

Press release

Sean Scully

Landline Weave

3 June—29 July 2023
Opening Saturday 3 June 2023, 3—6pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
Paris Pantin
69, avenue du Général Leclerc, 93500 Pantin



Sean Scully, *Tappan Weave Green*, 2023
Oil on aluminium. 215.9 x 190.5 cm (85 x 75 in)

The Irish-born, American painter Sean Scully's first exhibition in Thaddaeus Ropac's Pantin space features new works from his *Landline* and *Wall of Light* series, as well as new typologies of work titled *Weave* and *Net*, which look back to some of the artist's earliest work. They will be accompanied by a group of paintings whose distinctive palette is inspired by the town of Aix-en-Provence, where they were made.

Sean Scully fuses the colouristic tradition of European painting with the scale and expressiveness of American abstraction. Structured through arrangements of vertical and horizontal lines or blocks, his paintings eschew the cold rigour of Minimalism, in favour of an impassioned application of colour that infuses his work with an intrinsic vitality. His paintings are always rooted in the real world, referencing elements of the manual labour

he was involved in since leaving school at the age of 15 – typesetting, stacking and construction work – as well as the landscapes he has encountered in his numerous travels. ‘I’m very connected to the world,’ the artist stated in a recent interview, ‘because I’m fundamentally emotional, not intellectual.’ Light, colour and the haptic quality of his brushwork make Scully’s paintings a place of feeling for viewers, oscillating between vivid emotion and calm reflection.

Among the paintings on view in the exhibition will be works from the artist’s most recent series *Weave* and *Net*. In them, Scully draws on his early work with interlocking lines and contrasting colours to form an intricate textural tartan into which he insets squares of more densely arranged rectangular shapes characteristic of his ongoing *Wall of Light* and *Landline* series. He began working with grid-like patterns in the late 1960s, in a process which he describes as ‘systematic and improvisational at the same time’. Throughout the following decade, he continued his experiments with stripes in his *Overlay* and *Crossover* series, exploring their ‘irreducible yet elastic property’, as the art critic Kelly Grovier puts it. Blending the influence of Piet Mondrian’s geometric abstraction with the emotional directness of Jackson Pollock, over 50 years later, Scully’s approach is, in his own words,



Sean Scully, *Landline Maroon*, 2023
Oil on wood and aluminium. 215.9 x 284.5 cm (85 x 112 in)

‘looser’, allowing drips of colour to bleed from one stripe onto the next and the luminous grounds of his works to transpire through the thin layers of glaze he superposes with varying density.

Scully cites the Nabis painter Édouard Vuillard as an influence for his looser treatment of paint. He admires the ‘seepage through the seams’, characteristic of Vuillard’s Post-Impressionist style, relating it to the overlapping hues and rough edges of his own recent paintings. The materiality of his medium, rather than geometry and visual effects, has become central to Scully’s way of working. ‘I opened up colour for a while,’ he explains, ‘but the colour then reduced the aggressiveness of the painting because if you have bright colour, it’s very difficult to see it as stuff. If you reduce the colour, then it becomes stuff, like concrete or mud, and you can slap it around.’

At the centre of the exhibition will be one of the artist’s large-scale *Landline* works whose earthy palette of moss and ochre illustrates Scully’s new approach to colour. The contrast between the wooden and aluminium grounds that underpin the bipartite composition, reveals the role of the support in absorbing and reflecting light, as well as highlighting the tension between the urban and natural worlds that permeates Scully’s wider oeuvre. Begun in 2013, Scully’s *Landline* series marked a shift in the artist’s practice, evoking horizons and landscapes, rather than the architectural, brick-like structures that had thus far inspired his *Wall of Light* compositions. Works such as *California Deep* (2023) combine both geometries, embedding one painting within another to



Sean Scully, *California Deep*, 2023
Oil on aluminium. 215.9 x 190.5 cm (85 x 75 in)

establish a dialogue between image and frame, inside and outside, the natural and the manmade. As the artist remarks: 'I'm always in these conversations with myself – pulling myself around in different directions. I'm consistently restless, I would say, or restlessly consistent.'

Exemplifying the artist's way of working is a group of paintings made in 2021, which brings together his *Net*, *Landline* and *Wall of Light* series. Painted on aluminium, copper and wood respectively, all of them draw on the same distinctive colour palette of red and blue, inspired by the atmosphere of Aix-en-Provence, where the artist has a studio. Like other works in the exhibition, such as *Tappan Weave Green* (2023) created in upstate New York, the Aix paintings reveal Scully's deep emotional connection to the time and place of their making. 'When I make a painting,' he states, 'that's when all my turmoil is in the air. They're not a way of showing, they're a way of dealing with things. [...] If I make a painting with high colour, I'm very proud of myself because I've overcome my sorrow.'



Sean Scully, *Wall of Light Magenta*, 2023
Oil on linen. 106.7 x 121.9 cm (42 x 48 in)



Sean Scully in his studio

About the artist

Born in Dublin, Scully studied at Croydon School of Art and Newcastle University in the UK, where he began experimenting with abstraction. During a trip to Morocco in 1969, he was strongly influenced by the rich colours of the region, which he translated into the broad horizontal stripes and deep earth tones that characterise his mature style. Following fellowships in 1972 and 1975 at Harvard University, he permanently relocated to New York. In the early 1980s, he made the first of several influential trips to Mexico, where he used watercolour for the first time in works inspired by the patterns of light and shadows he saw on the stacked stones of ancient walls. The experience had a decisive effect on him and prompted his decision to move from Minimalism to a more emotional and humanistic form of abstraction.

In 1998, following additional trips to Mexico, 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 is currently on view at Houghton Hall in Norfolk, UK, until 29 October 2023.

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