

“THE ARTIST SEEKING HUMANE VALUES IN THE MECHANIZED WORLD” Sean Scully

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the originality in which Sean Scully caught using geometrical abstract forms with the details and his contemporary approach in seeking for humanistic values. The artist believing that it is impossible to escape from abstraction for our age draws attention of the art critics with the density of details in his paintings and the emphasis upon humanistic values in recent years. He considers it necessary to reflect human sensation, human sensibility in mechanizing world more than absolute formal elements such as color, form, line. His approaching to the horizontal-vertical quadrangle forms adding an extraordinary amount of sensational density and his highlighting the spiritual side of the art which has become complicated nowadays with the help of his paintings and writings are of the important reasons for analyzing him.

Keywords: Sean Scully, Geometric Abstract Painting, Humanistic Values, Spirituality

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Having changed the priority of the life, which is going to be more and more mechanic as a result of the conflict of nature-human-technology, which escalates more speedily than last years, having occurred the new values and understandings are the realities that can be clearly observed. This changing affect the values that connected with art, which are in the world of art like all fields of the life.

After interrogations are made in context of the object-subject and spectator of the art, following the changes, which came to eliminate the difference between art-life, the way, which has been taken towards the imaginary reality, which can be entered in the images –that it has been seen that the most of the artists turned to this- on the point, that is evaluated as the end of the art, with the expression of the Baudrillard the art “has resembled to the technological activity” from now on (*Baudrillard,2010: 90*). On the point such as this, to examine the artists, who are staying out of the majority, who are staying out of the being accepted, being valid with the other exposition, who are looking for the humane values on settling outstanding accounts with himself and with the global newworld order, which is under the front technology is founded meaningful. It has been seen that changing and connecting tightly with the expression forms, which is based on the accumulation and experience of the past these artists have been aiming to approach critically today. Sean Scully¹ has been evaluated as one of the artists who are looking for the humane values in the world, which is going to be mechanic.

Sean Scully has taken the tradition of rich abstract painting behind himself, which is reaching from abstract paintings of Kandinsky, who thinks that all that stems from inner necessities can be art, to Kazimir Malevich’s world without object, from Piet Mondrian’s pure geometrical color surfaces, which is based on settling outstanding accounts between inside-outside and spirit-nature to the Jackson Pollock’s action paintings and Mark Rothko’s painted surfaces paintings. The artist, enriching this abstract tradition with different search and thoughts has contituted his language.

On this context, it is thought that Sean Scully, who is not really known in our country, exhibited a determined artist personality with his original approach on his taking the geometrical abstract forms of the past, his effort passing further on abstract tradition and his patience, especially with his stress on the mystery and the spiritual dimension of art. which is a thought that has been undervalued, nowadays.

Scully has also written his thoughts about topics like art, politics, criticism, creativity, color, form, death, life besides his paintings and photographs. Researchs about changes, interaction or similarity in his paintings and examining the relations between the artists of his period and the previous period and his understanding, that has brought the artist’s, who has been seen continuing with the abstract geometric painting to his art life, which he started mostly with the

¹Sean Scully, has born in Ireland (Dublin) in 1945. He has taken his art education in England in 1960s . He has gone to USA in 1975, he had attended his education and he had been an American citizen then he had turned to the London again. His paintings have been exhibited in a lot of museums of the world and he hes taken awards. He has taken John Moore’s Awards and in 1989 he has been presented candidates to the Turner Award. He has been living and working in New York, Barcelona and Muenchen.

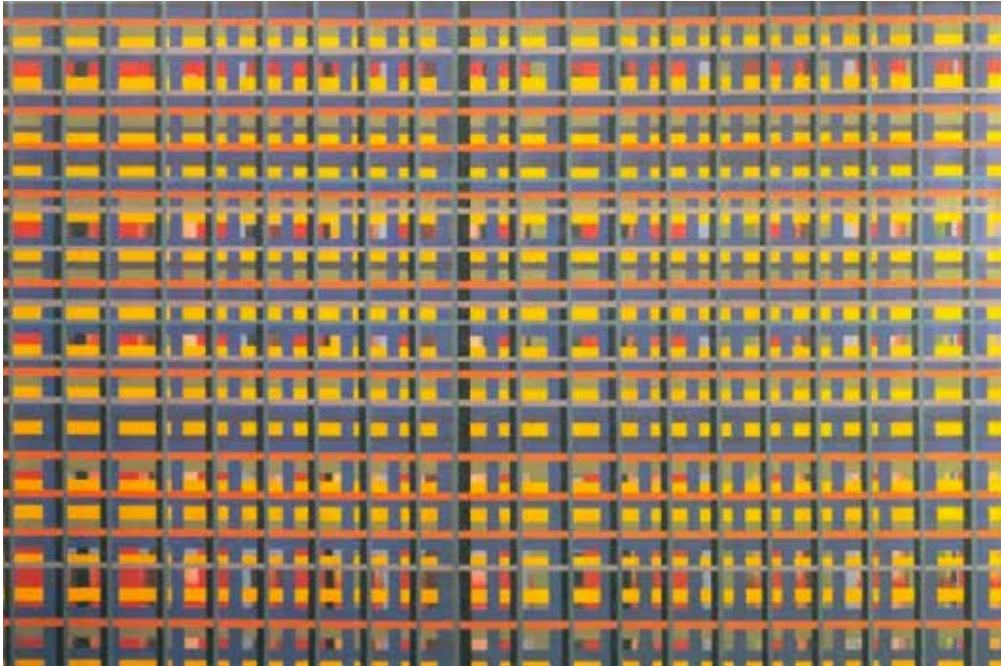
figurative paintings, look deeply at the life and the art to the era, which is going to be mechanic.

It has been understood from his writings and his paintings that Scully is affected from the natural structure and architecture of the geography, in which he lived or traveled. The stones and walls, the doors and windows, bridges are the starting point of his vertical and horizontal quadrangles which are the leithmotive of his paintings and the subject of his photographs. The effect of the light and shadow on the stone walls, the horizontal and vertical contrasts on the doors and windows are between the elements, which affect the Scully and not only with the formal peculiarities these subjects attract his attention with the angles of the silence in the atmosphere, inactivity, strongness.

Scully believes in expressing the moral values of the human who is going to be mechanic by technology and in importance of the humane details. It can be seen that he brings these details with the way of forming his paintings. He is interested in the problems of the paintings itself and in necessity of paintings to carry emotion. It has been understood that he has settled outstanding account with the subject of the necessity of how to use these elements to reflect the human emotion more than the elements which are only formal as color, form, line.

Scully thinks that modernism has not been completed yet. He had examined a lot of previous artists when he constituted his original expression in the tradition of abstract painting. Henri Matisse, Piet Mondrian and Mark Rothko besides Velazquez, Kandinsky and Van Gogh are the first artists who he has been affected from. But, the traces of these effects are not a repetition or imitation, they have reflected as an original changing.

In all periods, the search of innovation has directed the artists to conflict with the traditional



Painting 1. Backcloth, Acrylic on canvas, 198x304.8 cm. 1970, Private Collection

and to change the tradition in a creative manner. To look at the past because of revitalizing and changing the future in his opinion besides the complexity of the abstract painting tradition and wideness the directions has required to look at today deeply and to intensify and to interrogate for Scully too. Arthur Danto, has attracted attention to the evaluations about the deep meaning and the intensity of the artist's abstract paintings that he has added from himself saying if Sean Scully is underconsideration, "...it is possible to fill the abstract paintings, even graphical paintings, with the most deep ethical and personal meanings" (Danto, 2010:185).

Being constructed in a grid order of the horizontal-vertical forms which Scully has filled with the personal meanings have had a lot of changes pass which has connected to the interrogations that he has made from his youth years to now. Previously, he is seen that he tends to paint in a very smooth shape, closing with tapes the sides of the thin color strips which he used in a grid order (*Painting 1*). He paints paintings which are composed of the color surfaces in a strip appearance which painted again and again with the one right after the other plans like a cage knit, which are based on the vertical-horizontal or horizontal-vertical relations.

Although Rosalind Krauss has defended that the 'grid'² order (vertical, horizontal, crosswise added forms that one right after the other), which is seen that it used usually by a lot of artists, restricts the freedom and after one point it can not be further creative, Scully has realised contrary. The artist has been able to constitute a painting language, which is peculiar to himself, paralel to the process of the interrogation of painting, using freely the important detailes that he cathced by using this system with the changes that he made insisently. There are a lot of influences of the cities, in which he lived, on artist in constituting his original painting language by using the geometric abstract forms. Especially in 1975 when he went to New York from London, the order and color understanding that exists in his painting has been seen that they have an important change pass, that it has been virtually a turning point for the artist.

Scully, in New York in his process of interrogate on painting, considers Ad Reinhardt and Robert Ryman important and stays under their influence. In that period he throws all things, that existed previously in his paintings, behind him and he paints paintings that create the resonance of color with brown-grey-black and blue-black on the surfaces which are divided equally between two colors which are almost completely horizontal. However, he thinks that leaving the color out of the painting Ryman has reached to the zero point that it has been a reason for the death of the painting and he finds this as a disaster. These causes to think on painting again and when he went to New York he decides to put again all things that he removed, this time in a different way. If a person wants to go further in painting, he must consider again his talent of creating relations by the poetic, spritual metaphor that belong to his nature (Scully, 2006: 47).

²Krauss; "... is being extremely restricting in content of being used of the freedom in real meaning, although it's being very influential as a symbol of freedom. Unsuspecting, the grid as the most formulary structure which will be able to be mapping on a surface of a plane is innocent of flexibility at the same time. Thus, as a person can not defend that he had explored the grid, when he wants to establish it, to benefit from it gets difficult. As a result, when we examine the professional proficiency of the artists who depend on grid, we can say that, from the moment that they submitted to this structure, their works almosts stops and becomes a repetition The artists who can be examples are Mondrian, Albers, Reinhardt and Agnes Martin" (Transformer: Yilmaz, 2009: 267-268).

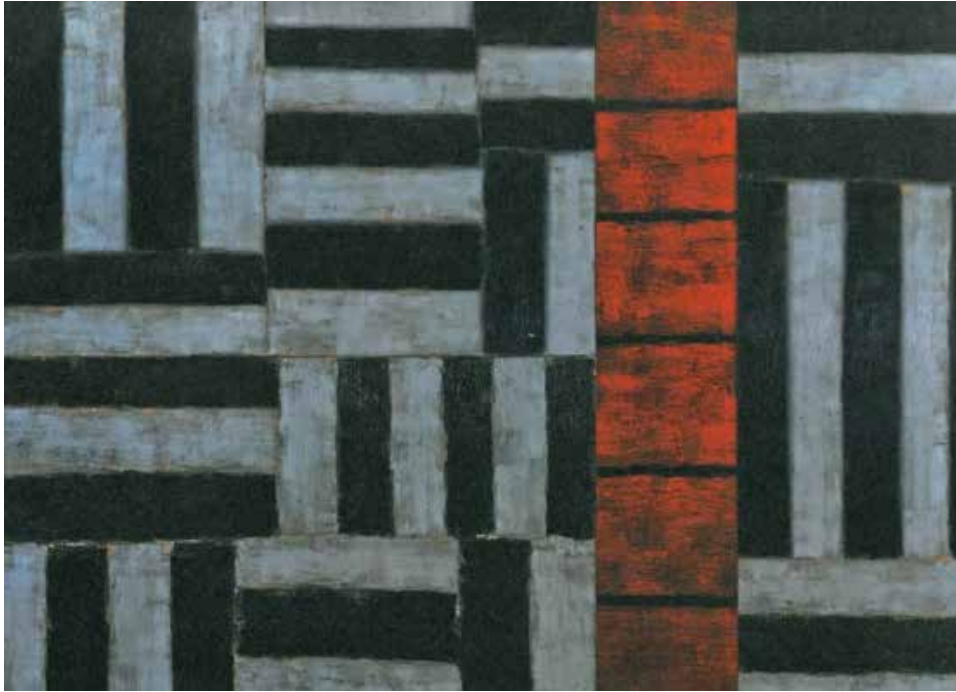
The changes, which the artist has decided to do on his paintings is seen New York's architecture, atmosphere, life and psychological effect, which created on human, are characteristic. It can be evaluated as a sign that skyscrapers, ways, lights of the night, network of the electric etc. the life of the urban which is equipped with magnificent technologies have brought the human to a mechanized situation and have taken human away from his nature, have made human spiritless that this important point explains the basic thought, which lies down behind Scully's paintings. The effort of adding an humane sensitiveness to the known geometric abstract forms and catching the forgotten being poetical helps to understand the reason of emotion intensity, which come out in his paintings.

The artist has given up closing the sides of his forms, painting with mechanic, sharp and clear borders and using a little color, he has started to leave the track of natural motion of his hands in his paintings, together with the experience of New York. He has noticed that the hesitation of the hand when it is moving during painting have more humane peculiarity gained to his paintings. For this reason Scully brings to a clear situation his brush strokes leaving his hands motions to their nature when he paints the sides of the vertical and horizontal narrow color strips. His leaving without closing smoothly the sides of the forms, without making sharp borders is evaluated as a reflection of his personal sensitiveness that he added to his painting. It is understood that for Scully, this process, which aims to reflect an emotion, is a long way that enriched with the effort of understanding the other artists and based on intensive examinations.

Scully clarifies that when he paints the vertical and horizontal color surfaces, he doesn't want to paint exactly smooth, the sides and corners of this surfaces like describing or bringing something to mind and he makes contact with his seeing the brush strokes in Velazquez's paintings that can be felt clearly. He sets forth that brush strokes add subjectivity and intensity to the surfaces –like in Velazquez's and Manet's paintings (*Scully, 2006: 26*).

Besides his composing the composition and the surfaces in Scully's paintings, it is seen that he makes contact with the works of previous abstract painters with the moral dimension. For example, he mention about Kandinsky's compositions peculiar to the place and Mondrian's surface paintings as a presentation of two dynamics probability of development of the abstract painting up to now. He expresses that he agrees with Kandinsky's opinion that bringing out into the open the thing that moral in art and he finds Mondrian close to him more (*Scully 2006: 21*). However, he finds Mondrian's vertical and horizontal forms close to perfection, but he finds his paintings close to the 'life' (street life) which includes the faults and mistakes. He clarify that he examines them with an approach that has not perfection (*Scully, 2006: 24*). With other words, he associates the street life with seeming to be carelessly done and randomly the colored forms, which are composed the effect of light-color, which appear from below in patches without closing diligently and completely with the brush strokes painted superposingly. Actually, his giving permission consciously to this careless appearance, which is seen as a detail becomes the most distinguishing feature of his paintings in the length of time (*Painting 2*).

Scully express clearly his view about today's art and artist while he analyzing from direction



Painting 2. Red Ascending, Oil on canvas, 259.1x355.6 cm. Private Collection

relations between the approaches of his period and previous period and his paintings about content and form in a manner that it is hard to encounter frequently as an artist personality. The Scully's paintings, which evaluated as an inheritor of American Abstract Expressionists of 1950s makes us rethink a lot of questions about contemporary art. Because interrogating the concepts like the artwork and beauty, traditional and new brings together a serious confusion today, he also attracts the attention of a lot of art critics with his stressing on deep meanings of art and the dimension of spirituality with his paintings and with his writings patiently and in stability and with consistency of his posture.

Eric Davis, in a conversation with Scully, asks him his thought about 'beauty', which has been discovered before a few century, in an environment which the word of 'beauty' is minimized today. Scully reveals that if something attracts his attention and moves him, he finds it beautiful and he accepts the concept of 'beauty' not minimizing but as a positive thing. He explains clearly that beauty is not only a problem of an appearance and there is not a standard beauty from now on. He says that in this way or that way, an understanding which all things is possible in art grows up nowadays. The only important thing for him is to realize that if one thing is deep, making someone moved, necessary, beautiful –that for him all of this almost resembling things- or convincing or not. He gives examples from two artists in subject of being persuaded. He puts forward that he can be convinced with a Lucian Freud painting but he can not be convinced with an Eric Fischl painting although two of them make a kind of expressionist figurative painting. He thought that he finds interesting the first because behind him there is a moral an-

ger and an objection but on secondary there is an appropriating and being accomplice. He puts forward that although two of them seem to be resembling their effects are different like being in a lot of abstract paintings (Scully, 2006:133).

The important thing for Scully is neither doing paintings suitable for the valid and popular understanding of the day nor struggling with the formal features or only appearance. Persuasiveness and sincerity are features that they are necessary not to be given up for the artist. He is more interested in the spiritual side of art. Before a century, from Kandinski's writings 'On Spiritualism On Art' until now in concept of art and artist, the existing of the spiritualism has come to a situation that being interrogated, when the minimized global world changes and makes human conscious turned, what has been going on today to the fact which Kandinski calls 'inner requirement'? In this subject Kristeva put forward that the humans inner world is going towards the disappearing after a long confusion period in thought of the technology makes humane sensitivity decreased. "Who has had still a soul? ... The modern human is on the road to losing his soul. But human even has not noticed this, because he is exactly a psychic tool that saves the representations and the values of giving meaning for the subject. The darkroom is damaged, it doesn't run now" (Kristeva, 2007: 16-17).

Like Kristeva, who attracts attention to the dimension of the emotion, defending the human, who the psychoanalysis has examined today, does not realized even losing his soul, Scully also stress making the spiritual and excessive sides of art come to the fore plan again and to the subject of giving meaning to the humanist values and beauty again and sees this as the most important necessity of the era. For this reason instead of using the hard geometric forms in his paintings, preferring to give an impression as if they are made unsystematic and easily with the emotion which he added to his brush strokes he reflects his critical look to the machine pleasure of era.

Mestrovic, who approached from another aspect to the changing of the human's emotional side in this era with his thesis of "Emotions have not lost in fact, so being emotional has been still extrasensoriness. But the hybrid of serial manufactured which is mechanic and made intellectualized has taken to the stage of the world." (Mestrovic, 1999: 98) he explains with today's world, which becoming more mechanic, with his description of "Extrasensory Society" and he attracts the most attention to a forgery of being created with emotions. In this context, the track of humane sensitivity which Scully endeavors to reflect in his painting gains meaning more.

But Donald Kuspit, who thinks that meaning and spiritual sides of the art falled from esteem with an approach that opposite of aesthetics together with 'Postart', accepts Scully as one of the artists that he evaluates with his description of 'New Old Masters.' He thinks these 'master's realised being able to loot to the world uncritically with the eye of aesthetical transcendence. According to Kuspit, "Standing against to the postart's making life became meaningless and became a thing, New Old Masters have exposed again the side of the deep meaning of the art, the side which reaches to the further side of the ordinariness of daily life, which reaches to the high" (2006 a, 190-191).

Kuspit, who finds Scully has the universal meaning and deepness of spiritual paintings of Old Masters in his article, which he debates the humanism in abstract painting, thinks that he exhibits a different conception with using the intensive and much color he appears at first glance as if a formalist as in understanding of Clement Greenberg. He specifies that the spiritual experience has not been carried to the painting by image and iconography, but it has been carried by nuance and intensity and with a big effect. According to Kuspit the traditional art is taken in hand as a learned connection more than the experience which is lived with mediating to a moral meaning via cultural symbol but it loses its dogmatic character and it is given a perceptual life directly and thus it becomes a meaning which is lived and experienced (*Kuspit, 2004*).

Robert Enright, who is one of the important contemporary painters in looking for the universal rhythm of the objects and in catching the lofty sentimentality with believe in converting his painting to an exceeding personal outlook, describes as a painter like a 'street fighter' to Scully's being decided about tenacious and a hard beauty understanding. And he thinks that his paintings have a monumental feature like Motherwell's, Barnett Newman's and Brice Marden's works. Enright expresses that Scully spends his all life to 'make his brush stroke personalize' insofar as possible. As a result he attracts attention that there are very clear clues about his personal expression in the rude geometric form which are in his paintings. Essentially in his paintings "Nothing is abstract: He is his portrait, the portrait of conditions of a person". He accepts his



Painting 3. Wall of Light, Oil on Linen, 274.3x335.3 cm. 2003, Canberra, National Gallery of Australia

paintings as “a kind of concentric boiling” that he has been left somehow at the point of solution and determination “emotion and structure, beauty and difficulty, light and darkness, increase and decrease” there (Enright, 2007).

John Haber, asks the question of “Is it necessary to see the painting as an object or as a visual art exactly?” to Sean Scully. He sets forth on the mean of art is not known, Formalizm became a directive for artists and this directive seemed to be out of date for the first Minimalist and Postmodern breaking at the two- dimensional illusionist perfection of the outlook, and he writes that being mentioned about the death of abstraction. But he specifies that the abstraction takes in hand this “breaking” as a subject and clarifies that it stands by this way. He express that it is possible to see these in Brice Marden and Sean Scully’s works in a different forms and the art never repeats itself like history (Haber, 2007). For example, Scully starts from an idea of a wall (Painting 3) on his painting series called “Wall of Light” different from absolute formal approach and he oozes all his experiences as it were in a wall. The wall swallows his being lived, his soul and it transfers to this soul to the tracker. He finds his matter from the inner of life. That’s why it is possible to see the traces of being lived in every motion of his hand and in every brush stroke. At the same time it is seen his catching a wall effect as a dimension too in his paintings.

Scully affected from the architecture of places he visited besides the atmosphere of the night, sea, sky or desert (Painting 4) and he wanted to reflect on his paintings the emotion which the light of this atmosphere left on him. It can be understood that the paintings series called “Night of Desert Wall of Light” or “Wall of Light” were made after this travels.

While Scully sees the abstract forms as a tool to reflect the emotion, at the same time it is detected his aiming to be able to absorbe the spectator deeper from the surface of the painting the soul which he transformed from himself with his brush stroke and with the emotion which he added. According to the Scully who caught the poetry with sincerety in geometric abstract forms; “The power of a painting has to come from inside not outside. Painting is not only an image on the surface. Painting has to contain the spirit of the painting as a complement –mass-. How he will start determines how he will finish. It is the importance of the aim and intent that comes from inside the human that determines all things” (Scully, 2006: 122). It is seen that the artist’s individual being lived, perception and intuitions contitutes a base to his creativeness on composing the art work. At the same time the artist’s personality, his posture in front of the world reflects also the spirit of the work.

Scully, in his writing which he transformed his thought on Giorgio Morandi’s (1890-1964) personality and works on subject of the artist’s posture in front of the world, evaluates Morandi’s making figurative painting as an exact challenge in a period which there is a general tentency on abstraction. Although the art critic and art collectors ignores in 20th century’s modernist art atmosphere, he finds respectful Morandi’s escaping from this general tendency, his personal objection and his resistance. He specifies that this posture makes him a big artist for us and the color and the dimension of his painting are in an exact accordance as a philosophical (Scully, 2006: 9). In this content, it has been understood that he admired Morandi’s posture opposite of



Painting 4. *Wall of Light Aran, Oil on Canvas, 2002, Madrid, Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sophia*

popular culture as an example Scully's attempting to read the past getting at the deepness.

Donald Kuspit also has used a similar expression for Scully. He finds the artist in a sense more excellent and emotional than Rothko. Since Rothko has made his paintings in a period which the painting was respectful-valid. Scully, on the other hand, was painting in a period where painting was thought to be in a crisis and he kept painting, far from the effects of Postart and in a way he believes. (*Kuspit, 2006 b*).

In response to the Bob Hughes's question "What is a painting like?" Scully says he resembles painting to a book. He explains that he sees the book as a sculpture with its name written on its back, when open its wings holds it and it can only be analyzed when it is open. He resembles the paintings to closed books, he believes they can also be opened and read, they cannot open but they show themselves, but they are not open graphics which show everything clearly and they need to encourage the person to open them (*Scully, 2006: 41*). With this approach, Scully calls the mystery of abstract art into attention. He encourages us to think that nothing is merely an appearance, and deep meanings and relations are one of paintings enchanting properties. The underlying, subtle details in his paintings ('closed book' in Scully words) creates a desire to open it up and read, encouraging the person towards aesthetics and deeper thinking. This detail in

the artist's paintings is very important, especially in an age where the thought that there is not time for anything but the economical struggle for survival is widely accepted, and everything is explicitly and hyper-realistically exposed. This crucial detail in Scully's paintings, with the effect of the lighting that seems to pop up from the background among shapes that resemble blocks of color, also creates an air of mystery and hope.

In spite of Anti-aesthetics, easyness and mundaneness, the speed of the age, the general trend in the art world towards usage of advanced technology which facilitates possibilities beyond human capacity, Scully says; "Art contains a unique potential to enhance emotion and experience, and to stop time" (Scully 2006: 148).

It is a difficult path to try and survive in the art environment of this age which includes many varieties, independent of the content determined, envisioned or limited by the organisers of art fairs, biennials or art shows. In this difficult path, the poetry of Scully's geometric abstract shapes, that he catches without getting caught in art trends, freely, and with an intimate approach based on his own experience is the most important aspect of his artist personality and paintings. He underlines the human values (poetry, metaphor, emotion, spirituality) of the past which he believes are still valid, instead of the attention or lack of attention or opinions of the art world. His struggle to create himself –the human- with great patience and faith is proof that Scully is sceptical of contemporary popular culture. His passion and determination to rediscover forgotten human values and his paintings, authenticated with subtle details on patterns which create an impression of horizontal and vertical "bricks of color", should be put apart from the approach to value whatever is popular or fad or superficial.

Translator/Çeviren: Serap Emmungil

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