A Guide to the Exhibition
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College
January 12 – March 9, 2008
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE
This guide is designed to introduce you to the art of Sean Scully, through his words and a host of other resources. It begins with an introduction, a biography of the artist, and a brief history of the stripe in Western society by Brian Kennedy, director of the museum and curator of the exhibition. This is followed by reproductions of the paintings in the show, accompanied by Scully’s comments about them. The exhibition is organized chronologically, so if you choose to, you may observe the evolution of Scully’s painting style from 1970 to 2006. (The final room contains four photographs by Scully, who works in photography, watercolor, pastel, and printmaking in addition to painting.) Or you may explore Scully’s work in any order you choose, using the floor plan on the facing page and the reproductions in this brochure to orient yourself.

In addition to the information described above, this guide contains a bibliography to assist your exploration of the work of Sean Scully and abstract art more generally following your visit to the exhibition, as well as a list of all of the public programs that will be offered by the Hood Museum of Art in conjunction with the show.

Other resources provided in the exhibition include:

- Two videos that feature Sean Scully talking about his work
- A recorded tour of Sean Scully talking about the works in the exhibition
- Looking at Sean Scully’s Paintings, a guide to help visitors engage with abstract art
- A reading and music area that includes numerous books on Sean Scully and abstract art, as well as CDs of music the artist enjoys.

Cover image: Sean Scully, Wall of Light Summer, 2005, oil on canvas; Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH; Purchased through the Miriam and Sidney Stoneman Acquisitions Fund, Hood Museum of Art; 2006.16
SEAN SCULLY—A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Sean Scully has come steadily into international prominence over the past thirty years to his position today as one of the most admired painters working in the abstract tradition. Born in Dublin in 1945, Scully moved with his family to London in 1949, and he grew up in a poor, working-class, Irish Catholic community. His father was a barber and his mother also worked to support the family. It was a conflict with the Catholic Church over his parents’ need to work seven days a week that caused Scully to be withdrawn from a local convent school and placed in a state school, where everything was “gray, hard, spiritually empty, and very violent.”¹ He left school at age fifteen to be an apprentice in a commercial printing shop, then joined a graphic design studio (1960–62). His mother became a professional singer and, along with his father, a champion tango dancer (when his parents later moved to Spain). They gave their son a love of books but little acquaintance with visual art.

The range of influences on Scully’s development is considerable. In London, after night classes at the Central School of Art (1962–65), he studied at Croydon College of Art (1965–68). Scully visited the Tate Gallery frequently to study Van Gogh’s Chair, 1888. It was a kind of conversion, the realization that the man who humbly signed his painting ‘Vincent’ had used only paint to create such a wonderful image of a chair. In his studios, Scully to this day has a single large chair from which he can survey and ponder his paintings. Mondrian, Matisse, Pollock, and Rothko are the great twentieth-century masters from whom Scully learned most, and he sees himself unabashedly as part of a tradition of painters dating back to the time of Cimabue and Giotto.

Between 1968 and 1972, Scully studied at Newcastle University and received a first-class Bachelor of Arts degree in Fine Arts. In 1969, on a trip to Morocco, a country that had influenced artists from Delacroix to Klee and Matisse, Scully saw strips of color-dyed wool, about six inches wide and up to eight feet long, that were hanging on wooden bars and used to make rugs. He also saw strips of colored canvas laid out on the yellow sand so that they could be used to make tents. He recalled later “I thought it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen in my life.”² For Scully, the stripe became “a signifier for modernism.”³

In 1972, Scully received a fellowship to Harvard University. He then returned to London to teach at Chelsea School of Art and Goldsmith’s College, University of London. In 1975, he moved to New York on a Harkness Fellowship and began five years of intense self-examination and hardship as he sought to find his voice as a painter. He met Robert Ryman and was also influenced by the work of Ad Reinhardt, Frank Stella, and Agnes Martin. In 1973, William Feaver was the first art critic to write seriously about Scully’s work, and an essay by Sam Hunter in Artforum (November 1979) brought him considerable attention.

In 1981, Scully had a ten-year survey touring exhibition, supported by the Arts Council of Great Britain, that was organized by the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham. In 1983, Scully became an American citizen, received a Guggenheim Fellowship, and began to earn much acclaim, culminating in his first solo show in an American museum, at the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, in 1985.

Scully’s rise to prominence has been marked by numerous exhibitions and publications: his first solo exhibition in a European venue was at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London

INTRODUCTION

Sean Scully’s pursuit of multiple variations on the theme of the painted stripe, bar, and block is consistent with his assertion that “the stripe is a signifier for modernism.” The stripe is viewed today as a positive symbol, but this was not always so. From medieval times in Europe to the nineteenth century, stripes were used routinely as “the devil’s cloth”, to separate outsiders from the rest of society. Lepers, prisoners, circus performers, and others were marked out by their uniforms of stripes. In the nineteenth century, these condemnatory associations began to change when artists employed the stripe as a bold mark of difference, embracing it to announce their own status as bohemian outsiders.

For twentieth-century artists from Mondrian to Matisse, Picasso to Motherwell, the stripe became a mark of modernism. Certain painters made it especially their own, from Gene Davis to Daniel Buren. Frank Stella responded to abstract expressionism with his controversial and groundbreaking black stripe paintings. Sean Scully began painting in the late 1960s and early 1970s amid the dominance of Op Art in Britain. He then moved to America, where, after five years of struggle, he found his painterly voice in the colored striped line, block, bar, or band. He was motivated to take on the motif after a trip to Morocco in 1969, where he saw colored strips of material used for making tents. Scully has relentlessly pursued the possibilities offered by his exploration of painted stripes. In so doing, he has been powerfully setting out his belief in the spirit of painting. He believes in an abstract art that can be a universal language for people of all religions and none.

This exhibition was organized by the Hood Museum of Art and is generously funded by Yoko Otani Homma and Shunichi Homma M.D., Class of 1977, the Marie-Louise and Samuel R. Rosenthal Fund; the Hansen Family Fund; the Ray Winfield Smith 1918 Fund; and the Leon C. 1927, Charles L. 1955, and Andrew J. 1984 Greenebaum Fund.

Above: Because of the Other, 1997, oil on linen; private collection
in 1989, and the following year Maurice Poirier produced Scully’s first illustrated mono-
graph. In 1993, an exhibition titled *The Catherine Paintings*—fourteen paintings dat-
ing from each of the years 1979 to 1992, selected by Scully in honor of his wife Catherine
Lee—was shown at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, and subsequently
acquired there. In 1995, a major touring show traveled from Washington to Atlanta,
Barcelona, Dublin, and Frankfurt.5

In 1994, Scully made his first works in a new studio in Barcelona. In 1999, he made his
first paintings in his self-designed grand, airy studio in Chelsea, New York City. In 2001,
he was honored as a member of *Aosdána*, an association of artists established by the
Irish Government to celebrate distinguished Irish creative practitioners, and in 2003
he received honorary doctorates from the National University of Ireland, Dublin, and
the Massachusetts College of Art, Boston. He made his first painting in a new studio at
Mooseurach, near Munich, in 2002, when he was appointed Professor of Painting at the
Akademie der Bildenden Künste. An exhibition of Scully’s *Wall of Light* paintings, orga-
nized by the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C., toured to the Modern Art Museum of
Fort Worth, Texas, the Cincinnati Art Museum in Ohio, and the Metropolitan Museum of
Art, New York, receiving widespread recognition as one of the best shows of 2006. Most
recently, *Sean Scully: A Retrospective* was held at the Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, in
2007.

**THE HISTORY OF THE STRIPE IN WESTERN SOCIETY**

“Stripe,” an Old English word of Dutch or German origin, has been part of the language
since medieval times. As a noun, it is “a long straight region of a single color” or “a wet,
long scar, blow, probably from stripe band on a garment”; as a verb, it means “a stroke
or blow with a rod or lash.” It is possible that the derivation is from the biblical Old
for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe
[bruise for bruise]”) or Isaiah 53:5 (“But because of our sins he was wounded, beaten
because of the evil we did. We are healed by the punishment he suffered, made whole
by the stripes [blows] he received”). The prophetic reference of Isaiah is to the scour-
ging of Jesus Christ before he carried his cross to Calvary. In the New Testament, the First
Letter from Peter 2:24 makes the derivation explicit (“Christ himself carried our sins
in his body to the cross, so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. It is by his
stripes [wounds] that you have been healed”). The sixth of the fourteen Stations of the
Cross, which, on the walls of Christian churches, record stages of Jesus Christ’s journey
to his death, is “The scourging and crowning with thorns.”

Michel Pastoureau’s book *The Devil’s Cloth: A History of Stripes*, published in English
translation in 2001, provides a fascinating account of “how this sign developed, evolved,
and was transformed in the modern and contemporary era.” Pastoureau, a professor
at the Université Paris Sorbonne, is fascinated by fabrics and clothing. In medieval times,
dressing in clothing regarded as inappropriate to one’s class or circle was seen as “a sin
of pride or a mark of debasement. Moreover, it is a transgression against the social order
and thus a cause for scandal.” This is what happened in the thirteenth century in Europe
when some members of the Carmelite mendicant order arrived in Paris in 1254. Their
striped cloak differed from that worn by other mendicant orders such as the Dominicans
and Franciscans, and it was therefore regarded as deviant. The Carmelites were victim-
ized as “les frères barres” (the barred brothers), which was especially insulting because
*barres* referred to the marks of illegitimacy. Pope Alexander IV ordered the Carmelites to
abandon their striped cloaks, but they refused him and his successors until 1287, when
Pope Boniface VIII finally won out with a ban on the monks of all mendicant orders ever
wearing striped habits. The Bible had, after all, forbidden the wearing of stripes of a sort
in Leviticus 19:19 (“Do not wear clothes made of two kinds of material”) and Deuter-
onomy 22:9–11 (“Do not wear cloth made by weaving wool and linen together”).

It is speculated that the reason the Carmelites caused such offense then was because
their cloaks resembled the striped *djellabas* worn in Islamic countries (where they can
still be seen today). Although the scandal associated with the Carmelites is the best-
known example of the prohibition on striped clothing, there are many others. Through-
out the Middle Ages in southern Europe, stripes were often required to be worn by
prostitutes, jugglers, clowns, and hangmen. In medieval German towns, bastards, serfs,
the condemned, lepers, the insane, cripples, bohemians, heretics, and, occasionally,
Jews and non-Christians were likewise so required. In traditions of biblical illustration,
stripes were reserved for traitors like Cain, who killed his brother, Abel, and Judas, who
betrayed Jesus Christ. Saint Joseph, the husband of the Virgin Mary, was regarded as a
simpleton of lowly background, and even in the Renaissance period, when his status
was rising, he kept his striped breeches. During the Middle Ages in general, people
distinguished among garments on the basis of whether they were plain, patterned,
or striped, the latter being seen as visually disruptive and unacceptable. Animals with
stripes—tigers, zebras, leopards, hyenas—were likewise seen as dangerous and
malevolent and associated with Satan’s bestiary. The lion, in contrast, was regarded as
the “king of the beasts.” When stripes were used in medieval heraldry as signs of
kinship, they were only acceptable when they divided or partitioned a single plane
equally. When they were employed for imaginary coats of arms in literature, however,
they always had negative connotations. The striped flag is a modern equivalent of the
acceptable striped medieval family coat of arms.

Beginning in the sixteenth century, the negative associations of the stripe began to
diminish somewhat as it became a mark of domestic servitude. Servants, peasants,
slaves, and native Africans in Venetian painting were often dressed in stripes, including
the African Magus Balthazar in paintings of the *Adoration of the Magi*. The stripe further
became a mark of exoticism, linked with African, Native American, and Oceanic peoples.
In Victorian England, the striped waistcoat became the attribute of butlers and valets.
By the eighteenth century an alternative and positive stripe began to emerge as an
indicator of social rank. Such stripes were invariably vertical, as a sign of the aristocracy,
as opposed to the horizontal stripes of the domestic servants. Stripes received their
strongest boost in the decade after the American Revolution. Why this happened is
a matter of speculation, but perhaps the revolutionary or romantic stripe involved a
declaration or protest against the larger social order. Intriguingly, at the same time
zoologists came to regard the zebra’s stripes as “harmonious.” Stripes were everywhere,
on flags, clothing, and in interior decoration, where they were considered to give energy
and vitality to a room.

The dual connotations of the stripe have continued to this day. Stripes are often used on
windblown objects—sails, tents, or flags, for example—because they are energetic
and lively. They have also been used to differentiate convicts, deportees, Russian gulag
prisoners, and, most terribly, Nazi concentration camp victims.
Professor Pastoureau also points out that until the nineteenth century in the West, undergarments were never dyed; it was regarded as unhygienic, immodest, and impure to wear colored underwear or to have colored nightclothes or bed linen. The growth of commerce after the Industrial Revolution began to change things, however, and the gradual move away from white began with pastels and stripes. Pastels were regarded as failed colors, and therefore less daring, while stripes were regarded as half colors. The move to full color that we know in domestic environments today was achieved slowly, through the transitional stage that also involved striped tiling in kitchens, bathrooms, and swimming pools. From the seventeenth century on, seafaring men also dressed in stripes, though it is not clear why. Perhaps they saw themselves as outsiders in the medieval manner. In any event, the stripe became associated with the sea and those who work and play on it—sailors, fishermen, Venetian gondoliers. From the mid-nineteenth century, the seaside towns of France were dotted with striped tents and parasols, and the swimwear of the 1860s was also often striped. Children were dressed in stripes too as a sign of hygiene. A clear example of this last association is seen in the red and white stripes of Signal toothpaste, marketed since the 1960s. Stripes’ association with dynamism and hygiene is perpetuated in their adoption on sports clothing, notably by the Adidas brand.

Elements of the stripe as the mark of the outsider have been retained today in its use by the artists who have favored it. The stripe is, somewhat inevitably, a base element for abstract painting. Pablo Picasso loved to wear a striped shirt and was famously featured wearing one on the cover of a special double-issue of Life magazine (December 27, 1968). The City of London pin-stripe business suit and the American mob gangster stripes present differing responses to the history of the motif, one related to the aristocratic stripe and the other to the outsider stripe. Professor Pastoureau concludes that the stripe will always be a sign with mixed messages: “Is the zebra a white animal with black stripes, as the Europeans have so long claimed, or a black animal with white stripes, as the Africans have always recognized it to be?”

Today, the landscape of the world is being overrun by the stripes of its globalizing communication networks—train tracks, motorways, telegraph poles, gas and oil pipelines, electric power lines. Now that the world has gone digital, linearity truly dominates, and all our commercial products have bar codes. The stripe has triumphed.

Brian Kennedy
Director, Hood Museum of Art
Dartmouth College

Notes
7. Ibid., xi.
8. Ibid., 91.
1. *Shadow*

The stripe paintings right from the very beginning were alternatively striped . . . I was making some paintings before the stripy paintings that were big S’s that were curved but were very loosely painted along the curve. More or less the letter S in rows across the painting, allowing the drips and freedom of color to be in the final result. *Shadow* is actually painted over the top of one of those. I started to make my work very patterned after I came back from Morocco. That alternative stripping has marked my work out ever since, which I think is very interesting. I never got into too much elaboration in the way that stripes were put down. They were always put down in as simple a way as possible, in the way that they were put down on those tents I saw in Morocco.

2. *Grid*

I opened up my work a lot when I was at Harvard. I did a lot of different kinds of things. I made pieces on resin, open grids, closed grids, diagonals. The whole thing became very exciting in that year. In this painting, which is one of a number that I have from that year . . . I block out parts of it. I blind it, in a way. It’s like filling in a window. I plug in the illusionism. I block it out and open it up. The paintings were in a very aggressive fight, with the possibilities of illusionism versus the possibilities of physical paint. You can see my mind working for the future in this painting. Here I’m working with patterning and a figure. So once again, I’m working between the universal, which is pattern-making, and the individual, which are the squares that are blocked out. They prefigure the inset paintings. The inset paintings are an attempt to put the figure back into abstraction to make it particular. Here the whole thing is being played out right in front of your eyes—the particular and the general. I made a grid with tape and I used that as a board to play on. Then I would paint different areas in different ways. I was using the spray gun a lot when I was at Harvard. I had a compressor and a big spray gun. I used a lot of masking tape and rollers. So the tools I was using were the tools of industrial painting, really. They weren’t fine art materials. And the paint wasn’t really for the most part. A lot of it was mixed up with acrylic and pigment. Not all of it, just some of it. I would just draw freely within that grid and then cross over it. If I wanted to make it more emphatic physically and break the illusionism then I simply took a roller and rolled the window out with paint. That’s it.

3. *Overlay 2*

*Overlay 2* was made in England. It is much more resolved and less experimental than *Grid*. The diagonal was very important to me at the time because it was creating so much chaotic movement . . . you could almost see it as a city plan, looking down on it from the sky, looking down on it out of an airplane . . . and by the way, the bottom of it, just to enforce how lingering the influence of Morocco was, is the same shape as the thin bands they have on camels. They’re always cut off; Moroccan carpets are always cut off like the bottom of a necktie. But I didn’t take it from a necktie—I took it from the culture of Morocco.

4. *Blue*

Now I get rid of all the illusionism in the paintings. They become much more meditative and hypnotic and deeply rigorous. I also feel that the reason I was able to transform my work is based on my ability to give up success, to walk away from it. My ability to pay the price to do what was necessary to get there. But in order to do that you need to break something. These paintings make a kind of nocturnal Zen world where the color comes out very, very slowly, but it requires time and contemplation. They’re extremely peaceful paintings and very connected to the practice of meditation and repetitive ritualized movements that you see in all kinds of Zen practice. At the time I was making these works I was teaching at Princeton . . . I used to make the paintings on the weekends usually . . . I pretty much purged my work of color when I arrived in New York. I made it a lot more serious in nature, a lot more conceptual, cooler. I took out anything in it that had any connotation of the decorative. I would make the paintings by mixing many colors together. They were very complicated colors, and it would take three or four colors to make the blue-gray. And then superimposed on that blue-gray would be a slightly different color, and the two together were meant to create in a sense a cushion of light in front of the painting.

5. *Fort #4*

With the *Fort* painting, I took the title from the design of a Roman fort, which is why I divided it into four. I was making four entities that would come together in a kind of sculptural whisper. The vibration between them would be quite exciting if you let it work its magic. But of course it requires time. The paintings around this time had started to have a different direction too. There was the contradiction of the horizontal and the vertical, and this would set up a secondary dynamic. With the four panels, you start to have the ability to free-play the way that the stripes and colors and the widths go together and don’t go together. It’s the beginning of this sculptural collision of relationships that would happen later on. In these paintings called *Fort*, around this time they were still maintaining their unity whilst allowing you to sense a real seam, a real division running vertically and horizontally through the work.
6. **Vertical Black**
I decided on the stripe gradually because I consider it to be almost everything, in the sense that it's a shape and it's extremely directional. As you well know in cultures that don't paint pictures of God, the stripe is bountiful and it conjures up patterns at the same time so you can make it into a wall. You can make it into a shape—in other words, an event and everything in between. So on one end you have got the stripe as a substitute for the figure and at the other end if you multiply it enough and reduce it in scale enough you can make it into a pattern. You've got, in other words, the journey of individualism to the possible cosmic, all using the same unit. If you turn it the other way you have the horizon line, and of course if you use it diagonal you've got everything in between.

7. **Boris and Gleb**
I liked the idea of mirroring . . . of flat figures in medieval art which I repeated. I've always been very attracted to it. In this painting, of course, *Boris and Gleb*, it's not only the color that appears—*Boris and Gleb* appear, so you get the idea of two persons. The title is very important to the painting. It's as important as the color . . . because it starts to make a reference to humanity, not to an abstracted idea or a severe degree of abstraction. I start to retrieve the notion of the figure and that goes right back psychologically to my figure paintings. The decision to move toward oil paint was, of course, the decision to move away from the line into the body, and to the mystery of the body and the surface in painting, which is so powerful in painting and remains so to this day. You will see in a painting like *Fort* and a painting like *Boris and Gleb* that the lines are very physically raised up on the surface, and this is oil paint working here. This is giving you a surface that you can't get in another way. There is a certain unpredictability to it. The colors become very rich and mysterious but full of the power of materiality.

8. **Blue Blue Red**
In *Boris and Gleb* the stripe is very restricted because of the proportion of the painting. So you've got a very powerful sense of the figure; the two halves of the diptych of *Boris and Gleb* really impact on what the stripes can do. The horizontal lines become very short so it becomes like a ladder. The vertical ones are very vertical so they're pushed from one end to another, from the top to the bottom. In *Blue Blue Red* you know they're closer to a square. Since the shape is more neutral, the stripes get to become more expansive; they get to make a bigger field, so the directionality of the stripes is perhaps not quite so extreme. It looks a little bit like half a window, and a shade has been pulled down from the top. You're looking at the same thing, but it's almost like a before-and-after photograph.

9. **Precious**
By 1981, I think that my relationship with minimalism was irrevocably broken. There's no pretense anymore. It really is a serious break and that of course liberated everything. So in a painting such as *Precious* you get huge differences in proportion straight away. The other paintings, which were compositional in some way, I suppose, or relational, were using units of the same size. In *Precious* you can see that the units are all different sizes and there is no longer any mathematical relationship between them. There's a big field on the left, trapping the figure, which is the small inset, as I like to see it, and shoving it against the panel on the right, yellow and red, which is pushing back into the painting. The inset becomes compressed. It's in a vise lock between the two bigger areas, which are aggressively pushing each other because they're running from side to side—horizontals are aggressive in different ways and the color in the inset is a more uncertain color. That gray is the color of uncertainty and melancholia. And then there is the overpainting and the panel on the left, the dark red over the lighter red. The paintings have become almost orchestral in relation to the limited means of the painting of the previous years, separated by mere months. You can see how far I've traveled in such a short period of time by introducing the figure overtly—not simply by referring to another painting, as I did in *Boris and Gleb*, but by making it overt. There are so many different surfaces at work in *Precious* in the way the brush is moving and the way the edges are made. The painting is painted fairly tightly, but it is painted by hand. It's not mechanical. So this is where the decision to make my own paintings becomes crucially important, because if I were making them like an Op Artist or artists today who use students or assistants to help them, I wouldn't have been able to develop the intuition in the surface of these paintings.

10. **Come and Go**
In *Come and Go*, which I must say is one of my favorite paintings, I make a reference to Beckett, but again you have the sense of a figure somehow entrapped. This green and blue inset is somehow locked into a field of varying horizontals, as in the case of *Precious*. But there the colors are more subtle. Here I'm referring to the way things come and the way things go. And I'm referring to the fact that when you think you've got something is when you haven't got it, and when you don't want it, it arrives. So it comes and goes and it's not obedient to what you want. One has to learn to accept this and understand what we are and what we're not. The coming and going of things is part of life. The coming of life, the going of life. The coming of good fortune and the going of good fortune and the allowing of good fortune and not such good fortune to return. It's about this allowing and understanding of the coming and going of things.
11. **Tiger**

I was thinking of this painting as an animal, in a sense. I wanted to give it the force of an animal. I almost thought of the inset at the bottom as teeth or an eye. It's a broken construction with the bands going across. At this point in my life, I was thinking about painting literally as the thing that tries to hold together that which wants to fall about. I was thinking about painting as a unifying romantic impulse to hold the world together, somehow to bind what wishes to be unbound. You know, there is an interesting story about Tiger, that it was leaning up against a wall when somebody entered the gallery and touched the bottom of it with his umbrella, and then it jumped on him. It was an art collector and he ended up underneath the painting. So I thought that was pretty good. In fact that proves it: it's a tiger! When that painting was shown in the Museum of Modern Art, it was one of about three abstract paintings that were in the show. We were surrounded by, we were in a sea of figuration, floating cars and angels and pyramids and God knows what. That painting had the force to stand up to all those paintings.

12. **Music**

Music has always been very important to me. It's very important to Irish people anyway. When you play music in Ireland, it's as powerful as music in Africa to African people. You see the whole room start to move. The rhythm of that music is in the people. My mother was a singer. Later on my parents became dancers. I think music is in a way the most beautiful art form, because it's always new. The problem with music now, of course, is that it's being colonized by big business. So, in a sense, music is destroyed and... it's blaring out everywhere in full-throated mediocrity, whereas painting still has its place. The rhythm of music and the rhythm in my work are really one and the same. My work is inhabited by the rhythm. That's what keeps it sort of rolling along, driving along. With my work, you get all these collisions of different kinds of syncopation. With the painting Music, you've got this very feminine sky blue with pink that seems light and airy, big horizontals working up against that. Then there's this very strangely painted diagonal. I find the painting to be constantly turning. It's an uplifting painting, of course—it's not in any way loaded with melancholia, as so many of my paintings are. Diagonals disappear because in a sense I find them frivolous. My work is so unfrivolous. What has happened with my work is that it has opened up and the edges and the body of the bands have become extremely active and personalized. I'm loading the painting up, loading up the surface with interest and emotion. The colors are a lot more mysterious and the edges are a lot more distinct. This opening-up goes back to the decision I made to convert to oil paint. I knew way back then that I had to do that to open up the paintings and to make the paintings sublime as surfaces. It's the surface of it and the mystery of the surface of it that makes the painting unconquerable.

13. **Precious**

The earlier painting titled Precious [1981], obviously, is more ecstatic in terms of color. It's more open. It's more exciting in a certain way. The later painting has melancholia in it. You'll see that all the colors are fallen. The maroon is a fallen red, and the white is a fallen white. And even the little black and white painting in the middle is kind of dirty. The paintings around this time are starting to get dirty and somehow informed with the dirt of things, the dirt of life. I think that as I've gotten older, I've just taken on more of the weight of things, the tragedy of things. There's a lot of sorrow in the world and I take it on. It has found its way into my work. There isn't much I can do about it. I feel it and I feel it so powerfully that I can't stop it getting into my work. I'm not trying to paint a picture of it. I'm just inhabited by it.

I was thinking about being lost in the Irish Sea [when I was a child on a boat with my parents]. Everybody was fearful because they thought we would hit a mine. If we hit a mine we would've sunk for sure, because in those days there were no rescue ships. We had left Ireland, after the Second World War, I guess this would be about 1948... the sea around England was full of mines, and it took many, many years to clear these, it does after all wars. Innocent people had been killed by them. We were a boatload of innocents coming across from Dublin to England. There was a terrible fog and the boat got lost. The navigation system was all off, and, as you can imagine, after the war the infrastructure was somewhat dented. There was a great anxiety on the boat; I remember I described something to my mother once of a fog and a figure passing back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, and she said, “Yes, that is what happened. You're describing the crossing between Ireland and England.” The captain was the one who was walking back and forth. He was passing us all the time and knew we were out on deck because we were traveling animal class. I was in a little pram or something wrapped in blankets and this man was pacing back and forth. I remembered it because I have a very, very strong memory of my childhood. I thought it was interesting to hold something within a bigger field that was either incarcerated or protected or given a context but certainly affected by its context. I painted the painting in the center, the little black and white painting, as a complete thing and that's what made it compositional. It's not just a field of bands. It's a field of bands that turn in on themselves. You can see that it's painted quite tenderly. Then you have these strange gray colors that are like the color of wavering white. You're not sure where it is. You're not sure what kind of light is on the painting.
14. Dakar
Around this time, the stripe in a sense stops being a stripe, in that it doesn’t go from one end of the picture to the other. It’s broken up. It becomes fractured and bangs into itself within the field, so then they’re more like bars or bands. They’re not really stripes anymore. There’s a tremendous amount of dark power in these paintings. They deal with a lot of night energy. Dakar is, quite frankly, oddly a tribute to John Coltrane, who made a piece of music called Dakar; to the place itself, clearly to my interest in African masks, because with African masks, particularly Dogon masks, you have this shelf of a forehead that drops back for the rest of the face, usually. Dakar has this power where the top is sort of falling in on the bottom. And the bottom steadfast columns of color are holding up the top. The top is all kind of pessimism and weight, and the bottom is all enduring optimism.

15. Darkness Here
Darkness Here is even more fractured, where the drawing has become much more broken up, discordant and much more like cubism, where you’re not really permitted to travel through it with any sense of security. Then it has got two punctures in it—these windows. I think that the title Darkness Here is very interesting. I don’t know where I got that from. At the time I didn’t even know where I got it from. The painting is a place, so it’s here. The painting is here so it’s like saying, “I am here”—I mean, we always are. We are all in fact here, and simultaneously there. The painting again has a broken shelf in it. It’s not even presented on one level, so the idea of the picture plane is in crisis, as well as the fact that it has holes in it that have been plugged in with other pictures. The whole thing is quite chaotic in terms of the integrity of the painting’s surface. It has got so many things wrong with it in terms of formulas.

16. Tiree
I think what I was trying to do here was take the inset out of the field and isolate it so that you have a broken relationship. It’s almost like an exiled relationship, because what was in the field is now surrounded by steel and cut off from the other area, but, of course, paint wants to be with paint. So there’s a kind of struggle in the painting psychologically for the paint to get back in the paint. The paint has a particular meaning within the culture. I consider it something that has a privileged position, like a grand piano has a privileged position in the culture. If you put a grand piano out on the sidewalk, a Steinway, it would look kind of odd. It would look a little tragic because it would be something that has this privileged position in our minds somehow in a position of danger. I see paint in a way like that. You have a painted surface. It’s not like other things. It’s not like the rest of the visual junk that’s in the world that’s disposable. It has this privileged sense, whereas steel is industrial. That steel that I used in those paintings is just road steel. There’s nothing special about it. That’s the point of it, but it’s used to keep these two areas of paint separated. On the left you’ve got horizontal black and white stripes, and the area on the right, the half of the painting on the right is a steel frame. It isolates another painting within it.

17. Because of the Other
Because of the Other again is a wonderful revelation painting, in a way much more important than a little watercolor that was called Wall of Light. It was only after I painted Because of the Other that I remembered the watercolor. You know I have my own peculiar way of doing things. I have a very odd relationship with time. I’m not a competitive artist, you see. I don’t compete with other artists. I don’t try to do things first. I’m quite happy to do things last. It’s just that I do things when I’m ready and not when I’m not ready. There’s a certain simplicity about me that makes it possible for me to make this body of work. I was in a studio in Deptford in London, with Liliane, and I was making what was going to be a black and white painting, or black and gray painting. It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon. It was very quiet and there we were in the middle of this industrial area with no neighbors. We were completely alone, sitting around, looking at the painting, and she was doing some of her work in the corner. And I just started to paint the areas differently, and I’m not even sure why I did it. As you can see, it’s not a fully formed Wall of Light painting because there’s a large area there on the right that’s still black and gray. But it has this doorway in the center that’s connected to this beautiful orange area on the top left. The painting starts to go out. Most of the paintings were about falling in on themselves or entrapment up until this point, but here the painting really starts to spin out into the room. Everything in the painting is because of the other. Then we talked about relationships and it became a relational painting and quite a figurative painting. I remember it was really a massive event for me to make this painting.

18. Floating Painting Black White Diptych
The concern for layering, of course, again returns to the decision to use oil paint. It’s quite simply about layered meaning. It’s not only a question of physical layering. It’s also the layering of meaning and the layering of the emotion and how the image is not graphic. The image has within it a sense of history and conscience and integrity and poetry, profound emotion and doubt. This is what makes things mean something. This is what gives things their value and their complexity. That’s what the layering is all about. The layering really comes from a very strong ethical base. It’s not something I do because it looks good, because it makes the paintings look better. It’s really a
question of what it is. It’s the difference between what something looks like and what it is in a deeper sense. So the life, the truth, is not simply a question of appearances. It’s not skin deep. It goes all the way through, and it’s made up of material and the material is made up of time. This is intrinsically bound up with the quality of my work. I suppose it’s quite natural that I get into things like the Floating paintings, and then later on I am persuaded, I must say, to make a sculpture. Then I reluctantly get into making monumental sculptures, although it’s not my mission. I’m somebody on a mission, so my mission is to put painting right into the present day and in the forefront.

19. Landline Brown
A painting such as Because of the Other relates to environmental painting, or what is sometimes called all-over painting. It’s got a relationship with Jackson Pollock. There’s that impulse in my work, and then there is this continuing assertion of the almost sacred importance of the figure, the individual, the figure on the ground, the figure in the ground. There’s the context and then there is the inalienable right of the figure to exist. I keep going back to this in my work and imposing it into the work. I feel that it’s almost a moral obligation, and in this painting Landline Brown, a very, very interesting painting, it goes back to that work where there’s certain parts of the surface that are just plugged in. They’re occupied by the figure. They’re not given over to the universal. Of course, this could be a painting about four bands of color, simply painted as four bands of color. Then it would refer to the universal. The figure makes it very particular, and it violates the blissful harmony of the four bands—the potential blissful harmony of the four bands—by asserting the right of the figure to exist, to take up space, to impose itself on the ground. That figure, of course, is us in relation to the horizon.

20. Holly
First of all, I think that what we need is art that builds bridges. We don’t need art that separates people into groups. Basically, we’ve more or less destroyed the world by dividing it up. We’ve bludgeoned it nearly to death with our divisions and our cultural mistrusts, layers of cultural mistrust. I wouldn’t make a set of paintings that were overtly representative of a religious dogma of any kind, be it Zen, Jewish, Muslim, or whatever. I simply would not do that, and I wouldn’t be the right guy for the job because I want to make art that everybody can love and everybody can feel equally invited to. That said, Holly has about it what I consider to be a very beautiful symmetry. It seems to fit into a room, the idea of a room with a door, with two short return walls, six down each side and a big one at the end seems like a very satisfying rhythm. Of course, it relates in some way to the history of the Stations of the Cross. It’s a difficult subject, though, to illustrate, and the only way you can really do it, I believe, is if you have belief in that faith. Holly has about it a sense of the chapel. It’s extremely modest but it doesn’t have any dogma. It doesn’t try to teach a particular thing. But it’s a symmetrical arrangement. It’s definitely something that was done for a woman. It has about it tenderness, an intimacy, and above all a lack of the heroic in favor of the intimate. The end one, the big one, has in it a sense of the ravaged in the ash-colored gray. It’s kind of a painful painting, I think. It has an element of loss in it. So there are the smaller, somewhat exquisitely painted panels, which look almost the same size as medieval panels, and then there’s the bigger, ravaged work that shows the loss at the end. It refers to the memory of the Stations of the Cross but it is not that. Whether or not I would take that up, I’m not sure. I do want to do a group of paintings that fit into a room that should be a room of contemplation for everybody with everybody invited. When I figure out how to do that, I’m pretty sure that I will do the next thing, and the scale of the thing, I’m sure, would be a lot bigger. I think that religion, like any other belief system, has to be accountable in some way. It cannot lose a sense of its own fallibility, because then it turns into something else that is like a runaway train of authority that would just smash things. The history of religion is troublesome in its relationship to extreme power, cruelty, and war. But if you take the idea of religion as an act of kindness, it becomes something else. When I was with my mother, when I was inside my mother in Ireland, she was being fed in a convent. Then we came over to England, and I went to this convent school. That was a very interesting place, challenging but full of vitality. The students, the kids, seemed to be valued very highly, that’s my memory of it. I remember it as a time of great layered value. When I was taken out of the convent school and put into the state school, I remember it as being utterly shocking, deeply traumatic. It was a significant turn for the worse. There are arguments for both. We could talk about this for hours. There’s the argument for the reformation, of course, but my own experience is that it was a disaster. As a child it was the last time I was happy.
21. Red Yellow Bridge
What I do is I paint something, and I change what it is by the way
I paint what color it is, how it’s drawn—there’s a lot of intuition
in my work. There isn’t really any mathematics in my work. If I
draw something, it’s drawn by hand, and this gives the painting
this kind of endless rhythm. As Donald Kusrip said, “My art is an
art of great nuance.” It’s the nuance, the way that the painting
of things—the layering of paint, the layering of color—brings
the work to a kind of emotionalism that is different from what has
happened before. These paintings are not like abstract expres-
sionist paintings. There aren’t any abstract expressionist paintings
that look like this. There’s no abstract expressionist painter that
used gray with anything like the variety and emotional delicacy
and complexity with which I have used it. At the same time, they
are not minimalist paintings, because they are too emotional and
too wayward. So, there’s something that hasn’t happened before.
We haven’t put a name on it yet, but the possibilities of it feel very
powerful to me, and what it will be called when I finish I don’t
know. And whether it will be the end of something, a summa-
tion or the opening-up of something, I can’t know that either
for other artists I’m talking about. But I suspect that the way
I’ve understood painting will allow it to continue to unfold: Red
Yellow Bridge is a triptych, but of course it’s all on one surface, and
this makes it quite different. Those other triptychs that I made,
like Heart of Darkness, they’re separate panels, so they really are
bolted together. They are sculptural, and they have advantages
of showing provisional relationships, sculptural relationships,
relationships that can come apart. I think that’s the huge differ-
ence. These panels are painted permanently into place so that
the seams in the painting, the divisions in the painting, are much
more emotionally complex. Or, let’s say, emotionally complex in a
different way from the ones where they bolt and unbolt together.

22. Wall of Light Summer

23. Wall of Light Pale Land
Wall of Light Pale Land is full of melancholia. It’s like a land that
is dissolving, a land that is losing its bodily vitality. It’s a tremen-
dously wistful work. Summer is a very assertive painting. It’s so
happy to be here, so happy to be in the world, so happy to declare
itself. The title, of course—the time when everything grows,
when everything comes up, when the sun comes out, when we
are warm, when we feel positive. One is like a summer painting,
and Pale Land is like a winter painting. I was about to go on a trip
and I was feeling exuberant when I painted Summer. There’s a lot
of weight on my paintings, so there’s a lot of sorrow. It’s not as if
I can’t paint bright paintings—I know how to do it, of course. I
think I’m a very gifted colorist, but I have to show the world as
I see it. I have to tell the truth as I see it. Paintings like Summer
tend to be in the minority.

24. Land, Sea, Sky
1999
C-print face mounted to plexiglass and framed
Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH

25. Urban Romance London
2000
C-print
Courtesy Galerie Lelong

26. A Corner of Barcelona
2000
C-print face mounted to plexiglass and framed
Courtesy Galerie Lelong

27. Omaha Snow Door
2000
C-print mounted to plexiglass and framed
Courtesy Galerie Lelong

Photography
A lot of the things that I photograph are doors. One of my favor-
ite photographs, Urban Romance, is called that in part because
I knew when I took it that it wouldn’t be the kind of thing that
would stick around. And sure enough, that door no longer exists.
It has been improved, as they say, with a new door, one that
doesn’t have any history. This door is a portrait of its history.
Also, a door is a place before another place, and we had a famous
band called The Doors. The name of the band the Doors is almost
religious, because it’s metaphorical, as a lot of rock and roll was
in the sixties. That subject is very fascinating to me, the Omaha
Snow Door and so on. The door is the door to something. There’s
always something on the other side. A Corner of Barcelona is a
really beautiful painting made by the passing of people. It’s what
they leave. It’s the mark that they leave with their lives. These
urban photographs I take tend to show the passing of people’s
lives, the passing of their lives in relation to the decay of mate-
rial. The shadow of what’s left. Land, Sea, Sky is a very important
photograph for me because it is our world, land, sea, sky. It’s
what we have. I try to show it in a way that’s very simple, giving
equal importance to each of those elements, and I take out the
space just to show the elements. So of course it relates to the
paintings—just like three bands in the painting, three stripes in
a painting.
EVENTS (continued from back cover)

19 February, Tuesday, 12:30 P.M.
Second-Floor Galleries
Lunchtime Gallery Talk
SEAN SCULLY AND THE ART OF PAINTING
Katherine Hart, Associate Director and Barbara C. and Harvey P. Hood 1918 Curator of Academic Programming

26 February, Tuesday, 12:30 P.M.
Second-Floor Galleries
Lunchtime Gallery Talk
THE DESIGN AND INSTALLATION OF SEAN SCULLY: THE ART OF THE STRIPE
Patrick Dunfey, Exhibitions Designer

29 February, Friday, 4:30 P.M.
Arthur M. Loew Auditorium
Lecture
THE STRIPE CONSIDERED
Lawrence R. Rinder, Dean of the College, California College of the Arts

1 March, Saturday, 2:00 P.M.
MUSIC AND THE ART OF THE STRIPE
Enjoy live music by Fred Haas, saxophonist, while Hood Director Brian Kennedy elaborates on Sean Scully’s working style and his use of music in the creative process.

GROUP TOURS
Free guided tours of this exhibition or the museum’s collections are available by appointment for any group of five or more. Contact the museum’s education department at (603) 646-1469 or hood.museum.tours@dartmouth.edu.

The museum is open every Wednesday evening until 9:00 P.M., so please visit after work!

All museum exhibitions and events are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted. For the safety of all of our visitors, the Hood Museum of Art will enforce legal seating capacity limits at every event in accordance with RSA 153:5 and Life Safety Code 101.

Assistive listening devices are available for all events. The museum, including the Arthur M. Loew Auditorium, is wheelchair accessible. For accessibility requests, please call 603-646-2809 or e-mail Access.Hood@Dartmouth.edu.

For more information about the Hood Museum of Art, its collections, exhibits, and events, and for opening hours, please visit the museum’s Web site at www.hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu

BIBLIOGRAPHY
This list of books is provided for those who wish to extend their exploration of Sean Scully’s work, and abstract art, beyond the exhibition.


The Color of Time: The Photographs of Sean Scully, by Sean Scully and Arthur Danto (Steidl, 2004)

Communicating with Pattern: Stripes, by Mark Hampshire and Keith Stephenson (RotoVision SA, 2006)


Sean Scully, by David Carrier (Thames and Hudson, 2005)

Sean Scully: Body of Light, by Brian Kennedy et al. (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2004)

Sean Scully, Resistance and Persistence: Selected Writings, edited by Florence Ingleby (Merrell, 2006)

Sean Scully: Retrospective, by Donald Kuspit, Maris Lluisa Borras, Danilo Eccher, and Lorand Hegyi (Thames and Hudson, 2007)


Sean Scully: Walls of Aran, by Sean Scully and Colm Toibin (Thames and Hudson, 2007)

Understanding Abstract Art, by Frank Whitford (E. P. Dutton, 1987)

EVENTS

18 January, Friday, 4:30 P.M.
Arthur M. Loew Auditorium
Artist Lecture and Opening Reception
THE DEVIL’S DRESS
Sean Scully, artist, will talk about his work. A reception will follow in Kim Gallery.

19 January, Saturday, 2:00 P.M.
Special Introductory Tour of Sean Scully: The Art of the Stripe with the Artist and Hood Director Brian Kennedy

23 January, Wednesday, 5:30 P.M.
MUSIC AND VISUAL ART
Join jazz pianist Jason Moran and Hood Director Brian Kennedy for a discussion about the connections between music and visual art creation. Moran will explore the influence of contemporary visual art on his work, while Kennedy will discuss the exhibition Sean Scully: The Art of the Stripe and the artist’s embrace of music in his creative process. For more info, call Hop Outreach at (603) 646-2010 or the Hood Museum of Art at (603) 646-2808.

27 January, Sunday, 12:00 NOON—5:00 P.M.
Family Day
THE ART OF THE STRIPE
Explore how artist Sean Scully has taken a simple motif—a stripe—and made so much out of it with his art. Have fun with a variety of activities that explore how artists decide to arrange their art works, including a hands-on magnetic board activity that lets you arrange, and rearrange, some of Scully’s paintings to understand his creative process. Look at books, photographs, and videos that connect his work to some of his inspirations, such as Mayan temples and Moroccan tents. In the studio, work with a variety of materials to design your own “stripe” creations. For children ages 6 to 12 and their adult companions. No pre-registration required. For information, call (603) 646-1469.

6 February, Wednesday, 5:30 P.M.
Arthur M. Loew Auditorium
Lecture
SEAN SCULLY: THE ART OF THE STRIPE
Brian Kennedy, Director, Hood Museum of Art

16 February, Saturday, 2:00 P.M.
Introductory Tour of Sean Scully: The Art of the Stripe with Hood Director Brian Kennedy

continued on inside back cover . . .