

# THE LATTICE SYSTEMS SERIES

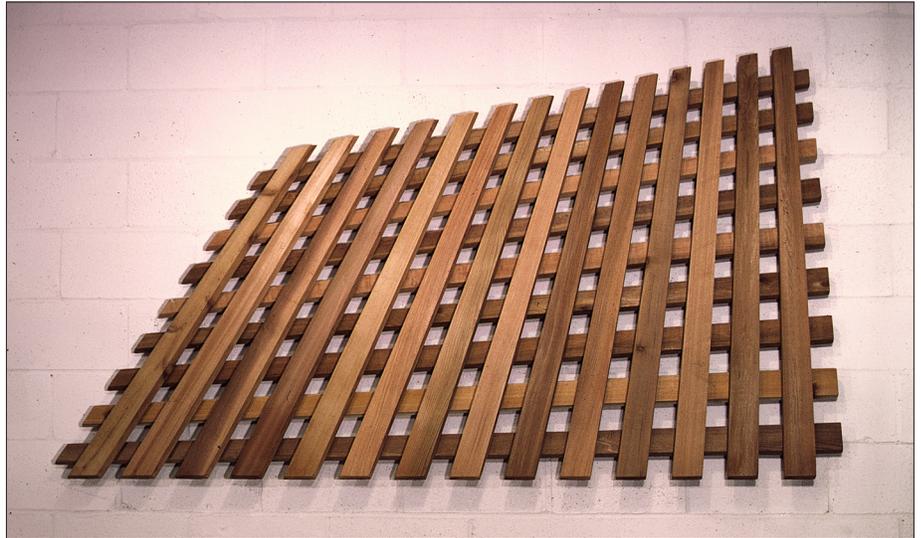
SCULPTURAL  
GRIDS—A MIX OF  
THE OBVIOUSLY  
SIMPLE AND THE  
INORDINATELY  
COMPLEX

By Mike Shaffer

The design and nature of the Lattice Systems series came along around 1975 after I had made a number of fairly regular grids in the Color Tubes series. Like that series done in metal tubes, all of the works in the Lattice Systems series are viewed hanging on the wall and, with the exception of the first work in the series, all done in various kinds of painted and unpainted wood. In working with the tubes, I was pretty much limited, for mechanical reasons, to two or maybe three layers. By switching to wood, I was able to make grids with more layers and more complex shapes and configurations. I generally think of them as being networks or lattices because they seem to be too three-dimensional to be just grids.

One of the concepts I wanted to work on was the use of layered grids situated on top of each other (in front of—as seen by the viewer) but off-register—where one layer is slightly out of alignment with the others. Several of the works in the series exhibit this quality but I felt that for this kind of effect to be adequately evident, I would have to use color, most likely painting some of the elements to make them readily discernible from one another.

After making a few works with the off-register idea, I became enamored with another variation on the grids and lattices theme—an illusionary effect, a configuration that made the



***Hey Day* measures 89 x 40 x 4 inches and is made of unfinished white cedar; it was exhibited at Washington Project for the Arts in Washington, DC in 1975. Tapered toward the top and left, this work was photographed straight on from its center, but appears as if it is leaning backward. All works in this series have the word “day” as part of their names.**

“grid” appear to be warped or leaning toward or away from the plane of the wall. I noticed while working with the uniform-width tubes earlier that some of them appeared to not be flat against the wall when in fact they were. I also found that the illusion was noticeably enhanced when the width of the crisscrossing elements, in addition to the spaces between them, were gradually tapered from one end to the other. The visual effect is dramatic especially works that begin to take on architectural proportions. The effect is somewhat analogous to the converging image produced by a close-in camera looking up at a tall building—where the buildings seem to be leaning in toward the center of the photo.

A few works in this series are large and or heavy. One such memorable work measured six by eleven feet and in 1983 I had to cut it into halves when I moved into my new studio where it is still in storage.

One of the most fundamental configurations for grids and lattices is the simple horizontal-vertical crisscrossing theme seen in a number of works, many made with lath. These networks of sometimes crooked and jagged strips contrast violently with the slick works similarly configured in the earlier Color Tubes series and illustrate how ruggedly organic and nature-like lattice structures can be.

Lattice and grid-based work as variable as snowflake designs has become ubiquitous at the hands of Mondrian, Martin, Bourgeois, Baselitz, Lewitt, and many others working since the glory days of minimalism and op art and it pervades architecture, design, advertising, fashion and the craft arts today.

On an emotional level, I think of the strength and order of lattice and grid systems as being representative of considerations that might bring peace and quietude to the present-day violent and chaotic world. ❖