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**Christina Waterson's sculptural cardboard installation was a hit at last year's Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Queensland chapter) dinner. Stephen Crafti speaks to her about the influence of art and architecture in her work.**

# Site Specific

Text  
Stephen Crafti  
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Christina Waterson wears several hats: an architecture graduate, a designer and an artist. "I've always thought of myself as an artist first," says Waterson, who has been making things for as long as she can remember. "I feel most content when I'm working with my hands."

Waterson has been oscillating between art and architecture since graduating in architecture from the University of Queensland in 2005, where she received the top graduate award, a prize that included placement with Cox Rayner Architects. Her decision to focus on her art practice was initiated by a design conference, held at the Bay of Fires in Tasmania (May 2007). "That week away gave me a chance to reflect on where I was headed. I've always had an art practice, but now the focus has changed," says Waterson.

However, even before graduating in architecture, Waterson worked in public art management, securing a position with the Queensland Art Gallery. Working as an exhibition designer with the gallery for four years gave Waterson the opportunity to look at design

in a broader context. "My work has always been materials based. I've always seen architecture as a form of art," she says.

Waterson's designs involve complex structural weaving in a variety of scales. Re-cycled materials, cardboard, stainless steel, plywood and polypropylene are all fashioned into sculptural forms. Some of these forms end up as lighting, both floor and ceiling, while others may appear as a brooch. And often, the one design can be both.

For last year's Royal Australian Institute of Architects (Queensland Chapter) dinner, Waterson worked with Cox Rayner in creating a large installation that would provide an architectural canopy over guests. Measuring 20x30m Waterson's sculptural forms covered the dining area in the grand ballroom at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre. Made of cardboard, each form took the shape of a Komodo dragon. Waterson also made 450 brooches in the same design for guests. "I've always liked the idea of making something and giving it to someone. Design should linger beyond an event," she says.



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Waterson's 'Arrays' have become her signature. The stacked and woven polypropylene can appear as small as 500mm in width, length and height. These arrays can also be substantial with many of the same units repeated. "I love the way light falls onto these forms, as well as piercing them in unexpected ways," says Waterson. "The shadows are as intriguing."

Like the architects she most admires, Zaha Hadid and Frank Gehry, Waterson makes a model before drawing. "I tend to get bogged down in detail if I start with a drawing. I prefer documenting after I have something in my hands to work with."

One of the pleasures for Waterson, whose designs are always site specific, is seeing how her installations, screens and lights transform a space. A woven screen made of plywood or plyboo (a combination of bamboo plywood) can appear as a feature wall or be used to guide people through a space. "Folding a surface in a particular way immediately suggests a certain direction," she says. The result is a combination of art and architecture with true creative force.

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01 'Peter' light, 2002  
02 RAlA installation during construction  
03 RAlA installation  
04 RAlA installation, stage view