

# SOFT UNCERTAIN SPACES

## SCULLY GIVES ABSTRACTION BACK TO THE PEOPLE

Wadsworth Atheneum visitors are in for a treat: Sean Scully's exquisite "Landline" series, just off a run at the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., has arrived in Hartford. It's here through May 19.

Works from this master of post-minimalist conceptualism enraptured viewers in 2015 at the Venice Biennale. The show explores the title through a variety of media with works inspired by his years in Ireland. The series also marks a significant shift in Scully's work from what had until recently become increasingly complex arrangements of stripes and colors. Landline marks a departure from his earlier hard-edged minimalism to his current expressive style.

It has been Scully's stated aim to give abstraction back to the people – and in recent years his paintings have been wildly popular, in some cases commanding \$1 million apiece at auction.

Scully, who is also a poet and writer, has said the series initially served as a virtual lifeline, helping him emerge from an addiction to OxyContin that followed treatment for a serious back injury. It was in recovery that he found painting horizontally offered him the chance to conjure sea, land and sky. This touring exhibition includes nearly 50 paintings, pastels, watercolors and photographs, and two layered aluminum stack sculptures as well. Ahead of this show, in 2018, a large

multi-layered sculpture was installed on the museum's Main Street sculpture garden.

Because his art comes to us in the language of the contemporary world – from the patterns we absorb as we traverse on city blocks, or the other visual rows and lines that define our homes and working spaces, Scully believes his art is easily accessed.

Between these lines, the artist's brushstrokes and brilliant rhythmic color packs a wallop, encapsulating vestiges of a Dickensian upbringing, a deep awareness of European art history and references elements from masterpieces created by a number of post-Impressionists. He credits Gustave Courbet, Paolo Veronese and Titian for teaching him about color.

### REVIEW

#### SEAN SCULLY: LANDLINE

WADSWORTH ATHENEUM  
MUSEUM OF ART

600 MAIN STREET

HARTFORD,  
CONNECTICUT

THROUGH MAY 19



Sean Scully, *Human Too*, 2017, installation, oil on aluminum, private collection.  
© Sean Scully, photograph by Robert Bean.



comprised of vertical and horizontal stripes," Patricia Hickson, the Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art, and the Wadsworth's curator, said.

In the paintings in this exhibition, "you can see these works are clearly responses to landscape, and feel the emotion that is in them. On face value, the bands of the natural landscape – of land, sea and sky – are just bands of color. But from the photographs that inspired these works you see how he takes these elements and makes them sublime," she added.

Scully was born in Dublin in 1945, moved to London as a child, studying art at the Central School of Art and Croydon College of Art before receiving his BA from Newcastle University in 1972. He has said that it was in relocating to the United States that the world opened to him, giving him opportunities to grow and develop that he would not otherwise have had. Scully's first mid-career solo exhibition at the Hirshhorn in 1995 cemented his status as a leading 20th century artist.

Renowned today as a master of post-Minimalist abstraction, he has taught and lectured at major universities and museums worldwide, including Princeton, Parsons School

TOP: Sean Scully, *Landline Far Blue Lake*, 2018, oil on aluminum, private collection. © Sean Scully, photograph by Robert Bean.

BOTTOM: Sean Scully, *Landline Bend Triptych*, 2017, oil on aluminum, private collection. © Sean Scully, photograph by Robert Bean.

His aesthetic sensibility has also been further shaped by his distinct cultural and working-class heritage, working as a young man in a Notting Hill printmaking factory and later for a cardboard box company north of London – fertile places to acquire skills and knowledge about people.

While the daily commute served up lessons in sociology and politics, one can also see how his nascent-aesthetic ideas were percolating.

Across media, including watercolor, oil painting and sculpture – Scully is able "to deepen, mystify and vary his relatively limited repertoire of motifs – largely



of Design, Harvard and Oxford University. And he has received many awards, including the Peter Stuyvesant Foundation Prize, a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Harkness Fellowship.

From 2002-2007, Scully was a professor of painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Germany. He currently splits his year between New York and the Bavarian countryside.

"I try to paint this, this sense of the elemental coming together of land and sea, sky and land, of blocks coming together side by side, stacked in horizon lines endlessly beginning and ending the way the blocks of the world hug each other and brush up against each other, their weight, their air, their color and the soft uncertain space between them," he wrote.

The exhibition can be found in the Austin Gallery and two adjoining galleries, and includes paintings, pastels, inset paintings and sculpture. In these rooms, viewers can see photographic images of the cliffside view in Norfolk, England, that inspired the series. A catalogue, with essays by Hickson and her Hirshhorn counterpart, Stéphane Aquin, is available in the Wadsworth bookshop.

On Monday, March 11, Hickson and Scully will have a featured conversation at 6 p.m., preceded by a reception for the artist that begins at 5 p.m.

| Kristin Nord

## ArtSpace Maynard Call for Entries!



ArtSpace Maynard invites artists in all media (except video) to submit proposals for one month solo or group exhibitions for the 2019-2020 season.

The proposed exhibit should be based on a unifying concept that is social, historical, philosophical, cultural, political or other. The ArtSpace Gallery is one of the largest nonprofit exhibition spaces in Massachusetts. Exhibitions are limited to New England artists.

For guidelines to go: [artspacemaynard.com/proposals](http://artspacemaynard.com/proposals)

**Deadline: May 17, 2019**



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