

**SEAN  
SCULLY**

**STANDING  
ON  
THE LAND**

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SCULPTURE AT PILANE 2021  
PILANE. TJÖRN. SWEDEN

*"I do believe abstraction is and was meant  
to embody deep emotions.  
I believe that's its job, in the history of art."*

*Sean Scully*





PILANE BURIAL FIELD

Time past and time future  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present.

T.S. Eliot, *Burnt Norton*

**Pilane, with its fascinating history**, its vast, well-preserved Iron-Age burial field, its nearby hill-forts and its diverse, seductively beautiful topography, is one of the most singular places in Sweden, where nature and culture interact. Here, landscape and art share the space and merge their destinies.

At Pilane, we experience nature and art simultaneously. It is like stepping inside a magnificent panorama by Joachim Patinir (c. 1475–1524), a Dutch artist who liberated landscape painting from its religious undertones. In one and the same picture, he would combine the most disparate natural phenomena – forests, fields, mountain ranges and ocean bays, giving rise to a genre that is now referred to as the *world landscape*.

To see and be seen by others wandering along the natural paths at Pilane is like being a stock figure in a Patini painting. Pilane is like a living work of art, where land and sea, mighty cliffs and moist valleys, fresh verdure and the unique pale grey and soft red tones of the Bohus granite are all combined. It is a cross-section of the entire world, a niche in reality where nature and art interweave their lives and where we can experience this from within.

ZINC TANKS  
Galvanized water tanks



AIR CAGE  
Corten steel

With the solo exhibition ***Standing on the Land***, consisting of six monumental sculptures by Sean Scully, Pilane is celebrating 15 years as a sculptural park. Scully is one of the most famous artists on the international art scene today. Born in Dublin in 1945, he has lived and worked in New York since 1975. His paintings and sculptures are often mistakenly associated with minimalism, a label he himself rejects. Minimalism was a movement in art that emerged in the USA in the 1960s and strove to eliminate any personal imprint of the artist.

Sean Scully's art is, on the contrary, profoundly personal and rooted in his own life experiences. His creative practice is more emotional than conceptual. Like his colleague Cy Twombly before him, Sean Scully deems art without passion to be dishonest.

As a young man, Sean Scully worked at a cardboard factory. His job was sorting and stacking boxes. In his texts, he writes about how he had an epiphany triggered by what he spontaneously perceived as the art of the working class – hard manual labour's tribute to itself.

This may be the origin of the repetitive element in Scully's artistic approach. Repetition that never generates exactly the same result but instead shows how retakes persistently lead to new variations through shifts in scale, colour and material. Scully never strives for systems but creates intuitively. Both paintings and sculptures follow and break up their own patterns.





**LANDLINE  
GREEN BREATHING**

Oil on aluminum  
Detail

His *Stack* sculptures correspond with the series of *Landline* paintings. The same basic sculptural shape is repeated in *Moor Shadow Stack*, *Venice Sleeper* and *Pale Stack*. Different materials convey different feelings, however. Some absorb light, while other reflect it. The weight of the material corresponds to the astonishing beauty of the style and form.

As early as the 1970s, Scully was creating works on the boundary between painting and sculpture. His *Floating Painting* series were constructions of textile-like patterns – paintings that seek to escape from the wall and step into the room. Eventually, he moved on to monumental sculptures, following a new artistic process beyond the complex, lonely confinement of the studio space. Painting means working alone and with focus. Inversely, the sculptures, with their physicality, materials and formats, require assistants, since stone blocks, wood beams and steel demand more strength than one person can muster.

Sean Scully's imagery is abstract, but his art is charged with stories relating to the artist's Irish roots and working-class background. His sculptures also have echoes from the historic sites and ancient buildings he saw on his visits to Mexico and Egypt. But Scully's art does not reference these cultural treasures to celebrate those who once commissioned them. Instead, his sculptures are a tribute to the hands of the anonymous workers who bit by bit erected such breath-taking structures as these pyramids, columns and temples.

Like one of his inspirations, the Romanian sculptor Constantin Brâncuși (1876–1957), Scully skips classical figure modelling and creates by directly processing the stone, metal, wood. Sometimes, he doesn't even process the material but simply channels its physical properties to create enigmatic objects.



**MOOR SHADOW STACK**  
Corten steel

# VENICE SLEEPER

Railway sleepers





**PALE STACK**  
Stainless steel

*Venice Sleeper* consists of solid wood railroad sleepers stacked on top of each other. Robbed of their original purpose under the railway tracks, the rustic beams are an exquisite, living artistic material. The cuts, scratches and grazes on the dark wood are like wounds from a long life of labour.

The title's *Sleeper* also suggests well-needed rest after heavy work. It is as though the sleepers were returning to their natural origins.





Similarly, the corten steel sculptures are alive, breathing and ageing in their own way. The steel was originally dark grey. Humidity, and especially salt water, has shifted the colour over time, first to orange-brown and then reddish-brown. The colours darken with age and attain a beautiful patina. The parts of the sculptures that are closest to the ground usually take on a more intense brown nuance due to moisture from below.

These beautiful colour shifts appear in *Tower Two Holes* – a sculpture that is both sealed and open. The round holes allow nature to enter the work. Art and landscape interlock and together create a multifaceted story.

# TOWER TWO HOLES

Corten steel



*Air Cage*, also in corten steel, is like a gigantic cage from a ghost town. Pilane's idyllic scenery and this light, yet somewhat brutal, skeleton structure mutually enhance one another through stark contrast. The effect is at once both dramatic and poetic.

In Scully, as in Brâncuși, we sense a longing for a universal form, a primordial element that unites the abstract with the architectonic. The robust and the simple, the coarse and the fragile, the concrete and the mystical, all convene in his art.

For the painter, the texture of the canvas or the grain of the panel offers resistance. For the sculptor, it's the air. In simple terms, the difference between two-dimensional painting and three-dimensional sculpture is that sculpture "shows" and painting "represents".

Painting depends on our ability to interpret perspectives, volumes and relative size in the picture. A sculpture is more manifestly the physical object directly in front of us.

That does not necessarily imply that sculptures are easier to read or relate to. However, the viewer's own body is a more tangible reference point than when standing before a painting. The size of Scully's sculptures therefore always relates to the human body. Tension arises when height and volume are still relatable, he believes. If the scale exceeds what we can relate to, it loses its relevance.



**AIR CAGE**  
Corten steel

Scully's art prompts intuitive understanding. The feelings, perceptions and moods that are aroused may be hard to express in words, but they concern the existential condition of mankind. Our strengths and our weaknesses. Our past and our future. Nature as mankind's first home, and culture as nature's mirror. Scully's sculptures settle in perfectly at Pilane. Here, they are enveloped in fleeting moments. Seasons, weather and light conditions shift uncontrollably.

Every work of art out here is in a state of perpetual rebirth and regulated by nature. The long fingers of the sun caress and illuminate them on the outside. Raindrops sketch their own patterns on wood and metal surfaces. The summer light enhances the characteristics of the materials. But dusk saps the colours from the landscape and the art. Darkness engulfs it all and eventually takes possession of it. Nature's clock follows its own laws and leaves its traces on the sculptures, which continue to move visitors over and over again, with living, ever-renewed force

Joanna Persman

*Writer, art critic*

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# VENICE SLEEPER

Railway sleepers



**PILANE HERITAGE MUSEUM**

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Skulptur  
i Pilane  
2021

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PILANE. TJÖRN. SWEDEN