

THE TOWERS SERIES

OBJECTS OF
LENGTH STACKED
INTO LOG CABIN
AND HOUSE-LIKE
STRUCTURES

Mike Shaffer

The earliest works in the Towers Series, started in 1975, are made of unpainted wood. Later I began to paint them at times with mediums that contained sand or other materials to give the surfaces granular or lumpy textures, a practice that carried over to the Line Paintings. Some are made with damaged and recycled wood that has protruding nails or “pre-attached” hardware. A few small works contain recognizable objects such as large match sticks and pencils or rolled materials like paper. Some have box- or block-like bases.

I have always been attracted to spires and tower shapes and while some with analytical intentions may see phallic resemblances, I doubt that that kind of influence is real. The crisscrossing theme is pronounced in the series, maybe even characteristic, but the format is not covered as extensively as it is in a separate group called the Log Cabin series designed to specifically examine that feature starting in 1994.

While not a classical or even a common shape for sculpture, the idea of a tower is fairly straightforward. I am not inclined to do work that resembles straight-up vertical post-like towers such as Brancusi’s “Endless Column” first set up in Romania in 1937 or some of the tall pole-like towers by Barnett Newman and others. Just about any object, sculpture or otherwise, that rises well beyond its base can be a tower. Works by Snelson for example, are more in line with the configurations I find engaging.



Most works in the Towers Series are made of found or reclaimed wood painted with acrylic mediums. Left to right are *House Tower Ten*, 65 x 18 x 18 inches, 2005; *Sky Blue High*, 50 x 19 x 20 inches, 1980 and *Palm Balm*, 39 x 11 x 11 inches, 1990. The format also includes large-scale public art projects, models and installations but the Towers Series as such is limited to medium-sized standing works for indoor display.

One of the qualities of work I am concerned about relates to surfaces and boundaries—the varied outer periphery—the peaks and valleys formed by the protruding ends of the solid elements jutting out into the surroundings and the relationship between the ends of the hard blocks and the voids located around them. It is as if there is a deep relief to the boundary where the rigid objects and the soft (air-filled) spaces of the inside meet the emptiness of the area outside to form what might be called “extreme texture.”

Another characteristic of this work might be called “porosity”—to me a reflection of the work’s openness, determined by the density of the thicket of crossing pieces. The challenge to me is to create work

with elements that are not so close together—so dense, that the work begins to look like a solid form or so spread apart that it looks sparse or totally un-tower-like and loses the continuity of its boundary. Of course to illustrate these situations, I have to make a few here and there that are outside of the preferred limits I have set. The concepts of stacking, order, repetition and process are involved in these works too, and for my purposes, speak to the more abstract concepts of rhythm and pattern.

Since I started the series, I have gravitated toward the use of brighter colors because they affect the visibility of the peripheral area I am concerned about and because they add a bit of visual excitement and drama to the whole approach. ❖