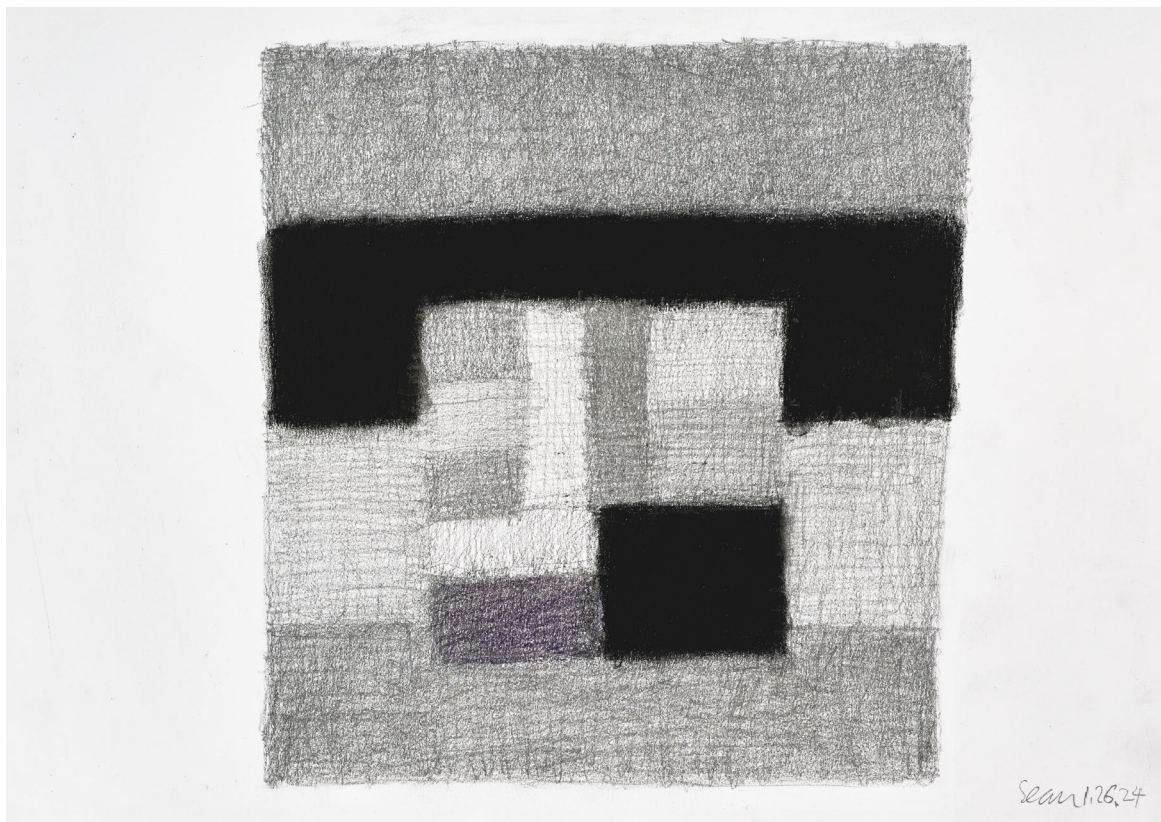


Press release

Sean Scully *Carbon and Air*

24 May—27 July 2024
Opening Friday 24 May 2024, 6—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
Paris Marais
7, rue Debelleye, 75003 Paris



Sean Scully, 1.26.24, 2024
Pencil on paper. 30 x 42 cm (11.8 x 16.5 in)

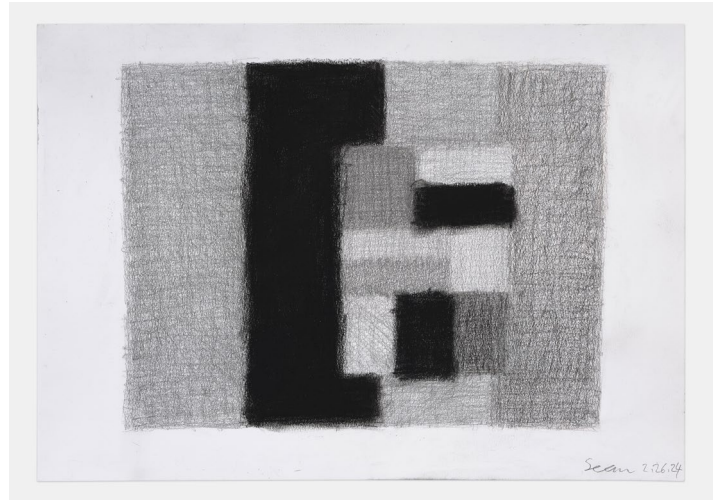
Carbon and Air is an exhibition of Irish-born, American artist Sean Scully's rarely exhibited works on paper. Bringing together works produced within the past year with historical drawings dating from the 1960s to the 1980s, the exhibition spans rare figurative works as well as testifying to the evolution of some of the artist's best-known abstract series, *Wall of Light* and *Landline*. This exhibition follows Scully's recent solo presentation at Houghton Hall, Norfolk, UK, in which his drawings were presented in conversation

with his paintings and sculptures. *Carbon and Air* will run concurrently with a solo presentation of the artist's work at the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest, on view until 1 September 2024, featuring several works on paper from the same series, three of which have recently entered the Hungarian National Gallery's collection.

In 2023, Scully began a new series of works in which he reimagines some of the most recognisable compositional

motifs of his paintings in pencil on paper. From the densely arranged rectangular forms found in his *Wall of Light* series to the stacked horizontal structures of his *Landline* works, these familiar shapes, which are always rooted in the forms he finds in the real world, reemerge in the exhibition through intricate, meditative hatching and shading. One of the first artists to break free of the rigidity of Minimalism, Scully led the transition to a more emotional, impassioned form of abstraction, in which composition is defined by his acutely experienced impressions of the world around him. As such, the recent drawings on view are each named after the date of their making.

Though known for his use of colour, monochrome also holds an important place in Scully's palette. Born in Dublin, Ireland, his family moved when he was four years old to the grey, industrial outskirts of London. In 1975, when he arrived in New York, he began what he has called a 'five-year love affair with Minimalism', inspired by the city to reduce his palette back down to these same monochromes in his 'Black paintings'. The pencil drawings on view serve as a reminder of the artist's relationship to high Minimalism through their formal self-sufficiency, while demonstrating Scully's mastery ability to convey light in black and white through meticulous shading, creating, as Dávid Fehér, curator of the exhibition at the Hungarian National Gallery, writes, 'colour without colour'. Like in the drawings of Georges Seurat, an important reference for Scully, densely filled space contrasts with sparser areas in which the individual strokes of his pencil are visible to form compositional structures guided by tone rather than line. The remarkable range he finds within monochrome, meanwhile, is profoundly influenced by the

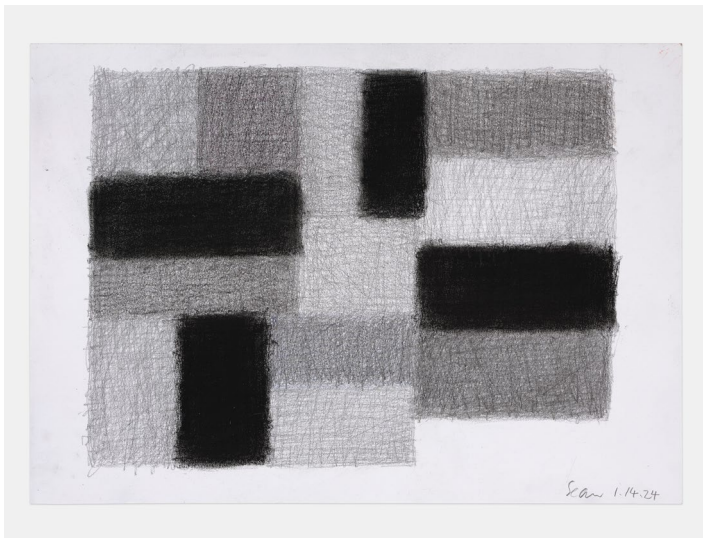


Sean Scully, 2.26.24, 2024
Pencil on paper. 30 x 42 cm (11.8 x 16.5 in)

force of 'the dialectical, or the grey' in Giorgio Morandi's work. In some of the drawings on view, the subtle application of blue, purple or red pencil introduces touches of colour.

Scully has been working with the geometric grids and blocks that are the ancestors of the works on view since the late 1960s while still a student at Newcastle University in England. However, the exhibition also presents a small selection of figurative drawings from the early 1960s – before the artist entered art school and while he was still working as a typesetter's apprentice – in which can be found the same attunement to light and dark, portrayed through shading rather than through colour, as is found in the artist's mature and abstract compositions. In one 1964 work, a pensive figure emerges from a sombre ground created through the application of heavy pencil strokes, the physicality of which is palpable in the finished work. In another drawing from the same decade, delicate, swirling shading forms shadows on the floor in a sun-bathed domestic scene.

Drawing has accompanied Scully's practice as a painter since the beginning of his career, and his works on paper, as Joanna Kleinberg and Brett Littmen, curators of the itinerant 2012–13 survey of Scully's drawings which concluded at The Drawing Center, New York, wrote, 'both paraphrase and diversify the ideas in his canvases'. Conceived as a development or extension of existing motifs – as 'stripping the motifs bare', as Dávid Fehér writes – rather than as studies or preliminary sketches for his paintings, the artist's drawings turn the often implied hierarchical relationship between the two mediums on its head. Harnessing the intimacy of drawing, Scully brings his familiar typologies of work to their purest conclusion to portray the essence at the heart of the compositions he returns to again and again.



Sean Scully, 1.14.24, 2024
Pencil on paper. 30 x 42 cm (11.8 x 16.5 in)



Sean Scully in his studio

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 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. From 1980, he made the first of several influential trips to Mexico. 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.

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.

Solo presentations of the artist's work are currently on view at the Ludwig Museum, Koblenz, Germany, until 16 June 2024; and at the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest, until 1 September 2024. From 21 June 2024, monumental works by Scully will be on view in the Église Saint-Nicolas, Caen, France, as part of the Normandie Impressioniste festival, and from 22 June 2024, Château d'Oiron, Plaine-et-Vallées, France, will be exhibiting the artist's sculpture, painting and works on paper. A permanent monumental stone tower sculpture, commissioned by the Centre des monuments nationaux, will be installed at Château d'Oiron later this year.

For any enquiries:

Marcus Rothe
Thaddaeus Ropac Paris
marcus.rothe@ropac.net
Telephone +33 1 42 72 99 00
Mobile +33 6 76 77 54 15



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@thaddaeusropac
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