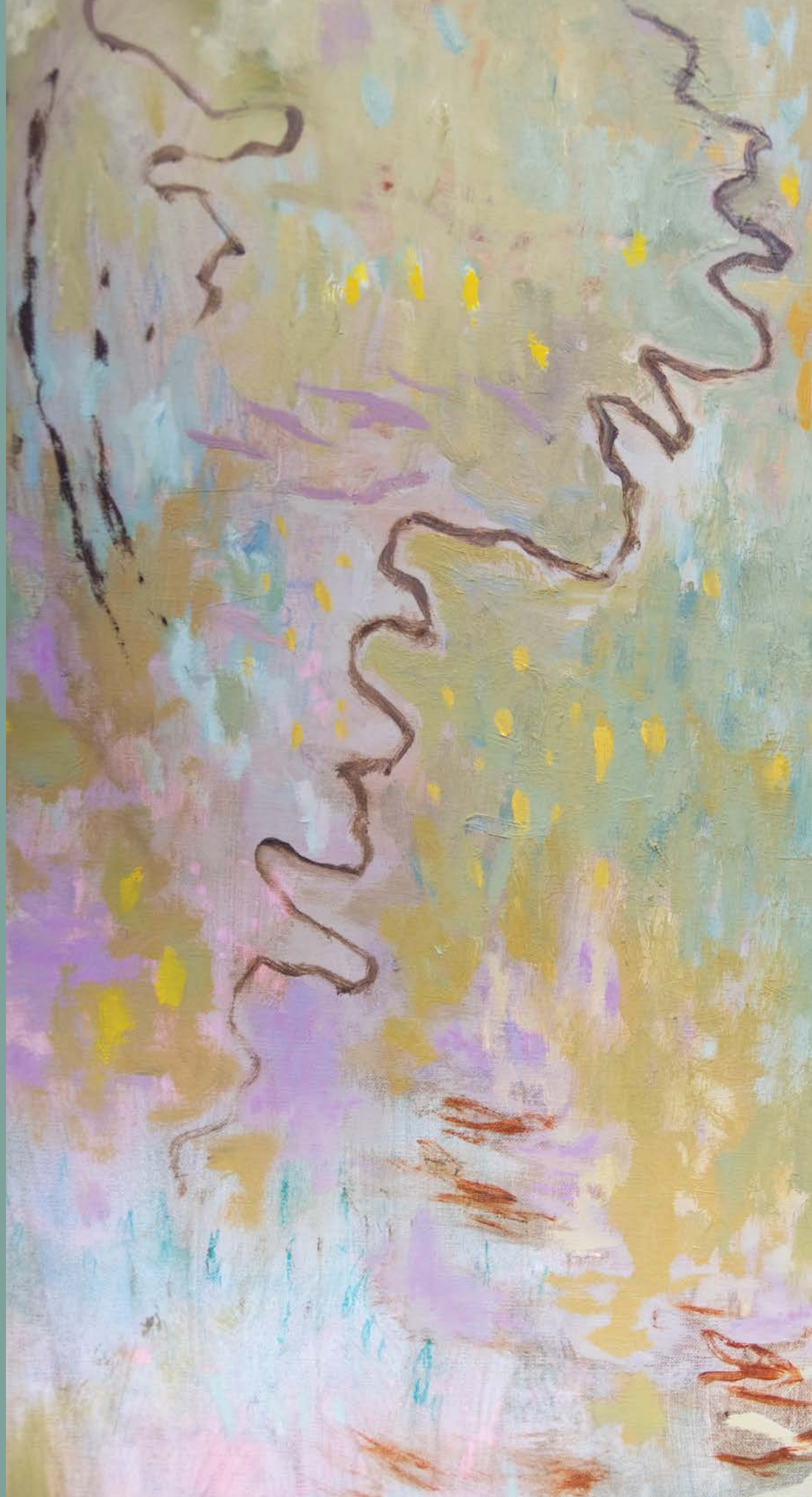


AMY STAPLETON Oh, the stories they could tell





AMY STAPLETON Oh, the stories they could tell

CURATED BY LAURA BRININ

“Many depictions of the gum tree play into the trope of the heroic and brutal Australian landscape, imagery deeply rooted in the continent’s ecology and colonial experience. Australia’s aridity, poor soils and recurring fires forged an environment unlike any other—one early European settlers perceived as harsh, alien and unrelenting. The eucalyptus, with its peeling bark, twisted limbs and flammable oils, became the perfect emblem of this strangeness—its very physiology read as a metaphor for endurance and survival. Over time, this vision evolved into a national mythology: the bush as a proving ground for toughness and self-reliance, and the gum tree as both witness and participant in that story.”

Oh, the stories they could tell

The gum tree, or eucalyptus, occupies a central place in the visual and cultural history of Australian art, and more broadly within the post-colonial Australian psyche. Its distinctive, sinuous form and fibrous bark have inspired artists for over two centuries, evolving from a subject of colonial curiosity to a powerful symbol of place and identity. Early European painters such as John Glover and Eugene von Guerard approached the eucalyptus through the lens of the picturesque and scientific realism, attempting to reconcile its irregular beauty with imported artistic conventions. By contrast, the late nineteenth-century painters of the Heidelberg School—Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin—embraced the gum tree as emblematic of a new, distinctly Australian vision and landscape tradition.

In the twentieth century, the eucalyptus became a site for modernist experimentation and cultural reflection. Grace Cossington Smith, Margaret Preston and Sidney Nolan each reinterpreted the tree's formal and symbolic potential, while contemporary artists continue to explore its ecological, spiritual and political resonances. The ghost gum (*Corymbia aparrerinja*) is the iconic tree that Albert Namatjira depicted as a dominant figure within his custodial homelands of the Central Desert. For First Nations artists, the gum tree is not merely a motif but a living presence—an embodiment of Country and a repository of ancestral knowledge.

Gum trees are a defining feature of cultural depictions of the Australian landscape—ubiquitous, distinctive, and symbolic not only of the nation's physical environment but also of its collective identity. From *Ned Kelly* to *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, from *Burke and Wills* to *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, the gum tree appears as a constant presence in the background, setting the scene and unmistakably declaring: this is Australia. Its pale trunks, tangled branches and shimmering leaves have shaped both the visual and emotional language through which the Australian landscape is imagined.

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colonial experience. Australia's aridity, poor soils and recurring fires forged an environment unlike any other—one early European settlers perceived as harsh, alien and unrelenting. The eucalyptus, with its peeling bark, twisted limbs and flammable oils, became the perfect emblem of this strangeness—its very physiology read as a metaphor for endurance and survival. Over time, this vision evolved into a national mythology: the bush as a proving ground for toughness and self-reliance, and the gum tree as both witness and participant in that story.

In *Oh, the stories they could tell*, Amy Stapleton continues this long tradition of responding to the eucalyptus as both subject and symbol, yet she moves away from the rhetoric of struggle and heroism that has often defined it. Her works offer an intimate perspective on the gum tree, focusing on the subtle variations of surface, pattern, texture and colour that reveal its quiet resilience and living complexity. Through careful observation and sensitive material practice, Stapleton reclaims the gum tree from its mythic associations and restores it as a site of tenderness, memory and connection.

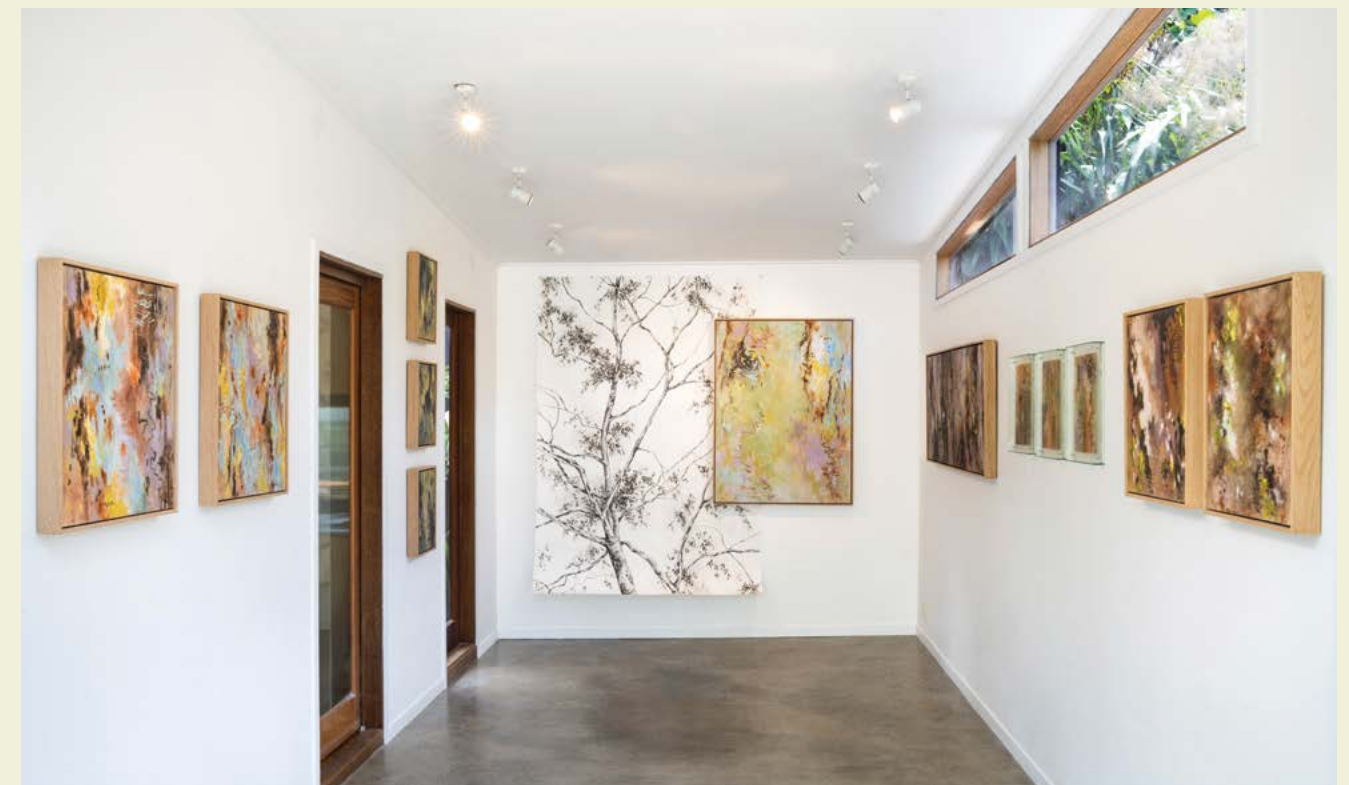
For Stapleton, the gum tree stands as a symbol of womanhood—both act as guardians and caretakers, providing nourishment, shelter and continuity. Each weathers the demands of their environment, shaped by time and circumstance, yet continues to stand with strength and grace despite the scars they bear. Through this lens,

the tree becomes not only an emblem of the Australian landscape but also a vessel for embodied histories and emotional terrain, connecting human and ecological experience through shared endurance and care. This parallel extends into Stapleton's material process. Her surfaces echo the textures of bark and skin, layered and weathered through repeated gestures and mark-making. The accumulation of pigment and the visibility of each trace recall both the physical resilience of the tree and the emotional endurance of the body.

There is also an implicit act of ecological care within Stapleton's work. Her project comprises one hundred studies, each based on the unique bark pattern of an individual gum tree she has encountered in the landscape. Every work is both a portrait and an act of attention—an intimate record of encounter between artist and tree. Extending this relationship beyond representation, the sale of each study contributes

directly to the planting of a new tree through the regeneration initiative *Fifteen Trees*. In this way, Stapleton's practice enacts the very cycle of care it depicts, transforming observation into restoration and creative practice into ecological renewal.

Stapleton's *Oh, the stories they could tell* reminds us that the gum tree—so long a symbol of endurance, identity and belonging—remains a living conduit between art, people and place. Through her work, this most familiar of trees is reimaged as a mirror for human resilience and a quiet gesture of environmental hope.



Oh, the stories they could tell



It's hard to find anyone who doesn't hold a soft spot for gum trees. They are quintessentially Australian — their silvery hues, distinctive scent, and the soft rustle of their leaves feel like a perfect welcome home after time away.

Culturally, for our first nations peoples the gums represent life, spirituality and connection to the ancestors, linking earth and sky. Often appearing in creation stories throughout different tribes and languages, passed down for tens of thousands of years. The gums have also been a continuous provider of bark and timber for tools, shelter and medicines, as well as providing food and shelter for our native fauna.

These works are inspired by our beautiful eucalyptus trees, each one based on an individual tree, focusing on their bark patterns. They represent us, the women in our histories, families and communities. They are as unique as we are, they are marked by their own colours, continually shedding their skin to reveal fresh patterns, shaped by the environment in which they grow, wearing their scars and wounds as proof of their strength and survival. They give us the air we breathe, they are our guardians,

they are the epitome of resilience and endurance. These trees are individual portraits — each a character shaped by wind, water, fire, human and animal influence and time.

There is something about our awe-inspiring gum trees, they can stand tall and straight, to attention like an army of sentinels or stand alone, all twisted and contorted like an old lady waving her gnarled finger, beckoning you over.

This project was an opportunity for me to push further, to experiment more, to test new ideas and hopefully to craft work that draws the viewer in, to explore the many layers. This is my entire ethos as to why I create, I love story telling, discovering and finding my own visual language to bring the works to life.



Left

I am the provider 2025
Acrylic, pastel and oil on canvas
40.5 x 50.5 cm, Framed
\$650

I have been standing here for so long

2025
Acrylic, pastel and oil on canvas
40.5 x 50.5 cm, Framed
\$650

Right

Gumtree 1 – 100 2025
Acrylic, pastel and oil on 400 gsm paper
14.8 x 21 cm
\$50 each

Cover

*I feel the pull of the earth (detail)
beneath my feet* 2025
Acrylic, pastel and oil on linen
90 x 120 cm, Framed
\$2700



— AMY STAPLETON

Amy



Amy Stapleton is a mixed media artist whose practice is deeply connected to the natural Australian environment. Working across painting, drawing, and experimental processes, she creates contemporary landscapes that move fluidly between representation and abstraction. Her work is defined by a curiosity for materials and a commitment to exploring how place, memory, and observation intersect.



Based on the border of Meanjin (Brisbane) and Tulumur (Ipswich), Australia, Amy regularly ventures into the surrounding bushland and waterways to sketch and gather references. These field studies, together with her interests in science, history, and storytelling, form the foundation of her process. The resulting works convey a layered sense of landscape where environment, narrative, and experimentation converge.

AMY STAPLETON Oh, the stories they could tell



*The multiple personalities of one
deemed insignificant* 2025
Acrylic, pastel and oil on canvas
60 x 150 cm, Framed
\$2300



She carries her failures 2025
Acrylic, pastel and oil on canvas
50.5 x 60.5 cm, Framed
\$800



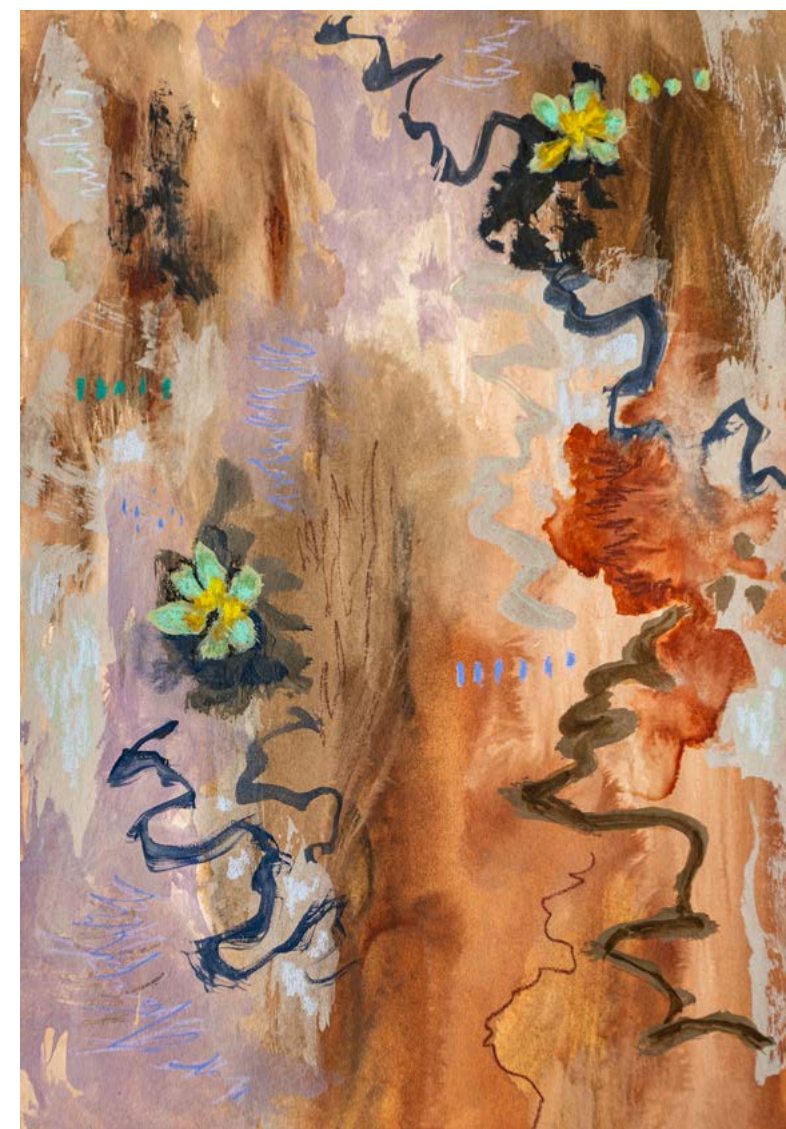
She wears her scars 2025
Acrylic, pastel and oil on canvas
50.5 x 60.5 cm, Framed
\$800



Stumers Road Reserve Study 1 2025
Gouache and pastel pencil on
300 gsm watercolour paper
23 x 33 cm, Framed
\$220



Stumers Road Reserve Study 2 2025
Gouache and pastel pencil on
300 gsm watercolour paper
23 x 33 cm, Framed
\$220



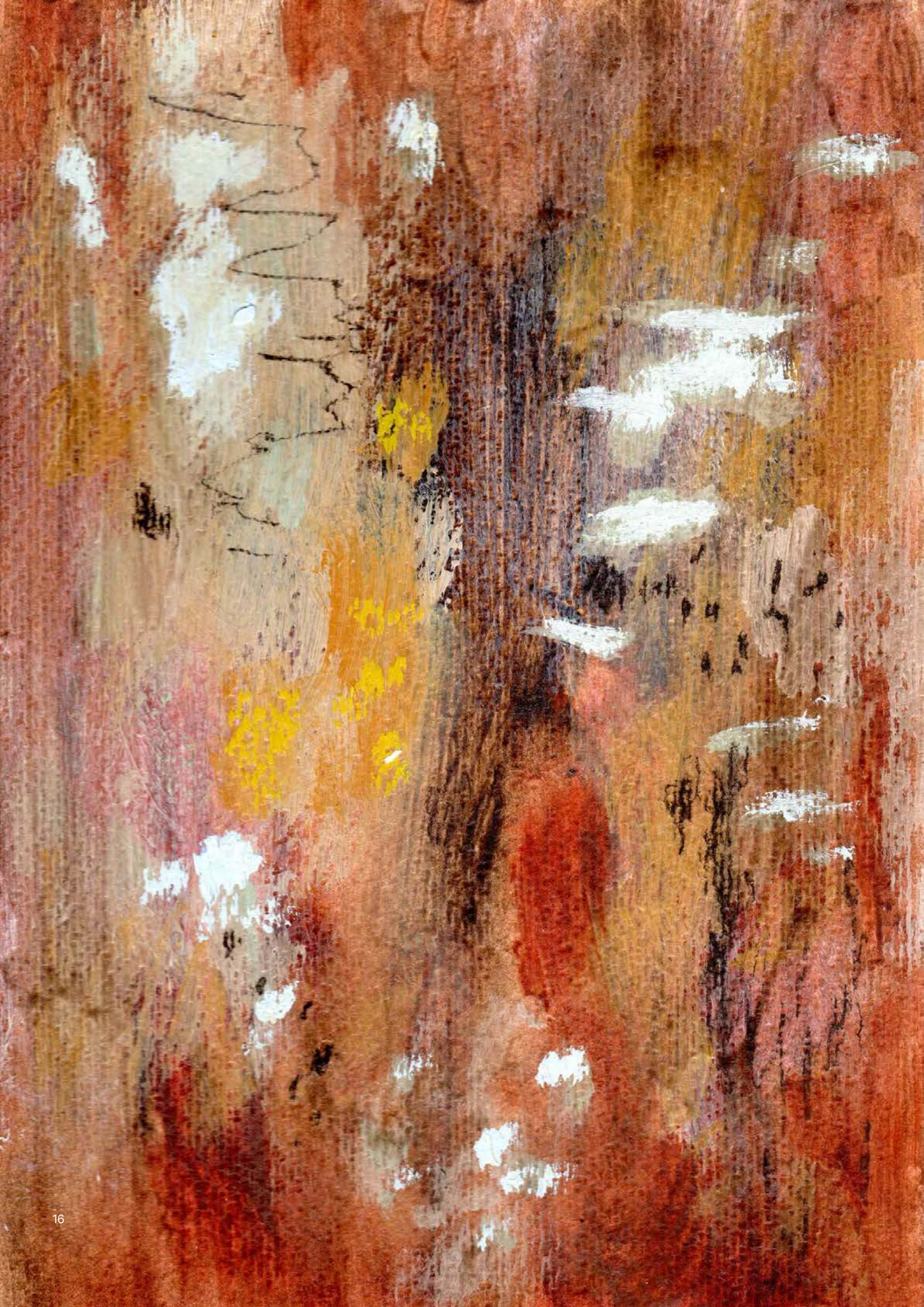
Stumers Road Reserve Study 3 2025
Gouache and pastel pencil on
300 gsm watercolour paper
23 x 33 cm, Framed
\$220



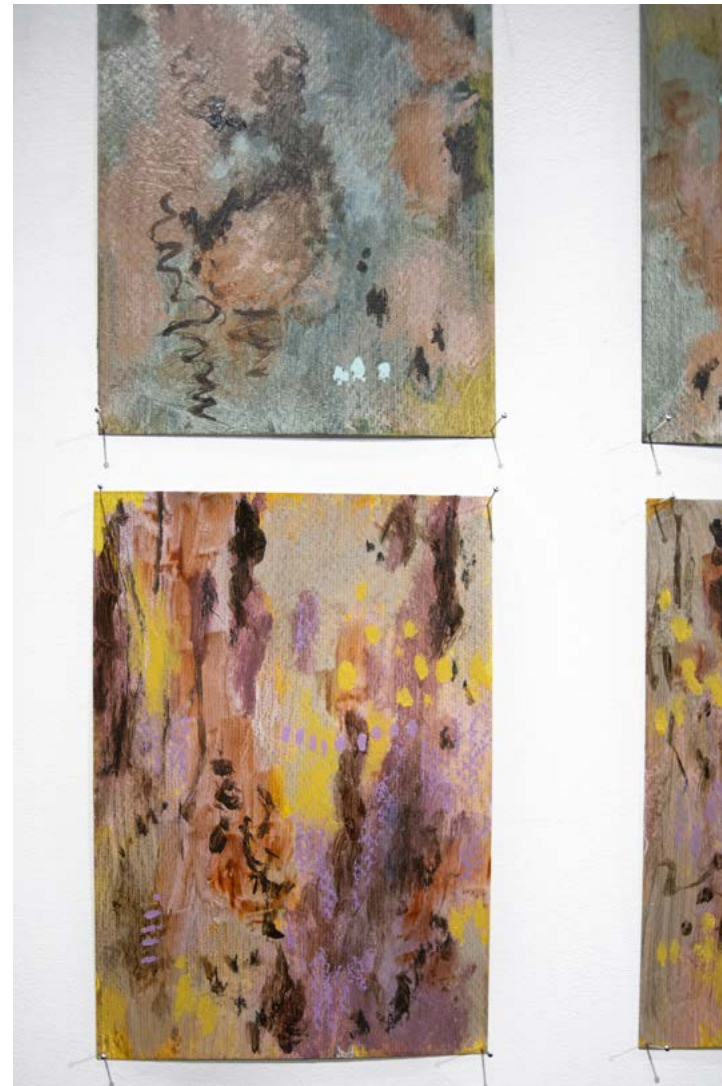
Meandering No 1 2025
 Gouache and crayon on
 300 gsm watercolour paper
 56.5 x 75 cm
 \$140



Meandering No 1 2025
 Gouache and crayon on
 300 gsm watercolour paper
 56.5 x 75 cm
 \$140



Gumtree 1 – 100 2025
Acrylic, pastel and oil
on 400 gsm paper
14.8 x 21 cm
\$50 (proceeds contribute
to Fifteen Trees)



A portion of proceeds from Amy Stapleton's Gum Tree Series supports Fifteen Trees, an Australian organisation dedicated to revegetation and community-based environmental action. This partnership reflects Amy's ongoing commitment to nurturing connections between art, place, and the natural world.

Fifteen Trees
Based in the Central Highlands of Victoria, Fifteen Trees is an Australian organisation dedicated to revegetation and community-driven environmental action. Since 2009, it has supported over 500 projects, planted more than 460,000 trees, and partnered with 200+ companies and countless individuals to reduce their carbon footprint. The initiative aligns with UN Sustainable Development Goals #13 Climate Action and #15 Life on Land.

15trees.com.au



Gumtree 41



Gumtree 42



Gumtree 43



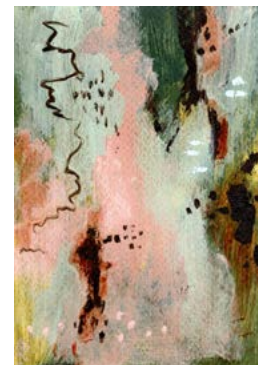
Gumtree 44



Gumtree 45



Gumtree 46



Gumtree 47



Gumtree 48



Gumtree 49



Gumtree 50



Gumtree 51



Gumtree 52



Gumtree 53



Gumtree 54



Gumtree 55



Gumtree 56



Gumtree 57



Gumtree 58



Gumtree 59



Gumtree 60



Gumtree 61



Gumtree 62



Gumtree 63



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Gumtree 83



Gumtree 84



Gumtree 85



Gumtree 86



Gumtree 87



Gumtree 88



Gumtree 89



Gumtree 90



Gumtree 91



Gumtree 92



Gumtree 93



Gumtree 94



Gumtree 95



Gumtree 96



Gumtree 97



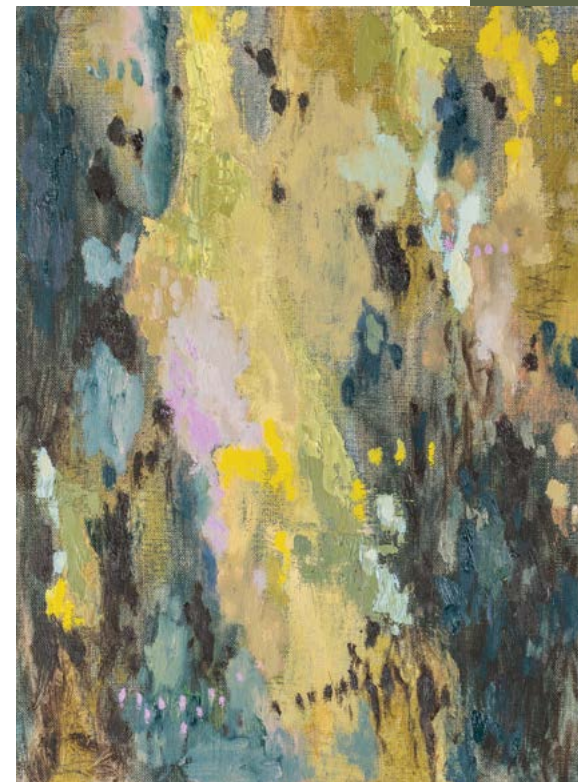
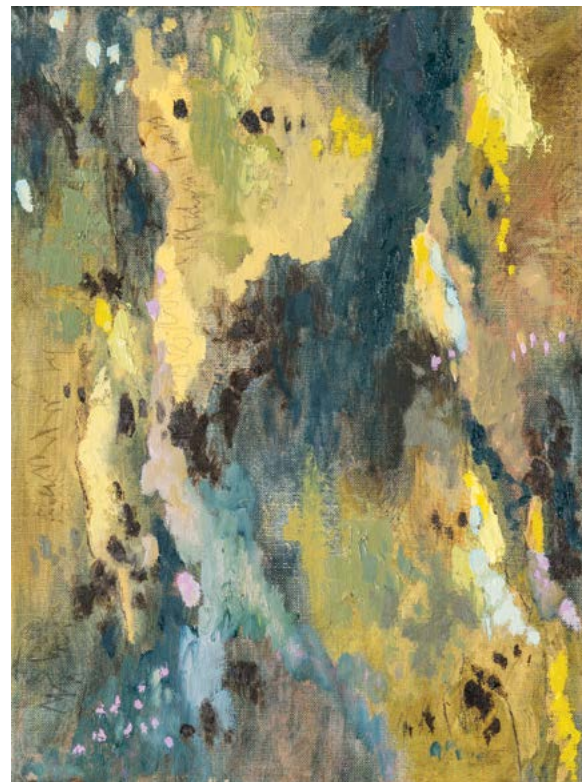
Gumtree 98



Gumtree 99



Gumtree 100



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I have seen all the highs and lows 2025
Acrylic, pastel and oil on linen
30 x 40 cm , Framed
\$500

I have seen so many seasons 2025
Acrylic, pastel and oil on linen
30 x 40 cm, Framed
\$500

I'm still watching it all 2025
Acrylic, pastel and oil on linen
30 x 40 cm, Framed
\$500



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Amy Stapleton
www.amystapleton.com

Side Gallery
sidegallery.com.au

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Rhianna Phillips
Page 7 Amy Stapleton

Design: Designfront

