

Barbara Heath is a conceptual jeweller and sculptor based in Brisbane. For over three decades she has created personal jewels for her – sometimes described as obsessively – loyal client base. She also creates work to exist ‘off the body’ in the form of architectural commissions, sculptural pieces and public art projects. The themes explored in her work translate seamlessly across works of varying physical scales. Her work is held in the State Library of Queensland’s artist book collection, and was the subject of the Queensland Art Gallery exhibition, ‘Jeweller to the Lost’.

After studying gold and silver-smithing at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Heath worked in Sydney for ten years as a jeweller and retailer. In 1987, four years after establishing a studio practice in Brisbane, Heath ventured to New York to study contemporary jewellery at Parson’s School of Design. This was a significant period within her development. Less than five years later she created a manifesto, defining her aims as a jeweller and artist, and reflecting the philosophies that underpin her practice. It is telling that this declaration of intentions is still as applicable today as it was when first written.

Capturing the essence of a person or place is central to Heath’s practice. She is drawn to objects filled with sentiment, history and meaning. She says, ‘I have always been attracted . . . to the strangeness of an object from another time . . . The patina of age; the mystique; the charm of the redundant.’² Just as language evolves and changes over time and through use, Heath believes that an object shifts in meaning over time from one owner to the next.³ Her work is imbued with narratives and symbolism. It evolves over time by being ‘worn and worn down’.⁴

Heath regularly undertakes collaborative projects with her partner, designer and collector, Malcolm Enright. This practice was formalised in 2003 by the merging of their operations – Jeweller to the Lost and Urban Archaeology – to form a single business front. In 2008 they were commissioned to produce *Two x four x eight* for the Ipswich Art Gallery Collection in response to two historic Ipswich houses, MONA COTTAGE and THE CHESTNUTS.

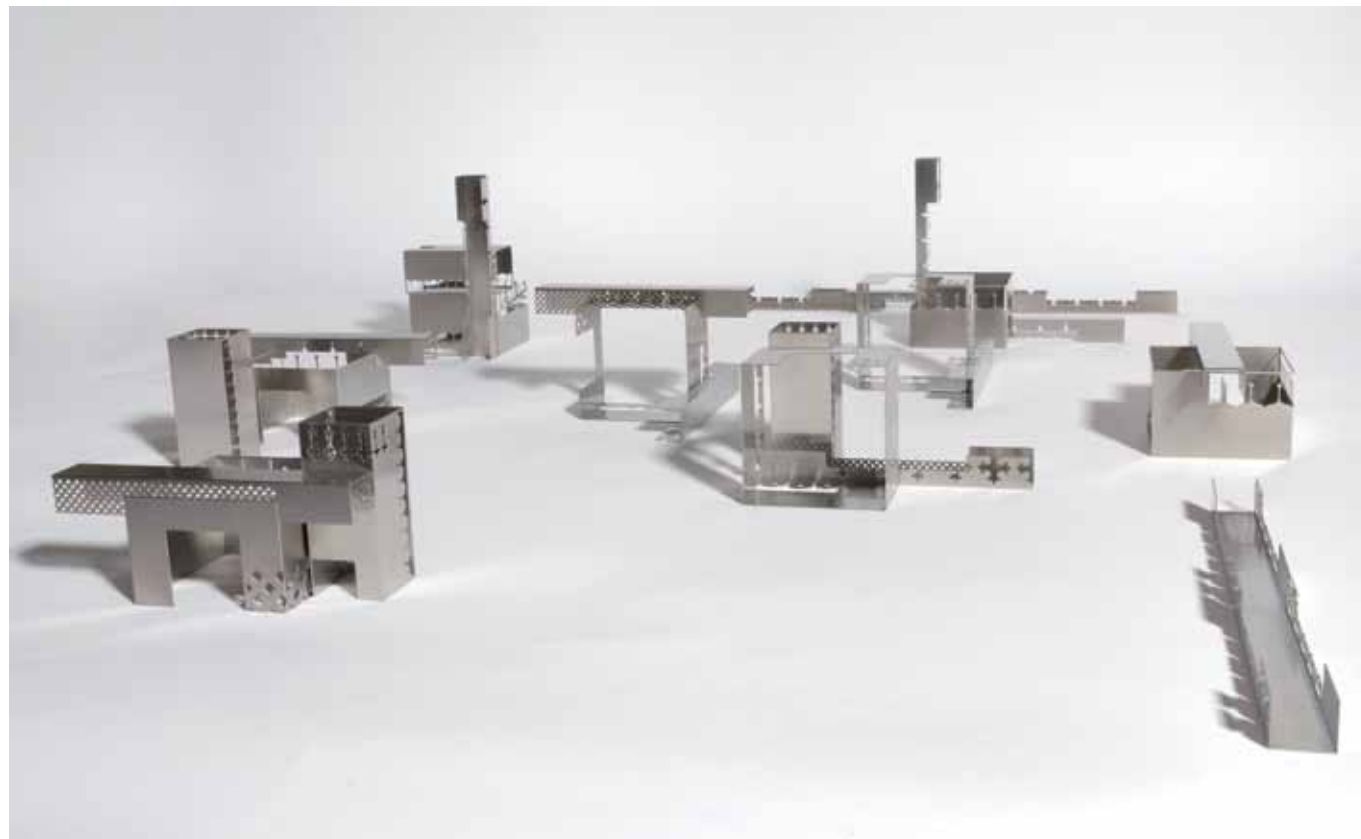
BARBARA HEATH The work references the universal forms and specific patterns of historic Queensland architecture by grouping three simple units into a series of relationships. Each unit is perforated with patterns derived from two historic Ipswich houses, MONA COTTAGE and THE CHESTNUTS. The patterned perforations like their architectural prototype, imply both protection and barrier; they define permeable boundaries that permit light but also cast shadows. Urban transition is imagined; by adding and subtracting, re-aligning, inverting, re-grouping. Shifted patterns cast their familiar text through past, present and future.



THE CHESTNUTS & MONA COTTAGE

BARBARA HEATH

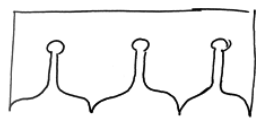
Barbara Heath in collaboration
with Malcolm Enright
Two x four x eight 2008 (detail)
Stainless steel, dimensions variable
Ipswich Art Gallery Collection, 2008



Barbara Heath in collaboration with Malcolm Enright
Two x four x eight 2008
 Stainless steel, dimensions variable
 Ipswich Art Gallery Collection, 2008

mona cottage

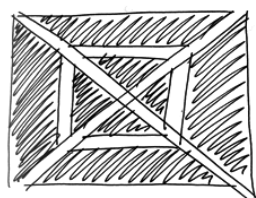
the chestnuts



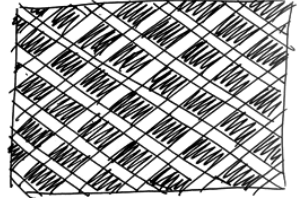
mona



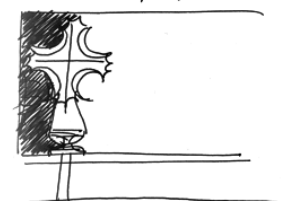
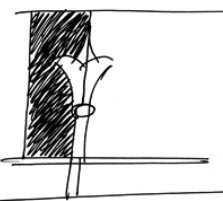
chestnut



mona F



chest N F



Preparatory sketches by Barbara Heath. The artist selected three architectural elements from each house. These were then translated into the designs that perforate the sculptural steel structures.



Chestnuts date unknown
 State Library of Queensland,
 neg no. 22098

MONA COTTAGE and THE CHESTNUTS are located on adjacent allotments near the peak of Denmark Hill in Ipswich, Queensland. The land was originally purchased in 1858 for £75 by Mr Thomas Brew Lyons, a watchmaker and jeweller of Brisbane Street, Ipswich. Monna Cottage was built in approximately 1863. It housed various tenants and was used as a private school for many years by Mrs Mary Darnley Morrison, who previously taught in Ellenborough Street. It was advertised in 1875 that Mrs Morrison had enlarged her establishment and employed an assistant in preparation to receive a few more boarding and day pupils.

In 1885, Mr Lyons subdivided the land and built THE CHESTNUTS on the higher block. Soon after he sold both properties to Mrs Morrison. Economic circumstances forced Mrs Morrison to sell MONA COTTAGE at the turn of the century, however she lived in THE CHESTNUTS until the time of her death in 1928. Since that time, both houses have had a series of owners and tenants.

Comprised of fourteen stainless steel structures, based upon three fundamental designs, *Two x four x eight* is formed by grouping the structures into a series of relationships. Patterns, inspired by the architectural features of the two houses, perforate the otherwise smooth steel planes. When placed side-by-side the patterns combine to form new layered designs, producing a kaleidoscopic effect.

Two x four x eight references the universal forms of historic Queensland architecture. The perforated structural planes blur the boundary between the interior and exterior, reflecting the tendency of Queensland architecture to engage with its environment, largely evident in the iconic verandah, often enclosed with lattice. Such permeable boundaries paradoxically permit light and cast shadow simultaneously. This underlying duality is implicit in the work.

Two x four x eight is by no means limited to a single, static composition. The work may be formed by any arrangement or re-arrangement of the structures. This echoes ideas of urban transition. By adding and subtracting, re-aligning, inverting and regrouping structures, innovation and renewal take pace over time. The original and historical is respectfully combined with the contemporary. Harmoniously, the work brings the past into alignment with the present and future.

The changeable form of *Two x four x eight* reflects the various functions the houses have performed over time. Form follows function, spaces shift to accommodate new uses and requirements. Accordingly, all elements within the structure are continuously relevant. The ability to adapt the existing and transform it into something new is emphasised by the work. *Two x four x eight* represents an ongoing process of renewal.

JADE WILLIAMSON

- 1 Phrase coined by Margie Fraser in 'Off the body' in *Barbara Heath: Jeweller to the Lost* [exhibition catalogue], Queensland Art Gallery, 2005, pp.17-19
- 2 Barbara Heath in conversation with Ian Were, published in *Barbara Heath: Jeweller to the Lost* [exhibition catalogue], Queensland Art Gallery, 2005, p.23
- 3 Id., speech for exhibition launch, 'Token Love: Contemporary Amulets of the 21st Century', Craft Queensland, Brisbane, 8-23 February 2005
- 4 Amelia Gundelach 'Barbara Heath's manifesto: the language of jewellery' in *Barbara Heath: Jeweller to the Lost* [exhibition catalogue], Queensland Art Gallery, 2005, p.5