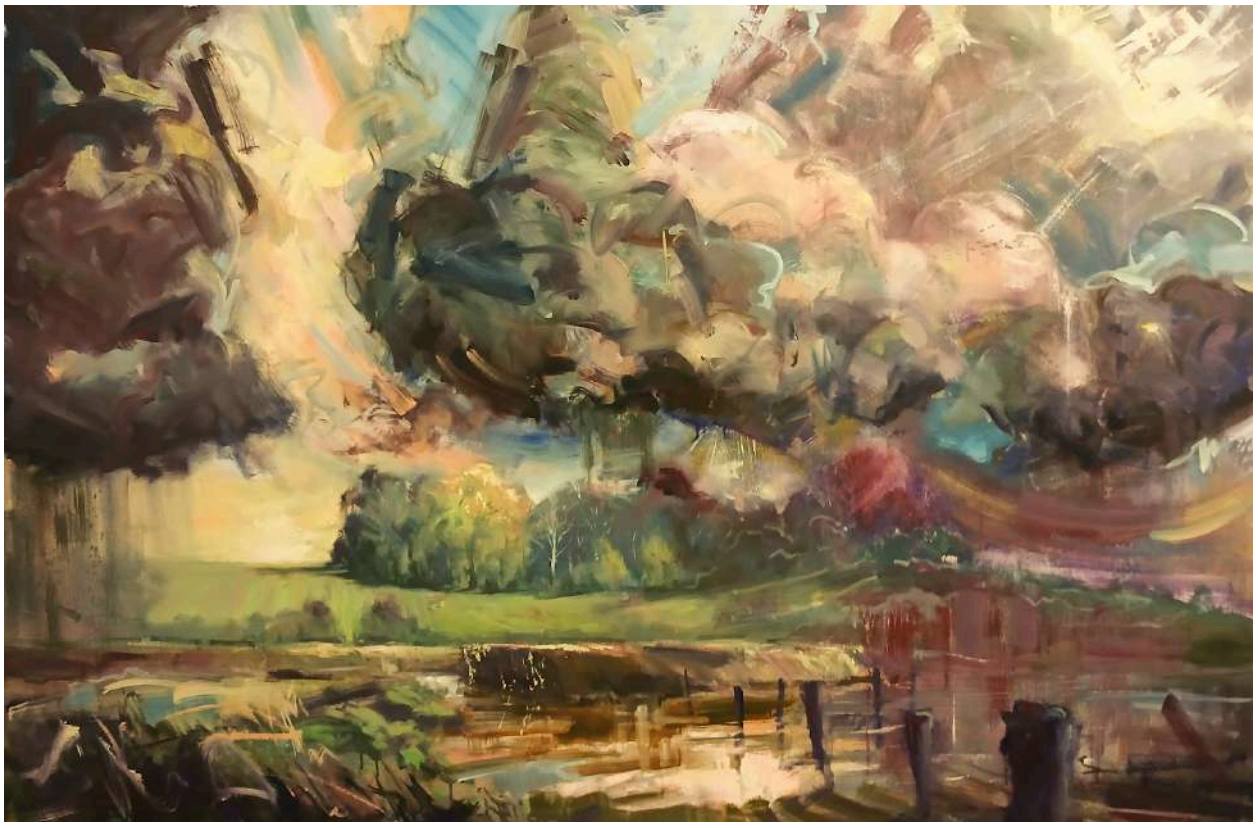
Oil on Canvas, H1000mm W1000mm
£2,500

In a Dream

Oil on Canvas, H620mm W620mm
£850

Light of Hope

Oil on Canvas, H560mm W820mm
£1,150

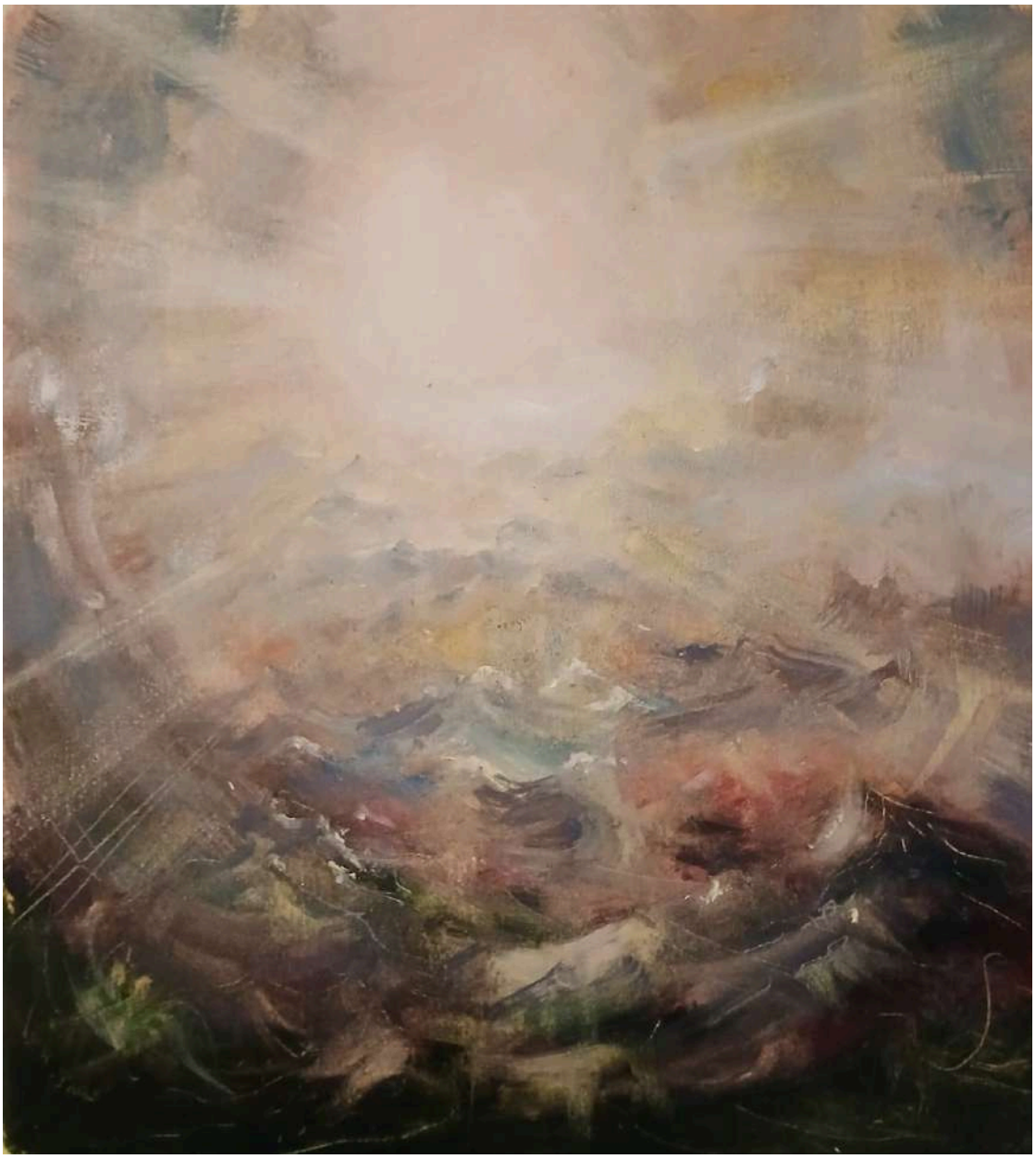


Love Despite Fear

Oil on Canvas, H1000mm W1500mm
£3,750

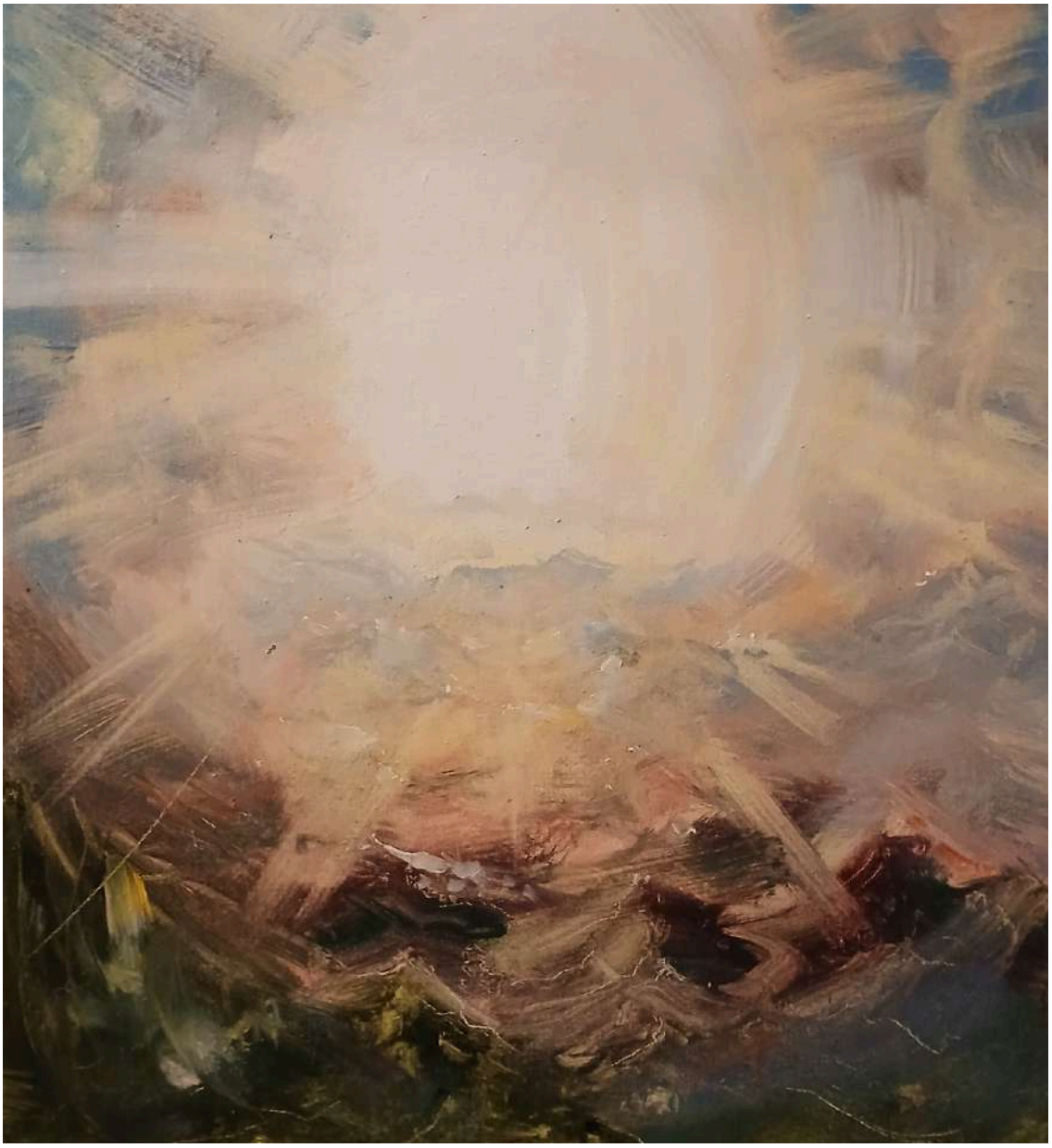
Light Within Chaos

Oil on Canvas, H455mm W555mm (x2) Diptych
£1,250



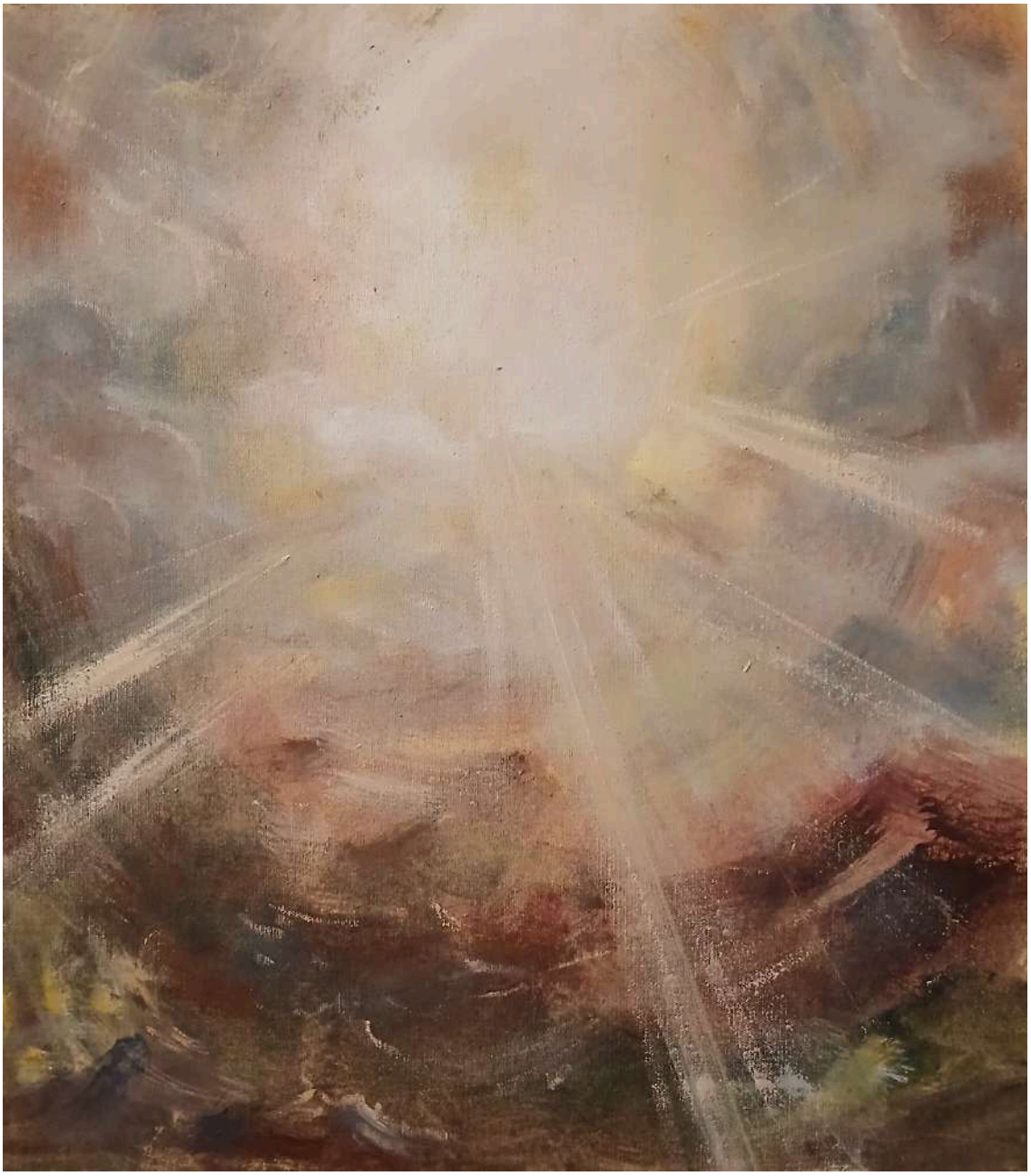
The Still Point at the Centre 1

Oil on Canvas, H500mm W46mm
£725



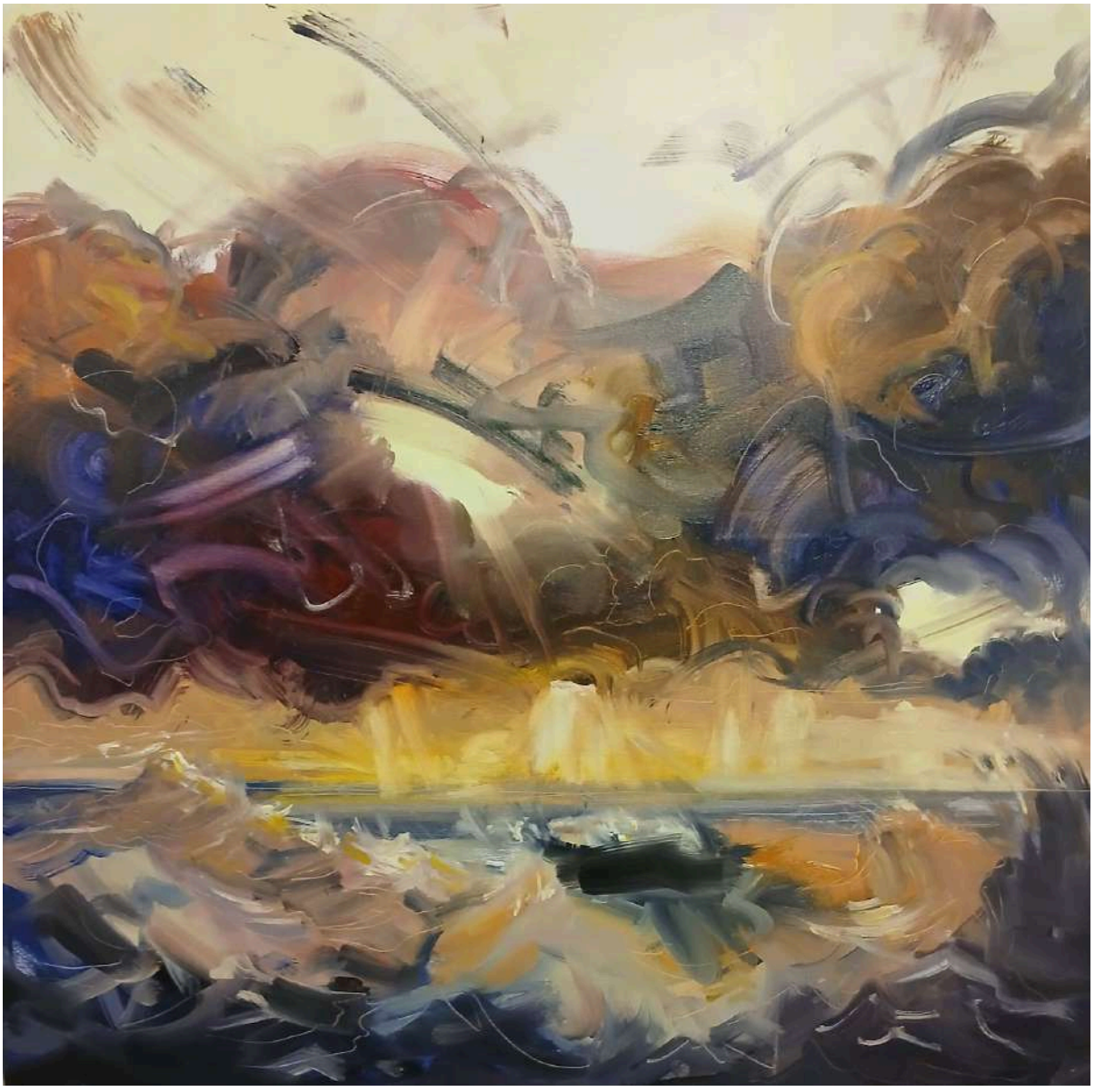
The Still Point at the Centre 2

Oil on Canvas, H500mm W46mm
£725



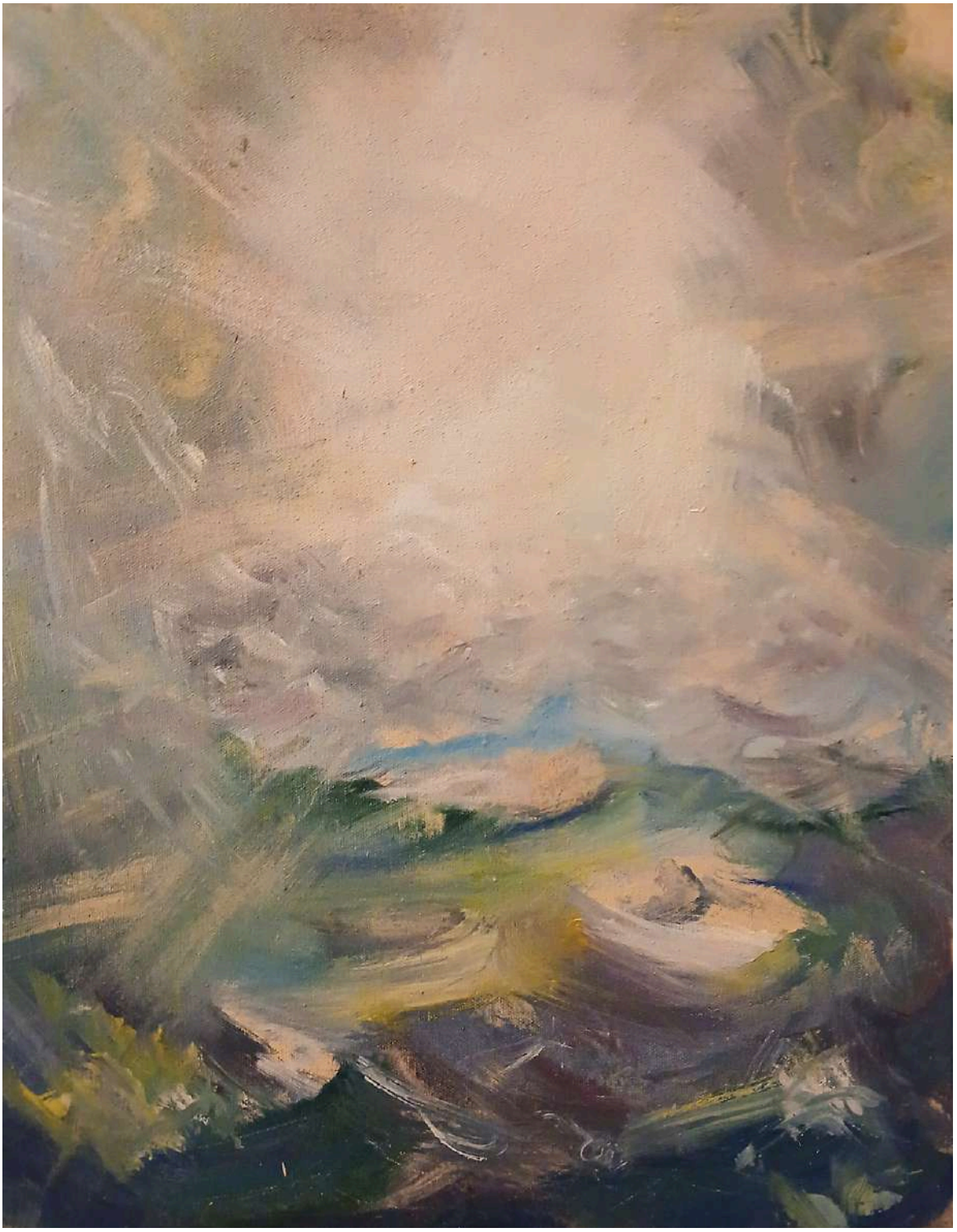
The Still Point at the Centre 3

Oil on Canvas, H500mm W46mm
£725



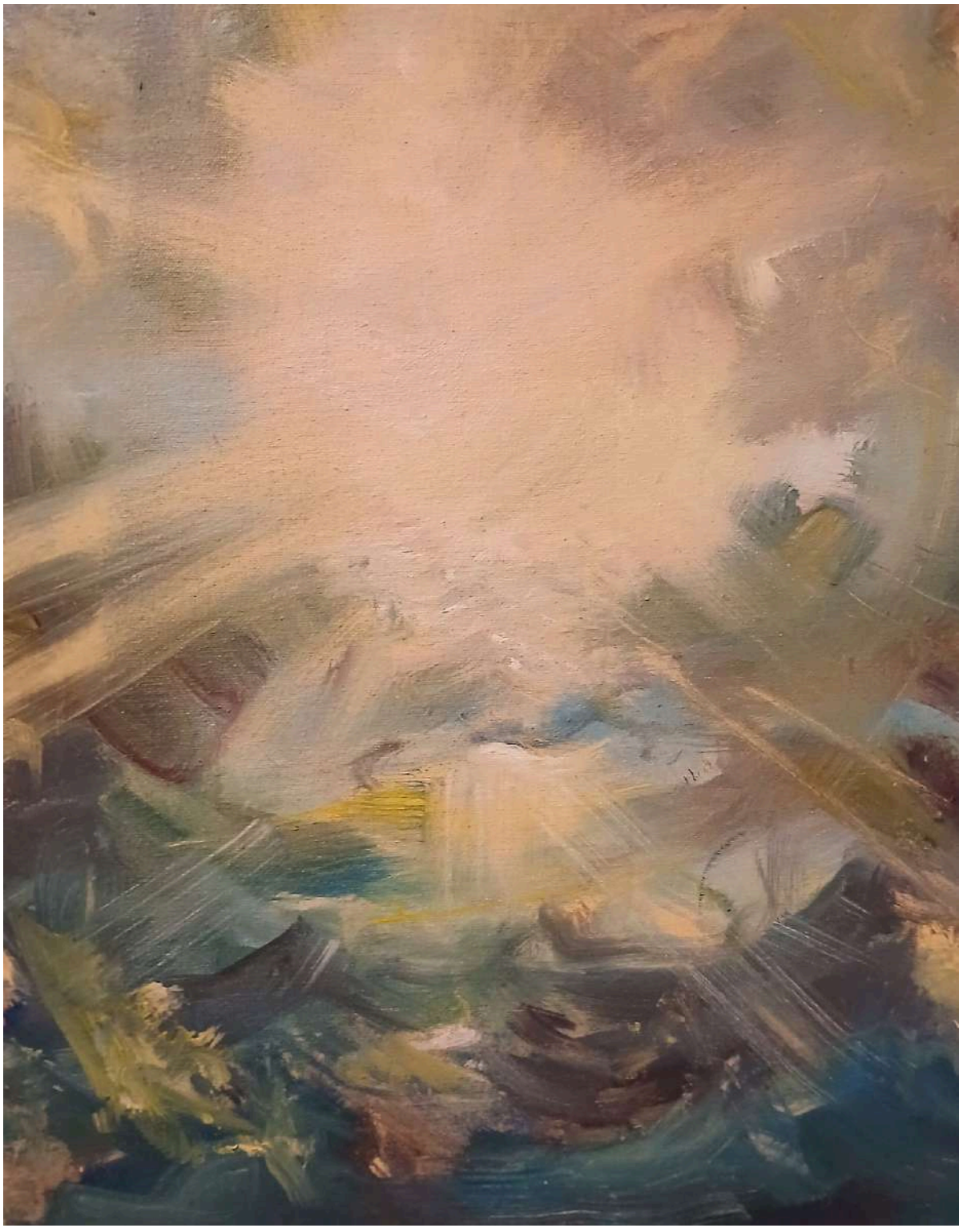
Water and Fire Succeed

Oil on canvas, H1000mm W1000mm
£2,500



The Murmuring Shell of Time 1

Oil on Canvas, H460mm W360mm
£650



The Murmuring Shell of Time 2

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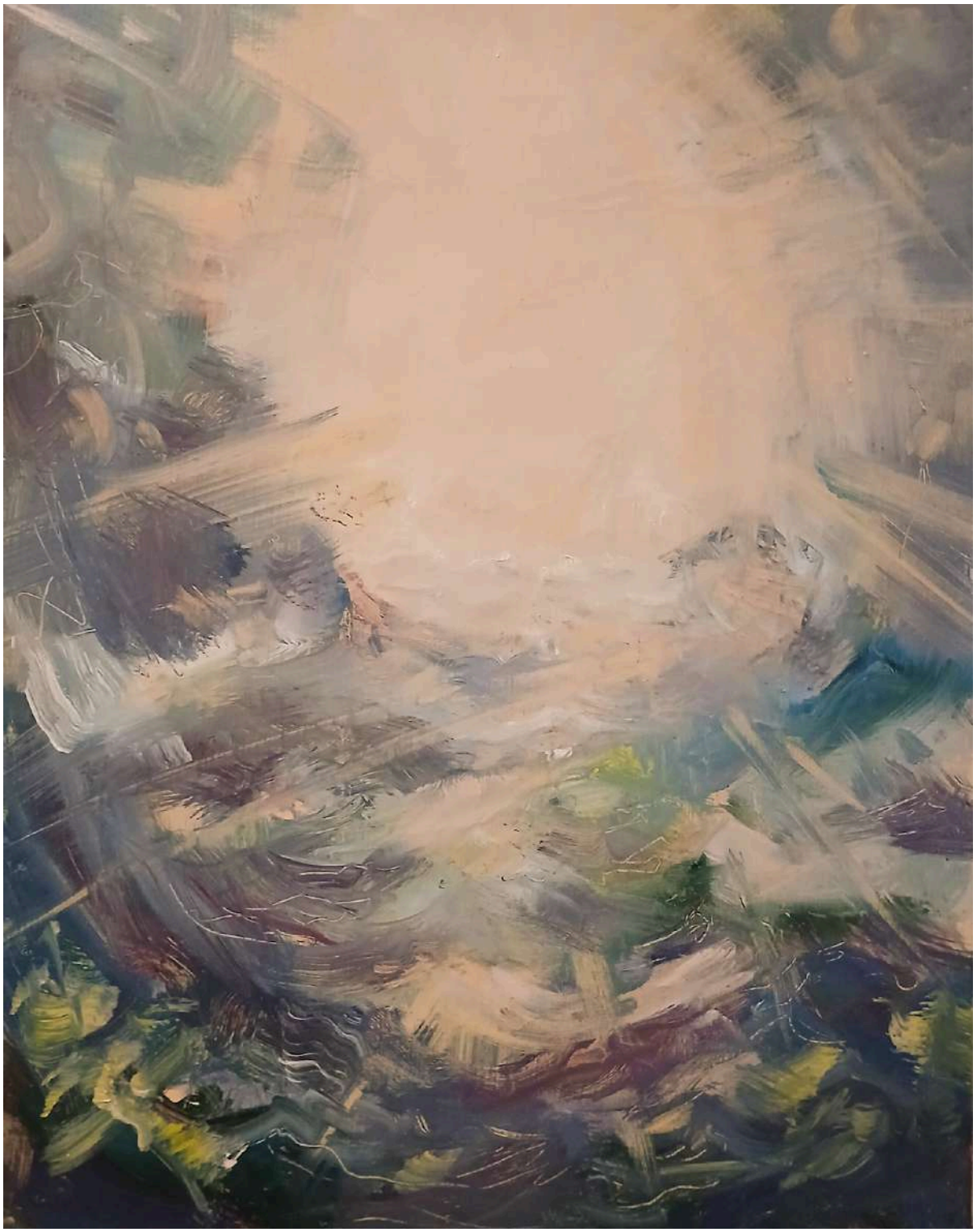
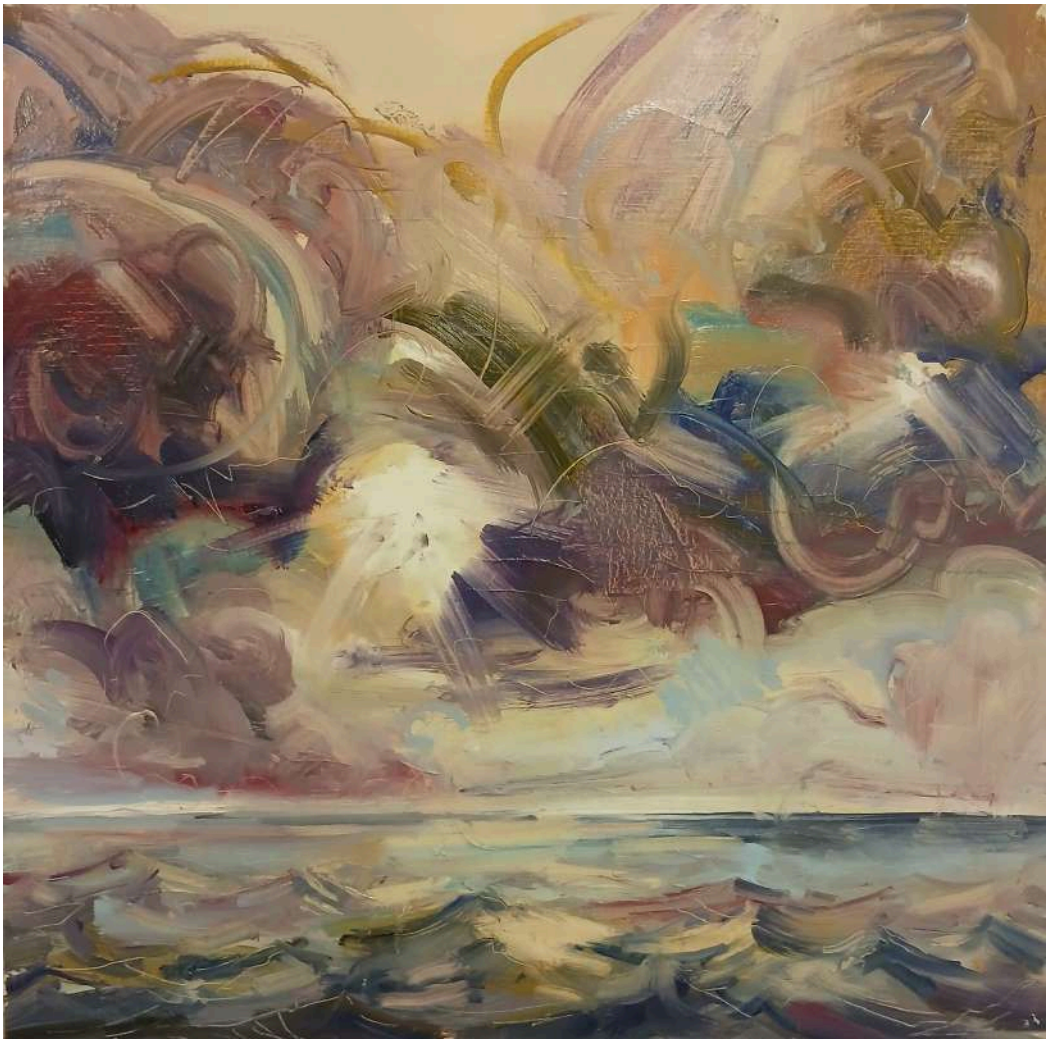
£650



The Murmuring Shell of Time 3

Oil on Canvas, H460mm W360mm
£650

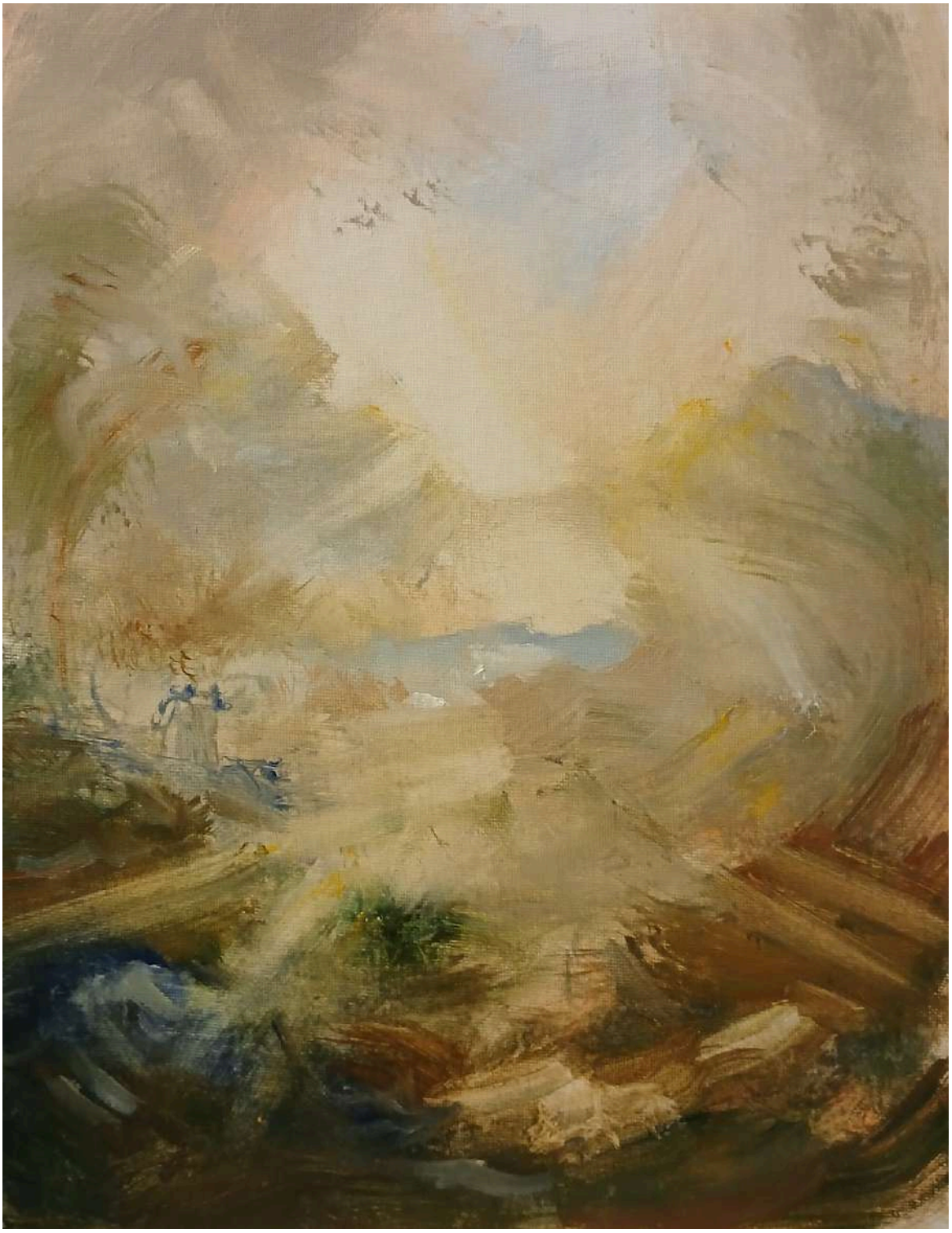


Lost Horizon

Oil on Canvas, H660mm W660mm
£950

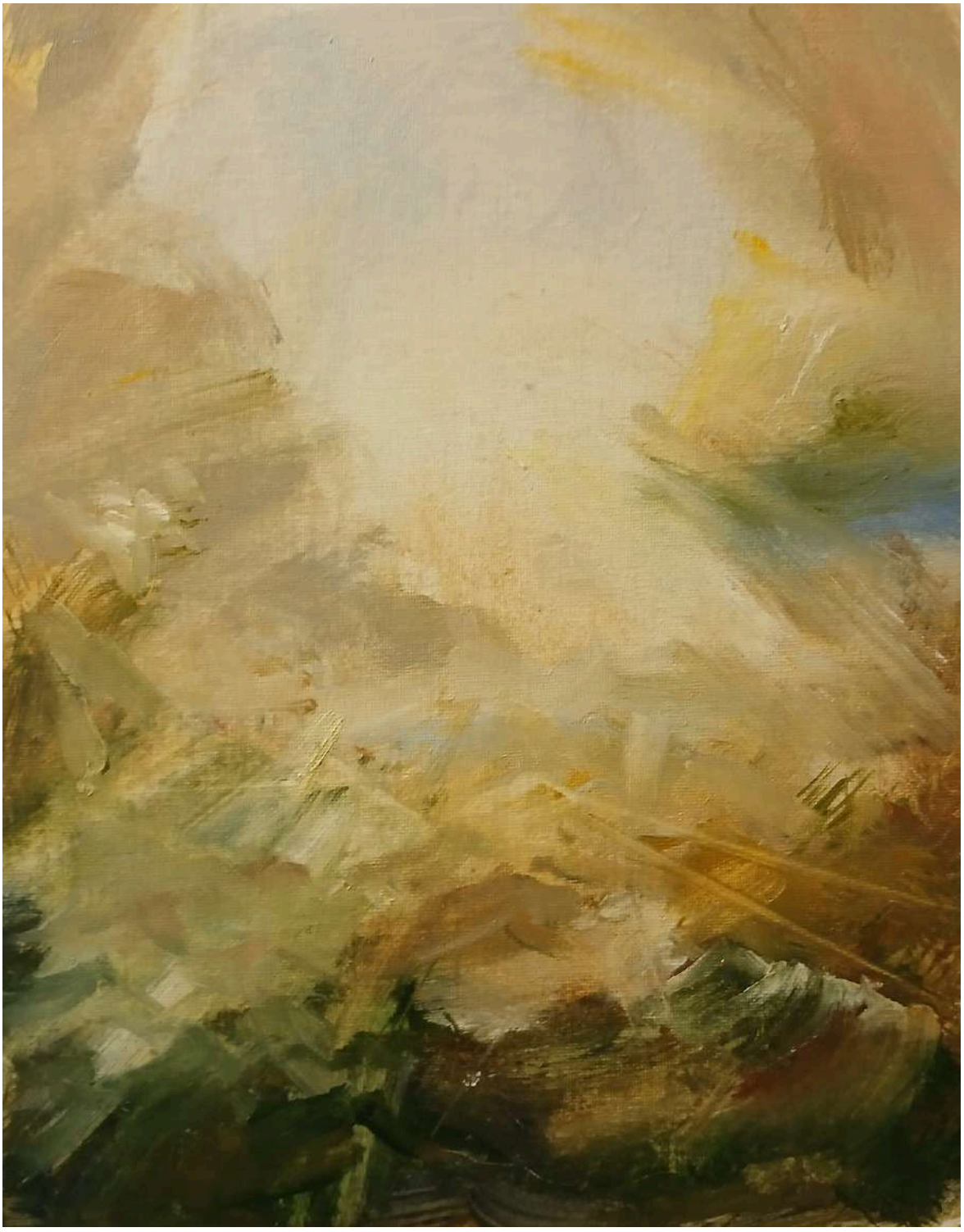
Stilleth the Noise of the Seas

Oil on Canvas, H830mm W130mm
£2,700



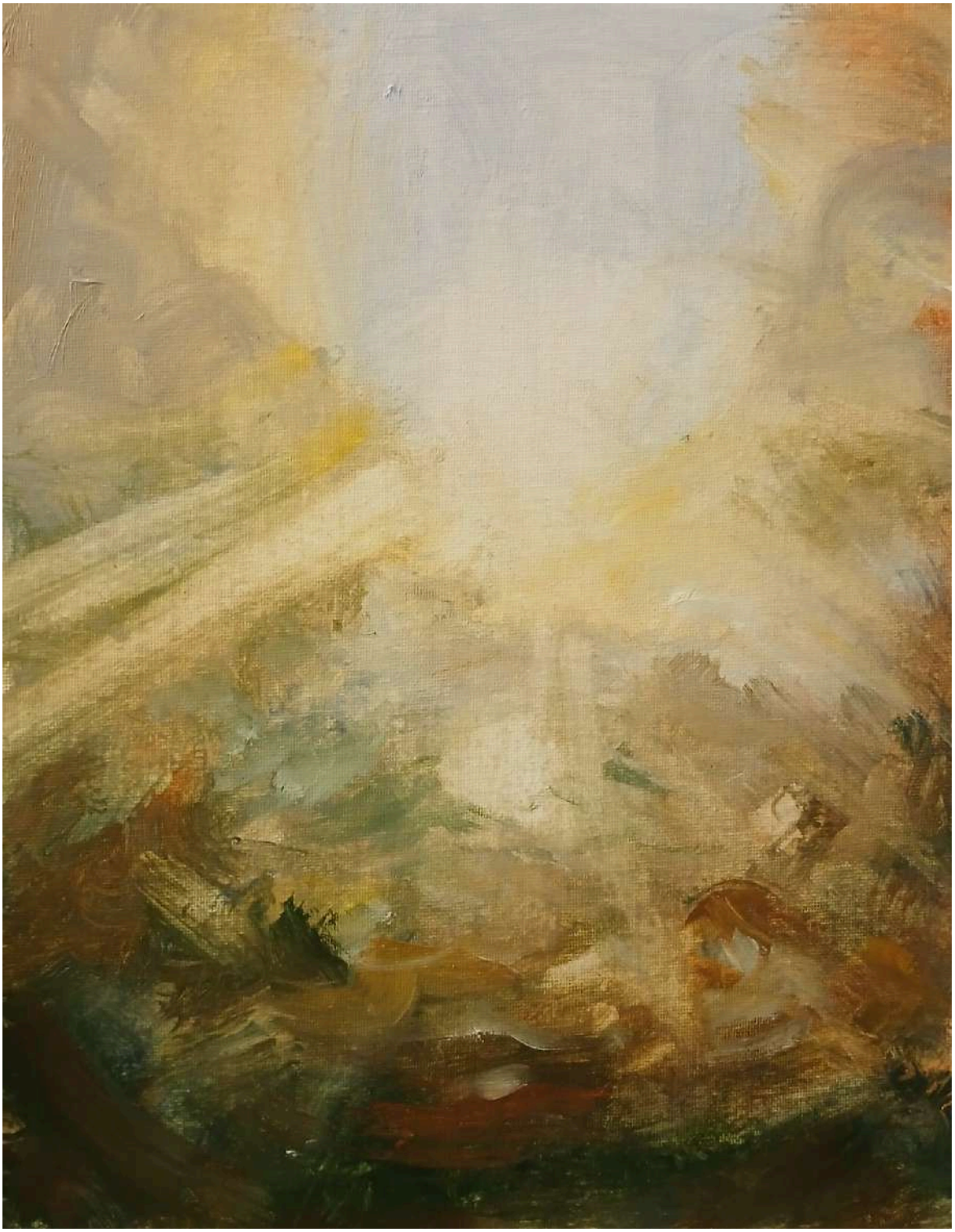
Heart of Light 1

Oil on Canvas Board, H355mm W280mm
£350



Heart of Light 2

Oil on Canvas Board, H355mm W280mm
£350



Heart of Light 3

Oil on Canvas Board H355mm W280mm
£350

The Journey 1

Oil on Board, H160mm W160mm
£200

The Journey 2

Oil on Board, H160mm W160mm
£200

The Journey 3

Oil on Board, H160mm W160mm
£200

The Journey 4

Oil on Board, H160mm W160mm
£200

The Journey 5

Oil on Board, H160mm W160mm
£200

The Journey 6

Oil on Board, H160mm W160mm
£200

The Journey 7

Oil on Board, H160mm W160mm
£200

The Journey 8

Oil on Board, H160mm W160mm
£200

The Journey 9

Oil on Board, H160mm W160mm
£200

The Alde Valley Spring Festival

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www.aldevalleyspringfestival.co.uk

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