

Grids and Lattices

LINEARITY LIVES AND HOLDS ITS OWN AS ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL FORMATS IN THE VISUAL ARTS TODAY ESPECIALLY WHEN STRAIGHT LINES CROSS TO FORM ESSENTIALLY HORIZONTAL-VERTICAL ELEMENTS SUCH AS GRIDS AND LATTICES

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What could be simpler?—straight lines and lengths of things, up and down, back and forth, stark as a naked flag pole or rich and warm as the crisscrossing fibers of a burlap bag. I have found lines and linear things engaging and for some reason was attracted to the intricacies they offer ever since I began welding pipes together in the early seventies. Maybe it was their austerity and elegance or the way they reflect orderliness or mathematical precision.

To me there is something profoundly fundamental about the linearity of pipes and boards in the same way that there is something fundamental about the manner in which tree trunks are laid down and stacked up to make log cabins—it's the result of an obvious pairing of circumstances like the roundness of wheels. I think artists are a little suspect when they try to pinpoint origins of their orientations but I recall, when I was about ten years old, building what was at that time called a fort behind our house. It was made log cabin style of slabs—the long pieces of wood saw mills cut from the sides of logs in the process of making boards from tree trunks—and I even remember the feeling of comfort and security I felt when it was done and I was surrounded by their heaviness and strength. Still, I don't know what it is or was that prompted my early attraction to order. Whether or not something is orderly is clearly a matter of opinion. Is the drawing AW-47 shown here orderly?



I would also include in this diverse genre of basic horizontal-vertical elements: scaffolding, porch lattices, auto grilles, fabrics and window screens as well as two-dimensional representations such as graph paper and the longitude-latitude aspect of maps. Nature itself creates lattices in molecular structure, seen frequently illustrated by the configurations of atoms of salts and minerals and the cellular structure of plants. Man-made grids and lattices, especially

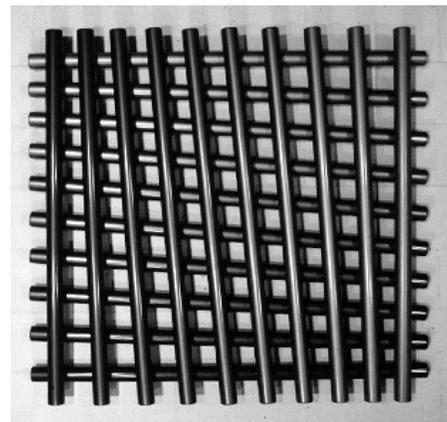
those whose roots are found in ancient cultures such as woven reeds and fabrics just seem to have evolved into being, not as a result of creative talent or necessity, but because of some simple and formative quality they possess.

I suspect that the most commonly held perception is that grids are mostly two-dimensional whereas lattices, with the added dimension of thickness, are generally more three-dimensional. An essential property of grids and lattices is the intersection or simple cross. The simplest form that meets the criteria for being a grid is the four-intersections figure formed by the crossing of four lines to make the familiar tic-tac-toe design and number designation: #. Crosses in their many forms and religious connotations are yet another group of grid-related icons that have remained an integral part of civilization into present times.

The horizontal-vertical format, of which the grid is a logical extension, was one of the first forms of minimalist abstraction. Piet Mondrian, in the twenties and thirties, exploited geometric schemes and, in doing so with his rectangles and bars, was one

of the first to touch on grid-like elements. Horizontal-vertical themes became hallmarks of later work by many abstractionists including Fritz Glarner, Victor Vasarely, Ilya Bolotowsky and Ad Reinhardt who, in the fifties like Mondrian, made squares and rectangles their own. One of the first painters to concentrate on true grids was Agnes Martin and it was her work in the early sixties that lead me to do a series of about 40 large line paintings called Fabric Works. Some of her paintings resembled enlarged versions of ordinary graph paper.

I like literalness and wholeness and it was at that time that I got interested in lines and the relationships between linear things and the space they define. There are certainly no rules about how to view grids and lattices but I suspect most people think of them as being horizontal and vertical with the x-axis and y-axis members perpendicular to each other.



Royal Party made in 1973 takes a size 47 by 47 inches and the general horizontal-vertical configuration characteristic of most of the works in the Color Tube series. All the tubes are two inches in diameter. (Left) **AW-47**, 16 x 12 inches, is from a series of experimental drawings called Companion Works, 1980.