

# LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

## Lisson Street: Sean Scully – *The Nature of Art*

18 February – 9 May 2026  
67 Lisson Street, London

Recently named the “greatest living abstract painter” by Jonathan Jones in *The Guardian*, Sean Scully’s abstraction has always held landscape as a touchstone. Presenting his 2005 series of photographs from the island of Aran alongside two large-scale paintings and a huge salon-style array of drawings, watercolours, photos and written works on paper, this selection charts the landscape theme throughout his career, revealing how enmeshed the natural world remains to the artist's ways of seeing and thinking.

This specially envisaged wall of Scully's landscape works, hung in rough chronological order from left to right, begins with an early pencil drawing of a house plant from 1965, produced while he was still a student at the then precursor to Central Saint Martins. Scully then leaps from close botanical study to radical abstraction in the space of just a year or so. A suite of vibrant oil pastels and gouaches from 1965-66 blur traditional horizon lines, rainbows and two figures in a field with a newly abstracted impetus and bold colouration.

Three watercolours from 1984 – depicting a countryside view, rustic houses and a vista from a balcony – lead into further works on paper that develop this medium towards fully abstracted, lined or striped compositions with others composed of cubiform blocks. A group of charcoal works mine the undergrowth and the strata of the earth, while his written pages speak of Scully's admiration for Monet’s Giverny and how green only entered his painterly vocabulary after 2016, following a long hiatus. Tellingly, passages of abstraction are often combined on the same sheet with recognisable plants or organic motifs, completing the cycle that sets everything flowing from, but also eventually back to, nature – ending with new drawings made in Eleuthera in the last week of 2025.

Photography is a constant throughout this landscape-inflected mini-survey, from Moroccan walls and Sieneese doors through to shorelines and woodpiles, and is reiterated in the iconic 2005 *Aran* series of 24 black-and-white photographs taken on the eponymous island off the west coast of Ireland exhibited nearby. Scully's affinity with the ancient traditions of layering and stacking present in the rough-hewn stacks of rocks, the horizontal bands and tessellating gestures that his photography reveals, becomes clear. Two large paintings, including a classic, five-banded *Landline* and another Moroccan-influenced oil on aluminium, complete the presentation.

### About the artist

Sean Scully's work has shifted the paradigm in American abstraction from Minimalism and its reduced vocabulary towards an emotional form of abstraction, returning to the metaphor and spirituality found in the European painting tradition. While known primarily for his large-scale abstract paintings, comprised of vertical and horizontal bands, tessellating blocks and geometrical forms comprised of gradated and shifting colours, Scully also works in a variety of diverse media, including printmaking, sculpture, watercolour and pastel. Having developed a style over the past five decades that is uniquely his own, Scully has cemented his place in the history of painting. His work synthesises a thoroughly international collection of influences and personal perspectives – ranging from the legacy of American abstraction, with inspiration from the likes of Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock, and that of European tradition, with nods to Henri Matisse and Piet Mondrian, as well as references to classical Greek architecture. While monumental in scale and gesture, Scully’s work retains an undeniable delicacy and sincerity of emotion.

Sean Scully was born in Dublin in 1945 and raised in South London. Wanting to be an artist from an early age, Scully attended evening classes at the Central School of Art in London from 1962 to 1965, and enrolled full time at Croydon College of Art, London from 1965 until 1968. He received his Bachelor of Arts from Newcastle University in 1972. He was awarded the Frank Knox Fellowship to Harvard University in 1972, where he visited the United States for the first time. In 1975, he moved to New York full-time. Today, he lives and works between New York and London. With a career that spans more than five decades, he has received numerous accolades and has been the subject of multiple touring exhibitions. In 2014, he became the first Western artist to have a career-length retrospective in China. *Follow the Heart: The Art of Sean Scully 1964 – 2014* included over 100 paintings and travelled from Shanghai to Beijing. Scully was named a member of the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 2013 and has received honorary degrees from institutions such as the Massachusetts College of Art, Boston; the National University of Ireland, Dublin; Universitas Miguel Hernandez, Valencia; Burren College of Art, National University of Ireland; Newcastle University, UK, among others. A series of essays and conversations between Scully and the esteemed art critic Arthur Danto was published by Hatje Cantz in 2014, and a collection of Scully's own writing, selected speeches and interviews, *Inner*, was released in 2016.

Sean Scully's work is in the permanent collections of numerous important institutions including the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada; Tate Modern, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; De Pont Museum of Contemporary Art, Tilburg; Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth; Albertina, Vienna; and Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China, among many others.

Recent solo exhibitions include 'Sean Scully: Stories' at Bucerius Kunst Forum, Hamburg, Germany (27 June – 30 November 2025), 'Sean Scully: Sublime and Sunyata' Art Museum of Sichuan Conservatory of Music, Sichuan, China (12 June – 12 October 2025), 'Sean Scully: The Albee Barn, Montauk' The Parrish Art Museum, New York, USA (11 May – 21 September 2025), 'Sean Scully', Daegu Art Museum, Daegu, Korea (March 18 – August 17, 2025), 'Sean Scully: Retrospective', La Pedrera, Barcelona, Spain (March 14 – July 31, 2025) and 'Sean Scully: a romantic geometry of colours', Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (14 October 2024 – 24 February 2025).

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