

**Fire Fury,
pastel,
71 x 100cm
(28 x 39")**

This is just exciting to paint. Keeping the reds and yellows clear and bright is difficult.



Thursday

It's bright but still windy and I've returned back from my journey looking for reference twigs. It was bitterly cold. I could tell from the smashed seaweed and fallen sand hills that there would be little chance of finding bereft twigs in the shallows. They would all have been blasted up to the rocks and tide-line. Romantic as it sounds, I'm glad to be back inside.

This is assessment time, and I study both paintings carefully. There are one or two little darks needed to strengthen "Twig" and one or two small blendings needed to soften "Fire".

The finish of the paintings is an important detail, and the deckle edges of the paper are a feature of the finished look. I make sure both paintings are fully covered with pastel to the very edge of the deckle. I check where pins or clamps have been used on the paper and make sure those areas are covered with pastel. I shake them to dislodge any loose dust and then suspend them with strong double-sided tape onto the mount boards.

It will take me the rest of the day to frame these two paintings. The mount boards, mouldings, backing boards and fixtures are here, having been delivered from Belfast or Dublin, respectively 100 and 200 miles away. I get other supplies from England, but the glass is cut to size for me locally.

This pattern of work is typical of the winter months, and it has taken me several years to go with the weather rather than fight it. My work may be governed by the temperament of the outdoor light, but I make it work for me and have fun along the way. □



The Wasp's Nest, pastel, 66 x 51cm (26 x 20")

The following morning after the fire, I discovered this wasp's nest with its silver/black coating from the flames — suspended and almost unscathed from the fire that had only licked it.