

Press release

Sean Scully *To Feel*

24 July—26 September 2026
Opening Friday 24 July 2026, 6.30—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
Salzburg Villa Kast
Mirabellplatz 2, 5020 Salzburg



Sean Scully, *La Grande Mer*, 2024–26
Oil on linen. 193 × 330.2 cm (76 × 130 in)

The exhibition *To Feel* brings together oil paintings and watercolours from Sean Scully's formative *Wall of Light* series. Begun in 1998, this series features vertical and horizontal blocks of colour that form pictorial architectures reminiscent of brickwork. Dark tones, which evoke compact wooden beams, alternate with contrasting, brighter colours, coalescing to form rhythmic units within the compositions.

The impetus for this series stems from a small watercolour that Scully painted in Mexico in 1984, in which he transcribed the interplay of warm sunlight and shadow on the stacked stones of ancient Mayan ruins and architectural formations on the Yucatán Peninsula. The artist was fascinated by their surfaces and how the stones seemed to reflect the passage of time. Over the years, Scully moved beyond Mexico, responding to other lights and latitudes, and his paintings reflect the places and



Sean Scully, *Wall of Light Pink Blue*, 2025
Oil on linen. 121.9 x 106.7 cm (48 x 42 in)

seasons in which they were created. Scully, ‘a distinctly cosmopolitan artist,’ writes Antonia Hoerschelmann in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, ‘has engaged intensely with European art and cultural history.’ The materiality of his medium, rather than geometry, has become central to his way of working. Strong painterly influences include the psychological intensity of the seventeenth-century Spanish tradition or the expressive colour and surface of French Post-Impressionism. These points of reference inform not only his rich, complex palette but also his handling of paint. Scully’s colours bleed from one stripe onto the next, while the luminous grounds radiate through. The open, frayed edges of his colour blocks – partly opaque, partly transparent – attest to his admiration of the work of Édouard Vuillard. ‘Scully condenses a wealth of influences in his practice, developing entirely new pictorial inventions in which emotion proves to be central to the work’s meaning,’ writes Hoerschelmann.

The paintings in the exhibition possess a distinctly physical, architectural quality – a defining characteristic of Scully’s work that is reflected in the title of the series, *Wall of Light*. He is, as Michael Auping has observed, ‘a builder of images’. Through variations in hue and brightness, his blocks of paint create a sense of weight, tension and motion. The thick layers of paint ‘push each other, but at the same time make room for each other’, as the artist has stated. Despite their apparent solidity, the pictorial walls

emulate impressions of light, illuminating and permeating the colour bricks. ‘The wall is a barrier, but what I’m doing is dissolving it. It is metaphysical, transformative,’ explains Scully.

Scully’s paintings have long had a distinctly physical, bodily presence. In a veritable maelstrom of paint, the colours become increasingly transparent and translucent, even iridescent in places. The relationship between surface textures and deep layers of colour appears to undergo a gradual transformation, as if the material state of the paintings were in fact changing.

— Antonia Hoerschelmann

Despite their large format, Scully’s works always strike a delicate, almost intimate note, as shown in his monumental work *La Grande Mer* (2024–26). The largest work in the exhibition, it spans over three metres in width and is dominated by the colour blue, which has particular resonance within his practice. Irregular broad brushstrokes in variegated blue tonalities evoke the image of dark depths or churning water and carry a subtle emotional weight. Dabs of red, shining through the cracks between the blue bricks animate the canvas. As Hoerschelmann writes, ‘the pull of the sea is like the pull of Scully’s paintings as they draw the viewer into the pictorial action.’ In contrast to this oceanic register, the work *Burnt Orange* (2025) with its intense orange and red tones highlights Scully’s fascination with nocturnal light. The warm hues evoke embers gleaming through bricks, heightening the painting’s fiery energy.



Sean Scully, *Burnt Orange*, 2025
Oil on linen. 142.2 x 127 cm (56 x 50 in)

Works on paper have occupied a central position within Scully's practice throughout his career, functioning not as preparatory works but as a medium through which his pictorial language continues to evolve. He has described the process of painting with watercolours as 'collaborating with sunlight'. Offering a sensitivity unattainable on a large scale, the two works on view extend and reconfigure the formal language of his paintings, in a compelling balance between the compositions' architectural structure and the expressive potential of watercolour. Here, too, Scully develops a sense of depth, though he achieves it through entirely different means. Animated by the medium's fluidity and transparency, the verdant works on paper offer a nuanced counterpoint to the large-scale paintings.



Sean Scully, *Wall Blue 4.13.26*, 2026
Watercolor and pencil on paper. 37.8 × 57.5 cm (14.88 × 22.64 in)



Portrait of Sean Scully, 2026

About the artist

Born in Dublin, then raised in London, Scully studied at Croydon School of Art from 1965 as a mature student, and then Newcastle University from 1968, where he began experimenting with abstraction. During a trip to Morocco in 1969, he was strongly influenced by the rhythm and play of stripes in the clothes and carpets throughout the region. Following fellowships in 1972 and 1975 at Harvard University, he permanently relocated to New York. From 1980, he made the first of several influential trips to Mexico. The experience had a decisive effect on him and prompted Scully's commitment to shift the paradigm in abstraction from Minimalism to emotional abstraction in painting, abandoning the reduced vocabulary of the former in favour of a return to metaphor and spirituality in art.

It was while in Mexico working in watercolour in 1984 that he made the first *Wall of Light*, inspired by the patterns of light and shadows he saw on the stacked stones of ancient walls, but it was not until 14 years later, in 1998, following additional trips to Mexico, that Scully began to create his landmark *Wall of Light* series. These works

were shown in 2005–07 at The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas; Cincinnati Art Museum, Ohio; and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. In recent years, Scully has also increasingly turned to sculpture, creating monumental structures that engage with the unique energy and history of their locations. As in his paintings, these sculptures feature individual rectangular sections that slot together, maintaining his ongoing interest in interlocking brick forms.

Scully's work has been exhibited in prestigious institutions worldwide, including the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery, London; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, among others. In 2015 he was the first Western artist to receive a major retrospective at the Shanghai Himalayas Museum and at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing.

An exhibition of Scully's sculptures, paintings and drawings took place at Houghton Hall in Norfolk, UK, in 2023, followed by monographic exhibitions at the Ludwig Museum, Koblenz, Germany, and at the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest, in 2024. In the summer of 2024, works by the artist were on view in the Église Saint-Nicolas, Caen, France, as part of the Normandie Impressioniste festival, as well as at Château d'Oiron, Plaine-et-Vallées, France. In 2025, exhibitions dedicated to the artist took place at La Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera, Barcelona; Daegu Art Museum; Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, NY; and Bucerius Kunstforum, Hamburg; Estorick Collection, London; Hilti Art Foundation, Vaduz.

Sean Scully: A Romantic Geometry of Colors, a room of paintings dating from 1972 to 2023 has been accepted into the Centre Pompidou's collection after being exhibited at the museum last year. His work is currently on view at the LongHouse Reserve, East Hampton, NY (until 24 December 2028). His solo show *Stack*, curated by Michel Gauthier, will open on 23 August 2026 at Château La Coste. Later this summer, his work will also be included in the exhibition *Cézanne et nous* at the Grand Palais.

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