

**SOUTHAMPTON ARTS CENTER PRESENTS
INDEPENDENCY: THE AMERICAN FLAG AT 250 YEARS
A NEW EXHIBITION CURATED BY HISTORIAN JOHN MONSKY AND CHRISTINA
M. STRASSFIELD**

250 Years of American Flags and Historic Textiles -- From the Revolutionary War and Abraham Lincoln's Presidential Campaign to the Beaches of Normandy and the Moon Landings

An Exploration of the American Flags as a Geometric Object Through the Masterful Works of Abstract Painter Sean Scully

Southampton, NY – April 25, 2025– Southampton Arts Center (SAC) is proud to announce *Independency: The American Flag at 250 Years*, a powerful and visually striking collection of American flags and historic textiles, witnesses to watershed moments in American history, alongside the work of abstract painter Sean Scully.

The exhibition is curated by historian and writer John Monsky with SAC's Executive Director Christina Mossaides Strassfield. *Independency* will be on view from May 17, 2025, through July 16, 2025.

Monsky's flags, represent a lifelong collection that began in his boyhood, and has since served as the focal point of his series of live multi-media musical journeys through history, which he presents at Carnegie Hall and the nation's top performance venues. His "The Eyes of the World: From D-Day to VE Day," performed with the Boston Pops from Boston's Symphony Hall, is currently streaming on PBS.org.

The exhibition, combining both visual art and American history, will feature select flags and historic textiles from Monsky's collection -- from a 1775 George Washington kerchief and a flag for the candidacy of "Abram" Lincoln to flags from the Apollo Missions, alongside Scully's work. Insightful narrative, archival film and photography, material culture and historic documents, will enhance the visitor experience.

The exhibition includes:

Gallery I. An introduction to the role flags have played in our history, the artistry of the stars and stripes, and the use of that geometry in art, with resonant work from renowned abstract artist Sean Scully.

Gallery II. *Campaigns, Parades, and Political Expression:* An examination of the role flags and kerchiefs have played in politics and civic discourse, including Presidential campaigns of Abraham Lincoln, John Quincy Adams, and Ulysses S. Grant. Work from Scully continues to interact with the geometries of the textiles.

Gallery III. *Vietnam and the Moon*: A look at flags reflecting one particularly complex moment, including a tattered flag from a Swift Boat, its occupants 20-year-old boys, juxtaposed with a “Love” flag from San Francisco circa 1968. America’s passion for exploration is seen through textiles from the Wright Brothers and Amelia Earhart, as well as flags that went to the surface of the moon.

Gallery IV. *Sacrifice*: This collection of flags reflects the victory and heartbreak of America’s conflicts. Highlights include a pennant flown by the USS Constitution in the War of 1812, the conflict which gave us *The Star-Spangled Banner*, the flag carried by the nearly all-Black 25th Corps, that captured Richmond, Virginia, the capital of the Confederacy, General George Patton’s personal guidon, and flags that landed on the Beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944. More contemporary flags are from a memorial held for those who died on Flight 93 on 9/11, and one carried by a US Navy Seal in Afghanistan.

Commenting on the exhibition, Monsky said, “These flags reflect our history, tell our story. Flags that were at rallies, battles, celebrations – flags that were present at hope-filled moments and flags that flew during moments of tragedy. It is also important to appreciate the flag as a geometric object. Its creation was an artistic act. The field of stars calls to our dreams, but it can also be seen as a remembrance of those we have lost: the boys on Omaha Beach on D-Day, dreamers like Amelia Earhart, the astronauts who died in their effort to explore space. The stripes can be seen as the oceans that Americans sailed and the fields where they plowed. We look at the flag every day, but rarely do we contemplate its design and the moments its design captures.”

On Sean Scully’s involvement he added, “Sean Scully’s work resonates powerfully with the iconic geometries of the American flag, and we are very pleased he is adding that compelling component to the Gallery. Scully’s famous stripes with squares reflect upon the emotional content in these flags, bringing new perspectives and amplifying their history they help the viewer approach our flag with new eyes, as it was first seen 250 years ago.”

Scully says, “I live by the river Hudson where much of the War of Independence was fought, where George Washington sunk the American ships so that when the British Armada came up the Hudson it crashed into them, so the issue of the formation of America is consistently on our minds since we live where it was played out. Notwithstanding, my work constantly quotes flags and banners and shifting national identities.”

Strassfield says, “Southampton Arts Center is honored to showcase the John Monsky collection. The works in his collection, which have never been seen in their entirety, are of such historical significance that this is a rare opportunity for visitors to see such treasures. The flags, photographs, and ephemera will genuinely make history come alive on our walls.”

She added, “Sean Scully’s work adds another dimension to this exhibition. It makes us examine the historical flags, their shapes, dimensions, and proportions more closely and see how contemporary artists have reused and reinvented those elements in their own work.”

ABOUT JOHN MONSKY

John Monsky is the creator, writer, and narrator of the American History Unbound series. His reverence for historical ephemera is at the core of his productions, with his meticulous research of flags and other tangible objects driving his narratives that explore landmark events in our history. His productions at Carnegie Hall include *The Vietnam War: At Home and Abroad* (2018), *We Chose to Go to the Moon* (2019), *The Eyes of the World: From D-Day to VE Day* (2021), and *The Great War and The Great Gatsby* (2023).

In 2019, Monsky was honored by The New York Historical, where he has developed and workshopped many of his lectures and serves as co-vice chair. He has appeared on CNN, CBS, and NBC. He is on the board of directors of The Rockefeller University and Yale University Art Gallery. His flag collection, which he began in his boyhood, is nationally recognized and has been featured in *The New Yorker*, *Art & Antiques Magazine*, and other publications. His historical research on George Washington has been published by the *Winterthur Portfolio*.

Monsky graduated from Yale College as a history major, where he was awarded the White Prize in History and the Deforest Oratory Prize. In addition to being an historian, Monsky, also a lawyer, serves as a senior partner of Oak Hill Capital, an investment firm. He lives in New York City and Southampton with his wife, Jennifer Weis. They have four children—Harrison, Annabel, Gillian, and Caitlin—and a dog, Flyer.

ABOUT SEAN SCULLY

Sean Scully was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1945. Today he lives and works between New York, Bavaria, Aix-en-Provence, and London and his work is in the collection of virtually every major museum around the world.

The last five years have been marked by the major fifty-year career retrospective *Sean Scully: The Shape of Ideas* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, in the USA, previously shown at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas in 2021, alongside multiple solo exhibitions and retrospectives worldwide, and the inclusion of the room *Sean Scully: A Romantic Geometry of Colors*, in the collection of the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. This year's major solo retrospectives are at the Daegu Art Museum, South Korea, Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera, Casa Milà, Barcelona, Spain; and the Bucerius Kunst Forum, Hamburg, Germany; and in New York at The Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill, where *Sean Scully: The Albee Barn, Montauk*, opens in May and will be open through until end September 2025, with an accompanying publication with essays by Deborah Solomon and Steven Henry Madoff, published by Hatje Cantz.

ABOUT AMERICAN HISTORY UNBOUND

The American History Unbound series combines live music performed by leading orchestras and celebrated Broadway actors with lecture, photographs and film from the National Archives, historic American flags, and material culture to explore watershed moments in American history. Created and narrated by historian John Monsky, programs to date have explored the Vietnam War, the race to the moon, D-Day, and World War I. These works have been presented at Carnegie Hall, Boston's Symphony Hall, John F. Kennedy Center Opera House, The New York Historical, Parrish Art Museum, Norton Museum of Art, Yale University, New York University's Skirball Center for the Performing Arts, and New York Stock Exchange.

In December 2024, *The Eyes of the World: From D-Day to VE Day* was performed in the East Room of the White House to mark the anniversary of Pearl Harbor Day. A performance with the Boston Pops is currently streaming on PBS.org. American History Unbound Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization. americanhistoryunbound.com

ABOUT SOUTHAMPTON ARTS CENTER:

Southampton Arts Center is committed to community building through the arts. We present and produce inspiring, inclusive, socially and regionally relevant programs across all disciplines, welcoming and connecting with the diverse members of New York's East End community and beyond. SAC is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization.

EXHIBITION DETAILS

- Exhibition Dates: Saturday, May 17, 2025 – July 16, 2025
- Opening Reception: Saturday, May 24, 2025, from 5pm – 7pm

EVENT SCHEDULE

- Artist Panel Talk: Saturday, June 21, 2025, from 5pm – 6:30pm

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