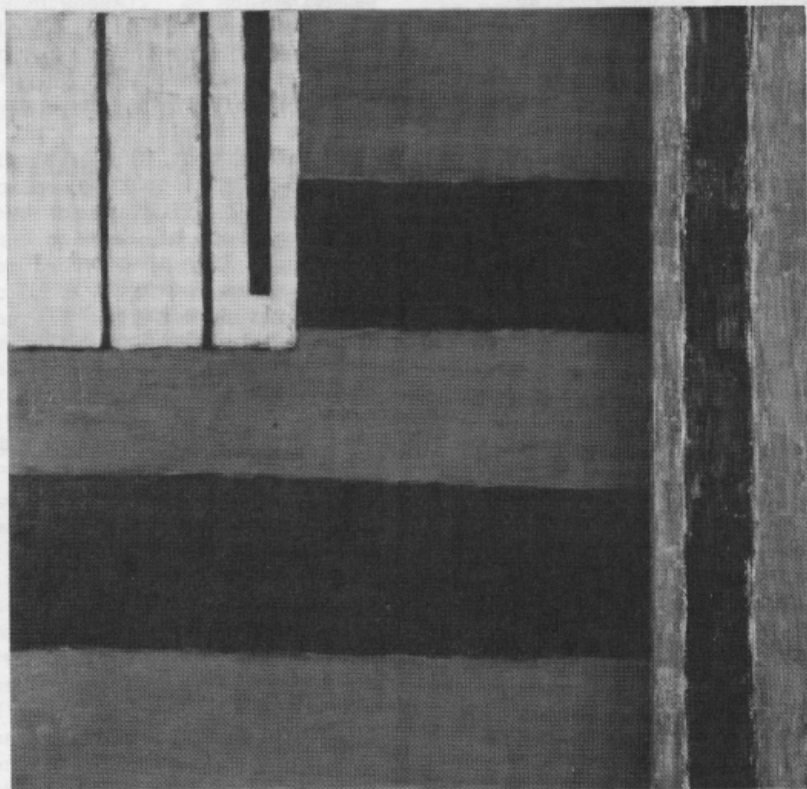


Sean Scully  
MATRIX/BERKELEY 112

University Art Museum  
mid October - mid December,  
1987

Yellow Light, 1985



The basic building block of Sean Scully's paintings is the stripe, but pattern as such is of no interest to him. Furthermore, although his paintings are emphatically abstract (in fact, he believes in the historic inevitability of abstraction), they are not about the relationships of formal elements such as color, shape and line. Instead, Scully, like Mark Rothko before him, struggles with how to use abstract forms and their relationships to express human emotion and psychology.

Since leaving London for New York in 1975, Scully has moved from colorful, plaid shaped canvases, to narrow-striped paintings in single and multi-panels, to the present monumental, irregularly banded and constructed paintings. No longer meditative statements of repetition, as, for example, Agnes Martin's grids, Scully's works of the past several years are increasingly physical and painterly. The stripes have become broad bands as much as two feet wide (as in the majestic If), the edges are rough rather than clean-edged, the thick surfaces are built up of several layers of color (the black under the red bands of Yellow Light; the grey underlying the ochre of Signal) that add mystery and depth not unlike the pulsating sensation of Rothko's rectangular washes of color.

Each Scully painting proudly bears the marks of its difficult birth. A discarded section of an older painting may end up in a new one, sometimes acting as a window-like element in a wall (If and Yellow Light contain such

corner sections with stripes oriented differently from those of the main body of the painting). Real space interacts with illusionistic space in Conversation, If and Yellow Light, all of which are built of two or more panels of varying reliefs. Scully spent several years supporting himself working as a house painter and carpenter and this experience manifests itself in an architectonic approach to making his paintings.

Color plays a dominant role in Scully's current work as it did in his Fauve-inspired student paintings, but from 1975 until about 1980 he created only monochromatic paintings, culminating in a stunning group of black canvases. Even in these somber works, however, greys were never pure greys but shifted subtly from pink-grey to blue-grey, from warm to cool (one thinks of the incredible range of color with which Brice Marden could imbue his grey paintings), and the blacks were never merely black but contained blues, reds and browns. In 1981 Scully began to allow these hidden colors to come through once again while maintaining the black stripe as a structural device. The black vertical bands and horizontal stripes in Conversation (named for the Matisse painting) set up a rhythm and unity strong enough to comfortably admit the small red-orange panel within it. Scully's colors--deep reds, greens, ochres and oranges--are of the earth; similarly he wants his paintings to be direct, material and matter-of-fact (the black paintings are the closest Scully ever got to ethereality).

Scully likes to keep himself and his audience off-balance. He sees his paintings as evolving, always on the way to becoming something unknown. He has stated that he strives for discontinuity and tension in his dynamic compositions, creating a precarious balance between projecting and receding panels, varying sized bands, vertical and horizontal alignment (the title If refers to this property of unsureness). As Scully noted in a recent conversation, in life, as in his paintings, "things don't always fit neatly together."

In Signal, the most recent painting in the exhibition, the three distinctly colored and banded sections are all on the same plane. This compositional shift may herald a new period of relative stability. Scully said in an interview with Joseph Masheck (catalogue for 1986 exhibition at David McKee Gallery) that he has a "very deep need...to make some security of, in, my art, because the life that I've led has been one of great insecurity." Noting that Rothko acknowledged the unsettling effect of being an immigrant, Scully said, "I've been an immigrant twice. I've had three nationalities--Irish, English and American." Scully thrives on struggle, nonetheless, admiring such writers as Joseph Conrad, who creates characters in a heroic search for the essence of life, and Samuel Beckett, whose dark existentialist view of life forced Scully to seek meaning and communication through his painting.

Scully was born in Dublin in 1945 and moved with his

family to South London when he was four. He describes the street where he grew up as "the poorest street in London." He studied first at the Croyden College of Art in London where he received strong training in figurative art and continued his education at Newcastle University, receiving a fine arts degree in 1971. Discouraged by the lack of context and appreciation for abstract painting in England, he moved to New York in 1975 on a two-year Harkness Fellowship, after having spent the 1972-73 academic year at Harvard on an exchange fellowship. He taught at Princeton University from 1977 to 1983, when he received a Guggenheim Award. He continues to live and work in New York where he is represented by the David McKee Gallery.

Constance Lewallen

#### Works in MATRIX:

1. Yellow Light, 1985, oil on canvas, 84 x 86 x 10". Lent by Arthur Berliner and Anita Ettinger, Berkeley, CA.
2. Conversation, 1986, oil on canvas, 96 x 144". Lent by The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection, Los Angeles, CA.
3. If, 1986, oil on canvas, 96 x 126". Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Harry W. Anderson, Atherton, CA.
4. Signal, 1987, oil on canvas, 96 x 144". Lent by Douglas S. Cramer, Los Angeles, CA.

Selected one-person  
exhibitions:

Rowan Gallery, London, '73,  
'75, '77, '79, '81; Tortue  
Gallery, Santa Monica, '75,  
'76; Ikon Gallery,  
Birmingham, England, Sean  
Scully: Paintings 1971-1981  
(traveled through the United  
Kingdom under the auspices of  
the Arts Council of Great  
Britain; catalogue); David  
McKee Gallery, New York, '83,  
'85, '86 (catalogue), '87;  
Carnegie Institute,  
Pittsburgh, PA (traveled to  
the Boston Museum of Fine  
Arts, MA; catalogue); Galerie  
Schmela, Düsseldorf, West  
Germany, '85; Pamela  
Auchincloss Gallery, Santa  
Barbara, CA, Monotypes, '87  
(catalogue).

Selected group exhibitions:

Museum of Modern Art, Paris,  
La Peinture Anglaise  
Aujourd'hui, '73; Hayward  
Gallery, London, British  
Painting, '73; John Weber  
Gallery, New York,  
Invitational, '76; The  
Clocktower, New York, New  
Wave Painting, '79; The  
Museum of Modern Art, New  
York, An International Survey  
of Painting and Sculpture,  
'84 (catalogue); Milwaukee  
Art Museum, WI, Currents #6,  
'84; Weatherspoon Art  
Gallery, Greensboro, NC, Art  
on Paper, '85; Annelly Juda  
Fine Art/Juda Rowan Gallery,  
London, Masterpieces of the  
Avantgarde, '85 (catalogue);  
University Art Museum,  
Berkeley, CA, Cal Collects,  
'86; Corcoran Gallery of Art,  
Washington, DC, Corcoran  
Biennial, '87 (catalogue);  
Helsinki Festival, Finland,  
Harvey Quaytman and Sean  
Scully, '87 (catalogue).

Selected bibliography about  
the artist:

Rosenthal, Adrienne.  
"Painting by Sean Scully,"  
Artweek, March 29, '75.  
Russell, John. "Sean  
Scully," New York Times, Dec.  
10, '76.  
Gold, Sharon. "Sean  
Scully," Artforum, May-June  
'77.  
Feaver, William. "Sean  
Scully," Artnews, Jan. '78.  
Hunter, Sam. "Sean  
Scully's Absolute Paintings,"  
Artforum, Nov. '79 (cover  
illus.).  
Tatransky, Valentin.  
"Sean Scully," Arts, Feb.  
'80.  
Zimmer, William. "Heart  
of Darkness: The New Stripe  
Paintings and an Interview  
with Sean Scully," Arts, Dec.  
'82.  
Westfall, Stephen.  
"Aspects of All-Over," Arts,  
Oct. '82.  
Larson, Kay. "Sean  
Scully," New York Magazine,  
Oct. 3, '83.  
Madoff, Steven Henry.  
"A New Generation of Abstract  
Painters," Artnews, Nov. '83.  
Cotter, Holland. "Sean  
Scully," Flash Art, April-May  
'85.  
Higgins, Judith. "Sean  
Scully and the Metamorphosis  
of the Stripe," Artnews, Nov.  
'85.  
Decter, Joshua. "Sean  
Scully," Arts, Dec. '86.  
Brenson, Michael. "True  
Believers Who Keep the Flame  
of Painting," New York Times,  
June 7, '87.

MATRIX is supported in part  
by grants from Mrs. Paul L.  
Wattis, The LEF Foundation,  
and the Alameda County Art  
Commission's County  
Supervisors' Art Support  
Program.