

THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

AMERICA'S FIRST MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

UPDATED RELEASE

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CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

***SEAN SCULLY: WALL OF LIGHT* TO PREMIERE AT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION, WASHINGTON, D.C., OCTOBER 22, 2005**

SERIES IS MOST IMPORTANT TO DATE BY THIS LEADING ARTIST AND DEAN OF THE ABSTRACT TRADITION



Niels, 2001, oil on canvas, 75 x 85 inches

Washington, D.C.—More than any other artist of his generation, Sean Scully (born 1945) combines the formal traditions of European painting—the brooding tones of Velasquez and Manet and the spectacular colors and brushwork of van Gogh and Matisse—with the distinctly American abstract tradition of Rothko and Pollock. Underlying all of Scully's work has been a commitment to pure abstraction: to its emotional power, its storytelling potential, and, above all, its capacity to convey light. This October, The Phillips Collection, a museum with a rich history of engagement with contemporary artists, will present the first U.S. museum exhibition of Scully's *Wall of Light*, the artist's most important series to date. Organized by the Phillips, *Sean Scully: Wall of Light* will premiere

on October 22, 2005 and remain on view until January 8, 2006. The exhibition then will travel to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, the Cincinnati Art Museum, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Scully is one of the most admired painters working in the abstract style. He works and exhibits throughout the world, with active studios in the United States, Spain, and Germany. During the next two years, in addition to the *Wall of Light* venues, Scully has exhibitions slated for museums and galleries in Madrid, Munich, New York, Barcelona, Rome, and elsewhere.

Sean Scully: Wall of Light is made possible by the global financial services firm UBS.



Sean Scully in Mooseurach, Germany, 2004
Photo: Liliane Tomasko

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The series was inspired by a trip to Mexico more than 20 years ago; it builds from the artist's memory of light and shadow playing on ancient Mayan ruins, and his exploration of surface texture and abstract forms evokes a range of emotional and narrative themes. Featuring some 40 paintings, this exhibition allows for a fresh consideration of this important artist and an appreciation for his process of developing themes over many years.

In addition, the Phillips has organized an installation of Scully's early paintings, pastels, watercolors, and photographs to place the large-scale *Wall of Light* paintings in a larger context and demonstrate Scully's great proficiency in varied media. A selection of the artist's pattern paintings and minimalist works from the 1970s and inset and stripe paintings from the 1980s and early 1990s represent the wide range of Scully's work. Works featured include *Red and Red* (1986), acquired by the Phillips in 1986 and the second of the artist's paintings to enter a museum collection, and *Because of the Other* (1997), a transitional work in the artist's oeuvre that sets the stage for the *Wall of Light* series.

"For 30 years Sean Scully's work has been synonymous with a kind of humanist abstraction," comments Jay Gates, director of The Phillips Collection. "He is universally regarded as the current dean of the abstract tradition. It is fitting that The Phillips Collection, with its history of close relationships with the most significant artists of the day, has organized and will premiere this extraordinary series by a contemporary artist whom we championed early on. The Phillips was among the first American museums to acquire Sean Scully's work, in 1986, so we feel it is especially appropriate that we are the first to bring this extraordinary series to the American public."

"UBS is proud to partner with The Phillips Collection and to serve as presenting sponsor of this landmark exhibition," said Michael Williams, senior vice president and regional director, UBS Wealth Management USA. "Support of the arts is a long-standing UBS tradition, and sponsorship of *Sean Scully: Wall of Light* reaffirms the firm's ongoing commitment to the arts worldwide, as well as our belief in giving back to the communities in which we live and work."

ABOUT WALL OF LIGHT

A sense of the importance of place, and of life's moments marked by specific people or places, imbues all of Scully's work. Though resolutely abstract, his paintings, including many in *Wall of Light*, have titles that hint at stories. *John Anthony* (2000) marks the artist's mourning of his father's death. *Barcelona White Bar* (2004) and *Chelsea Corner* (2004) allude to the cities where they were painted. Exhibition curator Stephen Bennett Phillips, curator at the Phillips, notes, "Sean Scully's ambition has always been to tease out life's awkward, blissful, or painful moments from the depths of color, brushstroke, and light that he painstakingly builds, layer after layer, into his work."

Wall of Light consists of oil paintings, watercolors, pastels, and aquatints. The series, which Scully continues to expand, stems from watercolors that he made during 1983 and 1984 on trips to the Yucatan. While there, he became fascinated with how the surfaces of the Mayan stone walls, animated by light, seemed to reflect the passage of time. He describes the Maya as a "culture of walls and light." It was Scully's recollection of the spectacular light on those ancient walls in Mexico—so different from the fleeting, brooding light he grew up with in London—that most affected this new series. In 1998, after additional trips to Mexico and almost 20 years after his initial trip, he revisited his original watercolors and began the current series, which now consists of more than 200 works.

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The works in the *Wall of Light* series rely on just two formal elements—the vertical and the horizontal—yet the surface texture and the space between the forms create fascinating, highly complex structures. Some of the works evoke such architectural elements as bricks, post-and-lintel construction, even the hulking structure of Stonehenge. The spaces between the blocks frequently reveal the underlying colors and read as light shining between the bricks of a wall. The rectangles are often built up with several layers of color, so that the artist’s hand is constantly present.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Scully was born in postwar Dublin and raised in a working-class district of South London. At 15, he apprenticed as a typesetter at a commercial printing shop and has retained a love of printmaking ever since. At 20, he decided to commit to his art—then predominantly figurative paintings—and enrolled at Croydon College of Art, later studying at Newcastle University. During his studies, he discovered the paintings of Mark Rothko and Bridget Riley and switched to abstraction. His technically flawless paintings from this period consist of complicated grid systems of intersecting bands and lines, pulsing with a richly dense optical field. Later, on a visit to Morocco in 1969, he was deeply impressed by the stripes and colors of local fabrics as well as the intense southern light. His work has retained these influences ever since.

Scully left England for the U.S. in 1972 to pursue a yearlong graduate fellowship at Harvard. He returned to the States in 1975 and settled in New York where he began creating minimal, monochromatic paintings with seamless surfaces that made the painter’s touch practically invisible. In the early 1980s, however, he began to alter this approach, re-introducing color, space, and brushstroke into his work and experimenting with composition and structure. By the mid-1980s, Scully had become internationally recognized. The Museum of Modern Art included his work in *An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture* (1984). The Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh organized the first major solo exhibition of his work in America in 1985, which traveled to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Four years later, Scully also had a major solo exhibition in Europe, which originated at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, and traveled to Madrid and Munich. Many major museums, including The Phillips Collection, began to acquire his paintings.

THE CATALOGUE

Sean Scully: Wall of Light, co-published by The Phillips Collection and Rizzoli International Publications, will be a survey of the *Wall of Light* series, including works from the Phillips’ exhibition as well as additional reproductions from the series. The 160-page hardcover book, with over 100 color reproductions, will feature four essays: a profile of the artist and an essay on his paintings by Stephen Bennett Phillips, curator at The Phillips Collection and exhibition curator; an overview by Michael Auping, chief curator at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, which links Scully’s work to architecture; and an essay on the works on paper by Anne L. Strauss, associate curator, Department of 19th-Century, Modern, and Contemporary Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The catalogue will be available for \$45 (\$40.50 for members). To order a catalogue, please contact the Museum Shop at (202) 387-2151 x238 or museumshop@phillipscollection.org.

ABOUT THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

The Phillips Collection is home to one of the most exquisite collections of impressionist and modern American and European art in the world with nearly 2,500 works by such artists including Daumier, Renoir, Bonnard, Matisse, Monet, Degas, van Gogh, Cézanne, Picasso, Braque, Klee, O’Keeffe, Lawrence, Dove, Avery, Diebenkorn, and Rothko. America’s first museum of modern art, it was founded by visionary collector Duncan Phillips and opened in 1921. The museum comprises Phillips’ 1897 Georgian Revival home and similarly scaled additions, retaining the intimacy of a private residence. The Phillips maintains an active collecting program and regularly organizes acclaimed special exhibitions in addition to maintaining a program of traveling exhibitions and an extensive lending program, making its works available to audiences throughout the world. The museum also produces some of the most effective and in-depth education programs, with an active schedule of programs for K–12 teachers and students, as well as programs for adults. Since the 1940s, the Phillips has also hosted weekly concerts in its wood-paneled, acoustically fine Music Room hung with modern masterpieces.

ABOUT THE SPONSOR

UBS, one of the world’s leading financial firms, is the largest wealth manager, a top-tier investment banking and securities firm, a key asset manager, and the leader in Swiss retail and commercial banking. Headquartered in Zurich and Basel, UBS employs over 69,000 people and has offices in 50 countries. It is a Swiss public company listed on the SWX Swiss Stock Exchange, the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE), and the Tokyo Stock Exchange (TSE). In the U.S., UBS is one of the biggest private client businesses with a client base of nearly 2 million private clients and approximately 7,500 financial advisers in over 350 offices.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The museum is located at 1600 21st Street, N.W., at Q Street, in the historic Dupont Circle neighborhood of Washington, D.C., near Metro’s Dupont Circle Station Q Street Exit. Museum hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thursday from 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. Sunday, October–May, from 12 to 7 p.m; June–September, 12 to 5 p.m. Closed Monday.

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