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LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

Sean Scully *Wall of Light Land*

18 November 2023 – Spring 2024
4/F, Building D7, Yard No.3, Jinhang East Road, Beijing

For his first exhibition at Lisson Gallery Beijing, Sean Scully builds upon recent bodies of work, including his *Wall of Light* and *Landline* painting series, while also featuring two recent small-scale sculptural works made from rough-hewn stone blocks.

Throughout his 50-year-long artistic career, Scully has practiced a form of abstraction that aims to reshape the genre. His recent *Landlines*, of which there is a 2023 example subtitled *Grey Blue* in this exhibition, result from the hard-won layering and merging of oil pigments in coloured bands across the panel's aluminium surface, in the manner of sedimentary rock striations or horizon lines, suggesting meeting points between earth and sky or between nature and architecture.

Scully often blends and blurs the boundaries between his own bodies of work, showing not only a prowess in tonal balance and pictorial construction, but also an ability to revisit and recompose the essence of abstraction over time and across decades of production. Indeed, the other paintings in this show follow a square format and introduce Scully's newest group of *Wall* paintings. They recall not only the dry-stone and wooden walls found around the countryside of Ireland and Scotland that were the subject of some of his earliest photographs and striped works, but present complex woven passages of paint referencing and remixing some of Scully's previous compositions, with vertical inflections and doubled 'bricks' disturbing the otherwise neat symmetry of each square. "I'm trying to turn stone into light," the artist has said of the manner in which these building blocks add up to something positive or "clear in its aspiration: to make a wall that is not a brutal divider."

The similarly square-formatted, multipartite sculptures, entitled *Small Cubed* (both from 2021) recall Scully's monumental, quarried works such as *Wall Dale Cubed* comprised of over 1,000 tonnes of stone or the rugged, shaped stacks of sand-coloured stone, *Tower Light Cubed* (2023), recently on view in the UK at Houghton Hall for his major show, 'Smaller than the Sky'. These more modest iterations of stone sculpture for Beijing are no less concerned with their own weight, heft and concentrated form, using gravity and geometry to bind themselves, while maintaining an irregular, abstract quality, due to the hand-cut nature of the materials, which disrupts any over-wrought or clean-cut rigour.

In addition to his show at Lisson Gallery Los Angeles (ending on 4 November) and major European museum shows in the past year, at Thorvaldsens Museum in Copenhagen and at the Hungarian National Gallery in Budapest, Scully's full-scale US touring retrospective, 'The Shape of Ideas', was seen at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Museum of Fort Worth in 2021-22. Indeed, Scully was the first Western artist to have a travelling survey in China in 2014, with 'Follow the Heart: The Art of Sean Scully 1964 – 2014' that went on display in Shanghai and Beijing – the last time his work was seen in depth in the city. Scully is also participating in the Chengdu Biennale, entitled 'Time Gravity' at Tianfu Art Park.

About the artist

Sean Scully is one of the most important painters of his generation, whose work is held in major museum

collections around the world. 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 synthesizes 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 Aix-en-Provence 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. 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 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 Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas; The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; De Pont Museum, Tilburg; Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Albertina, Vienna; and Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China, among others.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Beijing. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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