

SEAN SCULLY

La Pedrera, 14 March–6 July 2025

“I think that art is a wound in a dance with love. And if the wound and the love are the same size, then they can dance well.”¹



¹ *Studio notes*, June 2004, p. 149.

Sean Scully returns to Barcelona with a unique exhibition at La Pedrera.

The Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera presents the most extensive showcase ever held in Barcelona of the Dublin-born artist's work. It features more than sixty pieces – including paintings, sculptures, photographs and works on paper – offering a retrospective view of the artist's oeuvre, which spans over six decades of creative production.

"Sean Scully" is the latest exhibition by the Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera and will be in the exhibition hall at La Pedrera from 14 March to 6 July.

Curated by art critic, journalist and writer **Javier Molins**, the show includes **over sixty works**, ranging from **paintings and sculptures to photographs, drawings, watercolours and pastels**. This retrospective traces the evolution of Scully's work, from his **early figurative pieces** in the 1960s and his **minimalist phase** in the 1970s to the distinctive style he has developed today, characterised by a reduction of his iconographic repertoire to a series of lines, bands and blocks, which have become the hallmark of his practice and, in his own words, reflect his aspiration to "restore emotion to abstract painting".

The La Pedrera exhibition is the **most extensive presentation of Scully's work ever seen in Barcelona**, spanning six decades of artistic production. It features pieces from the **artist's own collection** – sourced from his studios in Munich, London and New York – as well as works on loan from museums and institutions such as Madrid's **Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía** and the **Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM)**.

Organised **chronologically**, the exhibition allows visitors to experience the evolution of Scully's work first-hand. It highlights his ongoing pursuit of a **renewed understanding of abstraction**, driven by his desire to capture, in his own words, "something that can reflect the dimensionality of the human spirit within the grid of our world".

SEAN SCULLY

Born in Dublin in 1945, Sean Scully is one of the **most influential artists in contemporary abstraction**. In the early 1980s, he restored a quality to abstract painting that had been lost: the **ability to move and stir emotion**.



Though he **began as a figurative painter**, influenced by German Expressionists among others, he gradually shifted towards a **minimalist approach**, ultimately developing rhythmic, colour-rich compositions that seem

to vibrate before the viewer.

"For five years, I was creating extremely minimalistic paintings. I was a highly respected member of the New York art community. But in 1980, I broke away from minimalism. This decision led to outrage from my artist friends. People would look at my new works and ask, 'What the hell is this?' Suddenly, I introduced emotion, colour, relationships and descriptive titles such as *Empty Heart*, *The Bather* and *Adoration* – titles that were not permitted in the puritanism of minimalism."²

² Interview with Sean Scully by Javier Molins at his studio in Tappan, New York, March 2016.

This is one of Scully's defining characteristics: his **reference to reality**, which can be discerned through the **titles he gives his works**. Scully strives to use a universal language that reaches everyone, drawing inspiration from his surroundings, whether real or imagined.

Literature and painting are sources of inspiration, but his main reference is **his own experience**. It could be said that his work forms the narrative thread of his life, with his travels having a profound impact on him. It was in **1969, in Morocco**, that he discovered vertical and horizontal stripes in coloured fabrics – an experience that changed his life, his artistic vision and ultimately led him to develop his own style, **infusing abstraction with emotion**, a hallmark of his work.

“My work is based on immersion. I am immersed in a very different set of parameters and aspirations. I am taking on the history of art, I'm immersed in it and I'm immersed in what I make. I am what I make in other words; there is no difference.”³

His **1980 trip to Mexico** influenced his style. There, he began painting from life



artist.

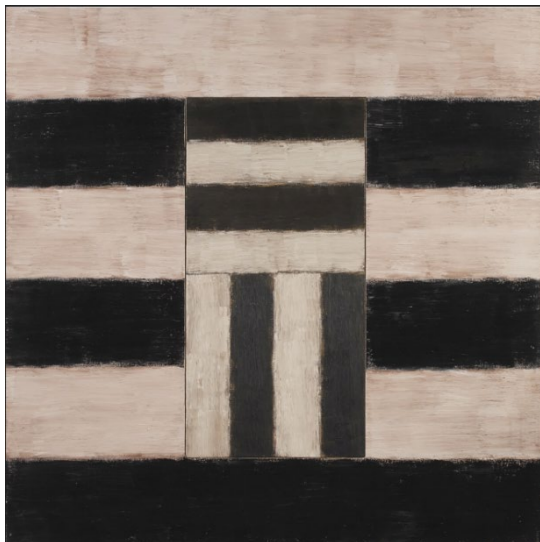
and **used watercolour extensively for the first time**. “In Mexico, while exploring the ruins, I created a small watercolour where I wrote ‘Wall of Light’, I don't know why. Thirteen years later, I began making my *Wall of Light* paintings,” he explains.

Wall of Light Arran, 2002. MNCARS © Sean Scully. Courtesy of the

³ Interview with Eric Davis. Published in the *Journal of Contemporary Art* (1999), p. 78.

But Mexico also left him with the geometric forms of the Mayan ruins, such as those at Chichén Itzá and Uxmal – pyramids built from stone blocks that closely resemble elements that would later appear in his work. Indeed, the pieces in the *Wall of Light* series function like true architectural walls.

His **painting reaches its fullest expression** when he focuses on his **loved ones**, as seen in the numerous works dedicated to his son Oisín. Scully is able to capture a sleepless night spent caring for his son in the work *Oisín's Breath*



(2010). He also conveys the love he feels for his mother, Dorothy; for his wife, Liliane; and for Paul, his first son, who died at the age of eighteen, in a painting included in this exhibition at La Pedrera – *Empty Heart* (1987) – which reflects the profound grief his loss caused the artist.

Empty Heart, 1987 © Sean Scully. Courtesy of the artist.
Photo by Robert Bean

A reflective artist, Scully's work embodies a profound understanding of art history – from the **mastery of colour seen in Titian, to the nuanced colour combinations of Henri Matisse and Giorgio Morandi** in their abstractions; **from the rhythm of Piet Mondrian to the emotional depth of Mark Rothko**. Above all, he is particularly noted for his painting technique. Distinguished by an intuitive layering of paint – often wet-on-wet – his colours blend and emerge, creating unique tonal variations of remarkable depth that infuse his abstract compositions with warmth.

The longer one observes a Scully painting, the more tonalities appear, fostering an intimacy that may initially go unnoticed but ultimately invites the viewer into an abstract narrative charged with emotion.

A true master of colour, Scully's work is inseparable from it. Through his compositions, he evokes deep emotions within each of us.

Scully prioritises rhythm over form; the wide bands that structure his canvases vary in width, have blurred edges and do not always follow the same direction – some run horizontally, while others are vertical. The simplicity and repetition in his compositions create a visual cadence that, through his brushstrokes, vibrates with life and emotion. Each colour band contains multiple gradations within it, and over time, the artist's palette has become increasingly nuanced and complex. The layers concentrated within a single space allow him to incorporate narrative, emotion, poetry, ideas, thought, spirituality, time and references. As he himself states, painting has a unique ability to halt time and condense feelings and experience.

“With a painting you can contain within borders a lot of experience, narrative, emotion, poetry, idea, thought, time, references and so on, all within a frame.”⁴



Fez, 2024 © Sean Scully.
Courtesy of the artist.
Photo by Eva Herzog

Falling Figure,
2002_MNCARS © Sean
Scully. Courtesy of the artist.

⁴ Interview with Eric Davis. Published in the *Journal of Contemporary Art* (1999), p. 96

Scully is an artist deeply invested in the **humanisation of painting**. His distinctive way of rethinking the medium bridges analytical abstraction with poetics. His work has **redefined the paradigm of abstraction**, evolving from the reduced vocabulary of American Minimalism to a more emotive form – one that reintroduces the spirituality inherent in the European painting tradition.

Scully's work **does not convey a fixed meaning** but remains open to interpretation, often eliciting a profound state of introspection and contemplation. Rather than impose a specific message, his goal is to create a **visual and emotional experience that resonates uniquely with each viewer**. His paintings thus serve as open windows onto human experience, offering us the opportunity to connect with our own emotions and the universal truths that underpin existence.

“The task I have set for myself is to reconnect abstraction with the public, to bring it out of its isolation and to allow the viewer to experience a direct sensation of the real world when looking at an abstract painting.”⁵

His **work, rooted in repetition yet “never quite the same”**, as exhibition curator Javier Molins highlights, shares many parallels with the music of Bach. “In both cases, nothing is left to chance. Everything has a purpose, and it is precisely the whole that gives meaning to the work. You can spend hours listening to the same Bach piece, just as you can spend hours contemplating a single Scully painting,” Molins remarked at the presentation of the exhibition catalogue for Scully's show at La Pedrera.

Scully's success extends to countries with vastly different cultures, including the **United States, Spain, Germany, China and South Korea**.

⁵ Lecture at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, 8 October 1992.

In 2024 and 2025, temporary exhibitions of his work have been held at the Lisson Gallery in Beijing, China; the Ludwig Museum Koblenz, Germany; the Hungarian National Gallery in Budapest, Hungary; the Church of Saint-Nicolas in Caen, France; Broadway Avenue in New York, USA; the He Art Museum in Shunde, China; the Stefan Gierowski Foundation in Warsaw, Poland; the Centre Pompidou in Paris, France; and the Lisson Gallery in New York, USA.

Sean Scully's works are housed in museums worldwide. In the United States alone, his pieces are part of the collections of over 50 museums, including MoMA, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

THE CURATOR, JAVIER MOLINS

Javier Molins holds a PhD in fine arts and has curated over thirty-five exhibitions featuring artists such as Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, Sean Scully, Tony Cragg, Ugo Rondinone, Manolo Valdés, Jaume Plensa, Julian Opie and Valerio Adami, in countries including Spain, France, Italy, England, Belgium, Switzerland, Singapore and Dubai. He has served as director of the Marlborough Gallery in Madrid and as director of communication and development at the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM). In London, he has lectured at the Royal Academy of Arts and the Courtauld Institute of Art, and he is currently an artistic advisor to the Hortensia Herrero Foundation.

Molins curated this exhibition dedicated to Sean Scully and previously curated **"Jaume Plensa. Poetry of Silence"** by the Catalunya La Pedrera Foundation, which was on display at La Pedrera in 2023.

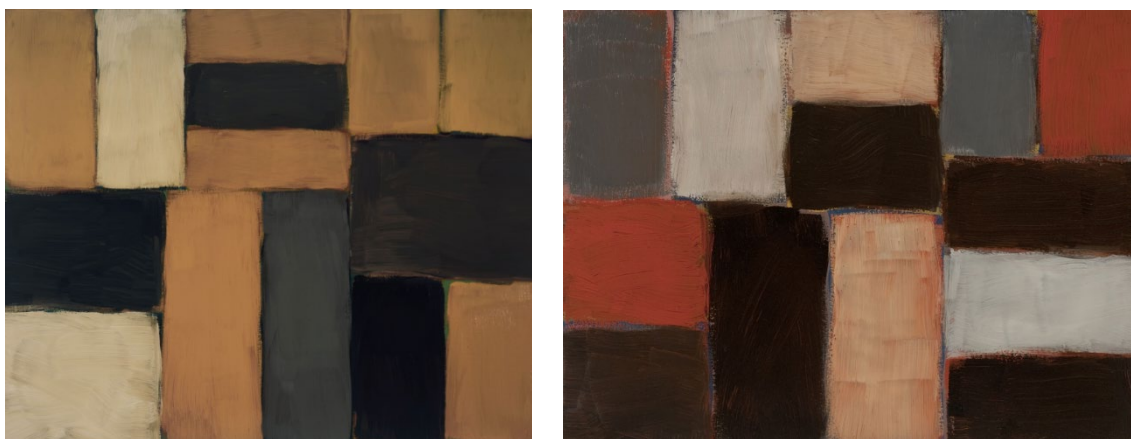
SEAN SCULLY AND BARCELONA

This exhibition at La Pedrera holds special significance as **the artist is returning to the Catalan capital**, a city where he lived for a time and maintained a studio for over 14 years. Additionally, in 2025, Sean Scully **will celebrate his 80th birthday on 30 June**, and he wishes to mark the occasion with a special exhibition in such an iconic building as La Pedrera. The show will be **the first retrospective** dedicated to Scully in Barcelona since 2007 – eighteen years ago – and now encompasses six decades of artistic production.

Sean Scully and **his wife, Liliane Tomasko**, moved to Barcelona in 1994. For ten years, they lived at No. 3 Carrer d'Aribau and had a studio at No. 21 Carrer de Joaquim Costa. In their final four years in the city, they moved to No. 4 Carrer d'Ausiàs March and relocated their studio to No. 4 Carrer de Girona.

Having lived and worked in various countries – including the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the United States – Scully has said that, for him, Barcelona is the city that most resembles New York, apart from the climate.

His **productive years in Barcelona resulted in a series of works**, some of which **return to the city for this exhibition at La Pedrera**. These include paintings created during his time in Barcelona, bearing the city's name in their titles, such as *Barcelona Band of Light* (2004) and *Barcelona Dark Wall* (2004), as well as works on paper and photographs.



Barcelona Band of Light, 2004 © Sean Scully. Courtesy of the artist. *Barcelona Dark Wall*, 2004 © Sean Scully. Courtesy of the artist.
Photo by Christoph Knoch

Barcelona Band of Light (2004) and *Barcelona Dark Wall* (2004) resemble painted walls constructed from blocks, forming a kind of barrier.

Walls have long been a significant reference and source of inspiration for the artist. From the dry-stone walls of his native Ireland – reflected in these paintings through horizontal bands – to the *Landline* series, in which lines evoke the melancholy of an emigrant longing for a lost homeland and gazing at the horizon, searching for what was left behind. Walls also reference the meeting point of sea, land and sky, united in communion by horizontal lines stretching into infinity, motifs Scully has depicted in travels across different continents.

He captures walls in his photographs for their textured surfaces, much like skin worn by life and time. He often photographs the **façades of abandoned, aged or marginal buildings** – streets lined with humble spaces that transport him back to his early years of hardship and precarity. Scully identifies with these environments because they evoke an **intimate, lived experience**.

His connection to Barcelona is also reflected in this exhibition through a **selection of photographs taken in the city in 1997**, showcasing another facet of his creative practice. Additionally, the exhibition features a **selection of drawings, watercolours and pastels**. This retrospective also includes an intriguing collection of **sculptures** of various sizes and materials, a medium Scully has explored extensively in recent years. **Sculptures made from stone, aluminium, zinc and Murano glass** will be displayed alongside his wall-mounted works, marking the **first time these pieces are exhibited in Barcelona**.



Barcelona 10.3.98, 1998 © Sean Scully. Courtesy of the artist.

One of the **great discoveries Scully and his wife made** during their time in Barcelona was **Montserrat Mountain**, where they often took long walks. It was there that they became acquainted with its Benedictine abbey and its prominent role in Spain's transition to democracy. Their visits led them to establish contact with the abbey, where they discovered the Montserrat Museum and its director, Father Josep de C. Laplana. It was Laplana who later baptised Oisín, the son Sean and Liliane welcomed in 2009. As a gesture of gratitude, Scully donated the painting *La muntanya de l'Oisín* (2009) to the abbey, where it remains part of the museum's collection.

This strong relationship also gave rise to a **project for Scully to design a chapel within the Romanesque church of Santa Cecília**, founded in 945 and part of the Montserrat Abbey complex. The church required full restoration, and after several years of work, the **Espai d'Art Sean Scully** was inaugurated in June 2015.

Scully also has a permanent work in the **Cathedral of Girona**, dedicated to Saint Mary. Geometric in nature, his piece is composed of lines and rectangles, distinguished by its bold use of colour and layers of transparency, inspired by the cathedral's oldest stained-glass windows. According to Scully, he chose this motif because, through the layering of lines and overlapping colours, he could create a mystical space that merges harmony, functional design and spirituality.

Today, his works stand as permanent installations in the stunning Romanesque church of **Santa Cecília de Montserrat** and the Gothic masterpiece of the Cathedral of Santa Maria of Girona.

SEAN SCULLY AT LA PEDRERA

The Sean Scully exhibition at La Pedrera is **a unique opportunity** to experience Scully's work in an extraordinary building.

Organised by the **Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera**, this is **the most comprehensive exhibition of his work ever held in Barcelona**. Developed in close collaboration with the artist, it follows a **chronological journey** through the different phases of his career. **More than sixty works created over more than six decades** – four works from the 1960s, eight works from the 1970s, nine works from the 1980s, ten from the 1990s, seven from the 2000s, nine works from 2010 and fourteen created since 2020 – from his **early figurative works** to his **minimalist phase in the 1970s**, culminating in his **latest abstract compositions**. The most recent work in the exhibition, from 2025, exemplifies his distinct style, which, in his own words, is driven by a desire to **restore emotion to abstract painting**.

Scully's abstractions are, in his own words, "open works, subject to all kinds of interpretation, but always aiming to reflect the dimensionality of the human spirit within the grid of our world." This philosophy permeates not only his **paintings** but also his **watercolours, pastels, photographs**, recent figurative works and, **for the first time in Barcelona, his sculptural pieces.**

Scully's sculptures vary in format and material, a medium he has explored extensively in recent years. **His signature horizontal and vertical bands translate into three-dimensional form**, taking shape in materials as diverse as water tanks, stone blocks and aluminium painted with automotive lacquer.

"Sean Scully's sculptures are a **three-dimensional extension of his pictorial approach**, centred on geometric forms and patterns of vertical and horizontal bands. He works with metal and stone blocks, using repetition and modularity to create compositions that are both solid and harmonious. Just as in his paintings, his palette is highly varied," explains curator Javier Molins.

The **dialogue between Gaudí's architecture and Scully's work** is a recurring theme throughout the exhibition at La Pedrera, reaching its most striking expression at the entrance. There, visitors are greeted by **55 (2025), a new sculpture created specifically for this exhibition.** Standing nearly seven metres tall and featuring a dynamic array of colours, **55** will welcome visitors to Casa Milà from the courtyard on Passeig de Gràcia.



Undoubtedly, **Antoni Gaudí and Sean Scully** share a common trait – they **both defy convention**. Just as Scully faced rejection from the minimalist movement when he chose to carve out his own artistic path, Gaudí similarly encountered resistance when he developed his unique architectural style, drawing inspiration from the organic forms of nature.

CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue featuring an **essay by curator Javier Molins**. Additionally, it includes **a text by Natalia Gierowska, a political scientist and art critic**, as well as a biography and a selected bibliography on the Irish-born, American-naturalised painter.

The publication reproduces all the works on display, accompanied by various quotations – excerpts from Sean Scully's writings compiled in the book *Inner. The Collected Writings and Selected Interviews of Sean Scully* (Berlin, Hatje Cantz, 2016).

The catalogue has been published in two editions – Catalan and Spanish – both of which include English translations of the texts.

EXPANDED EXHIBITION

Through a carefully planned strategy of **partnerships with other cultural institutions**, the exhibitions organised by the Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera **extend their reach across the city**. **A series of activities**, developed collaboratively with these institutions, expand the exhibition beyond La Pedrera, offering fresh perspectives and fostering dialogues with other artistic disciplines.

The Foundation creates a **series of self-produced audiovisual projects related to its exhibitions**. These documentaries provide an enriching perspective in which art, creation, reflection and dialogue with the architecture of La Pedrera come together to expand the experience of the exhibition.

For “Sean Scully”, **filmmaker David Trueba** takes us into the world of one of the most important abstract painters of the second half of the 20th century.

The documentary provides an intimate look inside Sean Scully’s London studio, where he is seen working on his latest pieces and reflecting on his practice. It also documents the preparation of the exhibition at La Pedrera. Following the screening,

David Trueba will engage in a conversation with the exhibition’s curator, Javier Molins. This audiovisual piece will be shown in the exhibition hall throughout the duration of the show.

Expanded exhibition activities:

Friday, 14 March, 7:00 pm

Sean Scully and Javier Molins

Sean Scully is one of the most influential artists in contemporary abstraction. Influenced by Henri Matisse, Paul Klee and Piet Mondrian, Scully is a deeply reflective artist whose work is shaped by colour and a distinctive approach to painting that bridges analytical abstraction and poetic expression. On the opening day of the exhibition at La Pedrera, the artist will engage in a conversation with curator Javier Molins.

Sunday, 27 April, 10:00 am–2:00 pm

"Sean Scully" Day

Tours and talks

A morning dedicated to the "Sean Scully" exhibition at La Pedrera, offering an exploration of the artist's work from multiple perspectives and artistic disciplines, featuring interventions by composer Bernat Vivancos, architect Lucía Millet and curator Arola Valls. There will also be a guided tour open to all audiences, a family-friendly tour and short musical performances within the exhibition space, in collaboration with the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya (ESMUC).

Tuesday, 6 May, 8:00 pm

Documentary on Sean Scully by David Trueba

Première of documentary and chat

Filmmaker David Trueba brings the public closer to the world of one of the most significant abstract painters of the late 20th century. This documentary takes viewers inside Sean Scully's London studio, where the artist is seen working on his latest pieces and reflecting on his creative process. The film also captures the preparation of the exhibition for La Pedrera.

Following the screening, a conversation will take place between David Trueba and exhibition curator Javier Molins, moderated by journalist Laura Sangrà.

David Trueba (Madrid, 1969) is a writer, director and screenwriter. He made his directorial debut with *La buena vida* (1996), which premiered at the Directors' Fortnight in Cannes. In 2003, he directed *Soldados de Salamina*, presented in the "Un Certain Regard" section at the Cannes Film Festival. His 2013 film *Vivir es fácil con los ojos cerrados* won six Goya Awards and was selected as Spain's entry for the Academy Awards. His most recent film, *Casi 40*, won the Special Jury Prize at the Málaga Film Festival.

Monday, 12 May, 8:00 pm

Anastasia Kobekina in Concert at the Liceu Foyer

Concert and screenings

For Sean Scully, music is the most abstract art form and, due to its ethereal nature, the one most closely connected to the spirit. In many ways, his painting breathes musicality – its rhythm, repetitions and fugues. Scully himself has admitted to a deep passion for music, particularly for the cello.

This concert establishes a dialogue between his paintings and a selection of musical pieces performed by the exceptionally talented cellist Anastasia Kobekina. A visual and auditory spectacle, this event immerses audiences in both the material and spiritual dimensions of Sean Scully's universe.

Renowned for her passion, dedication and extraordinary talent, Anastasia Kobekina has become a leading figure in the world of classical music, captivating audiences with her emotionally charged and unique performances across a broad range of styles, from Baroque to contemporary music. She has performed on prestigious international stages alongside renowned orchestras, such as the Konzerthausorchester Berlin and the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, under the baton of conductors including Krzysztof Penderecki and Valery Gergiev. Born in Russia, she began playing the cello at the age of four and received her training at elite academies in Germany and Paris. Kobekina is widely known for performing on a 1698 Antonio Stradivarius cello, loaned to her by the Stradivari Stiftung Habisreutinger – an instrument that has become an essential part of her artistic identity.

Thursday, 22 May, 8:00 pm

Concert by the Escolania de Montserrat, Orquestra del Miracle & Juan de la Rubia

Concert and screenings at the Palau de la Música

As part of the Millennium Celebrations of Montserrat at the Palau de la Música, this concert will feature performances by the Escolania de Montserrat and the Capella de Música de Montserrat, together with the Orquestra del Miracle, founded two years ago at the Santuari de El Miracle in Solsonès, a site affiliated with Montserrat.

The programme will include works by three of the most significant Baroque composers: Saxons Georg Friedrich Händel and Johann

Sebastian Bach, plus Italian Antonio Vivaldi. Given Sean Scully's close connection to Montserrat, where he created an exceptional artistic installation for the Romanesque church of Santa Cecília in 2015, the Foundation has partnered with this event to integrate Scully's works into the concert setting.

Saturday, 14 June, 11:00 am

Visit to Santa Cecília de Montserrat. Espai d'Art Sean Scully

Guided tour and concert

As part of the exhibition, a guided tour of Santa Cecília de Montserrat. Espai d'Art Sean Scully will take place, exploring a space where contemporary art and historical heritage coexist in an extraordinary dialogue. In 2015, Sean Scully created a unique artistic ensemble for this Romanesque church. Over the course of a decade, he developed an intervention of great artistic and spiritual intensity: triptychs and polyptychs, fresco paintings, crosses and stained-glass windows, which unfold harmoniously within the millennia-old

arches and walls of the church. The visit will conclude with a concert by the Barcelona Clarinet Players, featuring music by Bernat Vivancos, inspired by Scully's work. This immersive experience blends art, heritage and music in an incomparable setting.

A coach service will depart from La Pedrera and return directly from Santa Cecília to La Pedrera.

To mark the exhibition at La Pedrera, the Montserrat Museum will exceptionally open the Espai d'Art Sean Scully to visitors on the following Saturdays: 5 April, 10 May, 14 June and 5 July. The opening hours for the public will be from 10 am to 2 pm.

SEAN SCULLY – VISITOR INFORMATION

14 March–6 July 2025

Monday to Sunday, from 10 am to 7:30 pm (last entry: 7 pm).

General admission: €12

Reduced admission: €10 - Seniors aged 65 and above, students and individuals with disabilities (equal to or greater than 33%)

Free admission: Children under 12, members of professional associations (ACCA, AICA, AECA, AMC, ICOM, ICOMOS), individuals with disabilities (equal to or greater than 65%) and accredited companions.

#ScullyLaPedrera

Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera (FCLP)

Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera is committed to promoting art and culture through a carefully curated programme of exhibitions, reaffirming one of its core missions: to serve as a cultural catalyst for society. These exhibitions connect the Foundation and La Pedrera with the people of Barcelona and Catalonia, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera Press

Lluïsa Oller Tel. 638 44 94 69

Ana Lorente Tel. 625 36 55 60

premsa@fcatalunyalapedrera.com