

Joan

L I V I N G S T O N E

Limits of Capacity

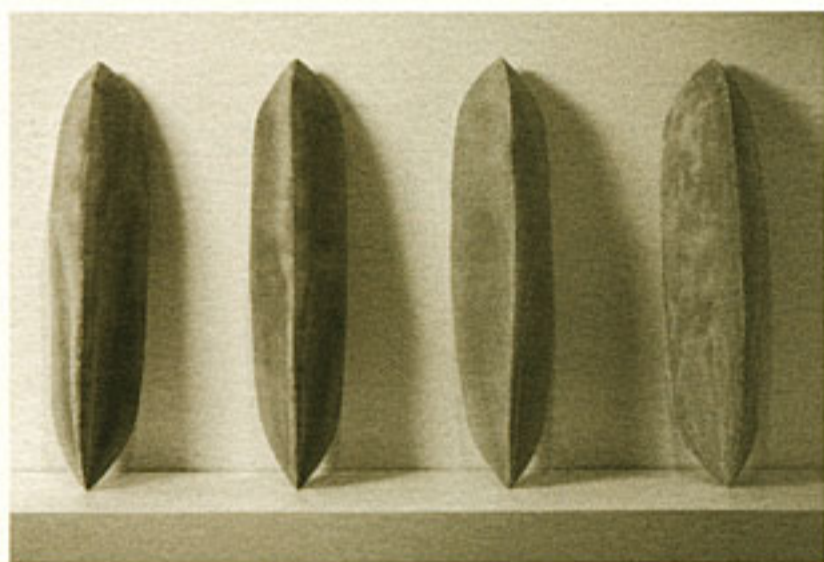
Dennos Museum Center

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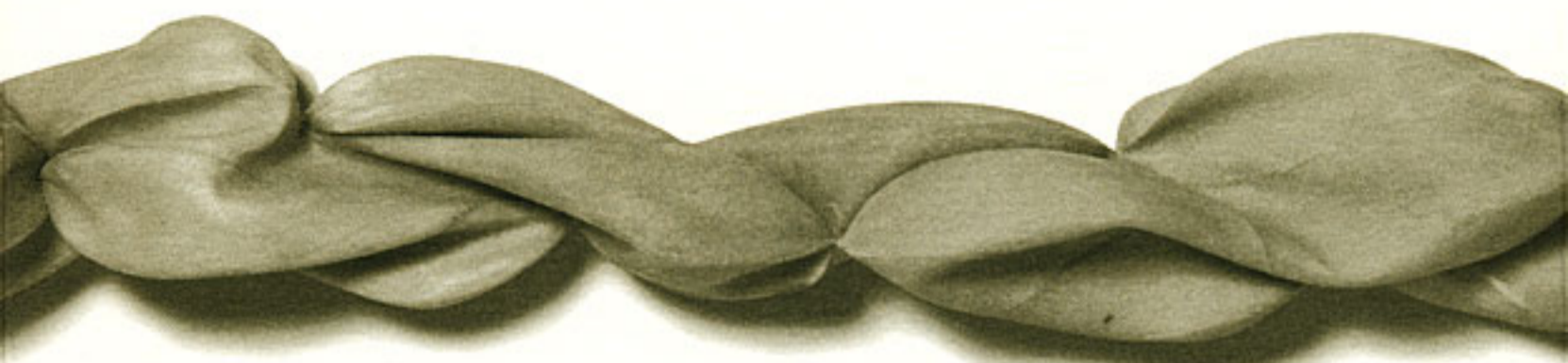
Limits of Capacity addresses the primacy of form and the relationship of exterior edges to interior spaces. *“When something reaches its limits, it can either expand or contract: the edge defines the limits while the interior reflects the capacity,”* she notes. In this she views her work as a metaphor for a full range of human attributes encompassing the physical, intellectual and emotional. A recent trip to India stretched her personal perception of endurance, forcing her to question the outer most edges of capacity from one culture to another. Examining

the relationship of form to content, she draws the analogy between physical form and emotional tolerance. Commenting on the subject Livingstone remarks, *“We all have limits, particularly in terms of understanding. In our society, we do not deal very well with issues of sex and death as is*



Sirens 1990
Felt, suture thread, stain, epoxy resin
30" x 48" x 9 1/2"
Private collection

evident in our attitudes towards AIDS, cancer and other diseases. On the other hand, in a culture such as India, people are faced with horrendous issues of basic survival and still manage to live a full and awakened life. As a culture, we have a tendency to shut things out, yet, issues of struggle, difficulty and challenge, build spirit, deepen compassion and allow us to become.”



Uma 1990
Felt, suture thread, epoxy resin,
24" x 87" x 26"
Private collection

Livingstone exhibits a profound sensitivity in her work, challenging traditional notions of beauty, relationships, and the tensions made manifest in the examining process. *"There's a way of bringing awkwardness into beauty,"* she says. To this end she searches for beauty in the imperfect, suggesting that something seemingly repulsive can be beautiful.

"Fragility and vulnerability - those things can be beautiful. They reveal a sense of intimacy and sensuality, the things that make us human," she adds. Her work explores the place in one's self where we are sometimes afraid to go - a place of discomfort, of fear, of sacredness, of beauty - and in doing so, brings out the mystery in the human spirit.

□ Livingstone's choice of medium rests in the service of her ideas. At the forefront of the Craft movement in its expanding role in the early 1970s, she explored the characteristics of fiber, discovering that the binding relationship between material and process echoed a cultural history of women's work, that of labor intensiveness. Livingstone's labor intensive process underscores her search for order.

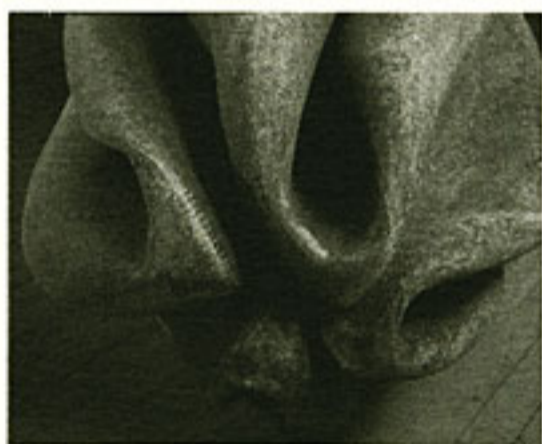


Bellows II 1992
Felt, suture thread, stain, epoxy resin
29" x 36" x 16"
Private collection



Spine 1995
 Felt, suture thread, epoxy resin
 10" x 110" x 9"
 Collection of the artist

Patterns and long strips of industrial or hand-made felt, bound tautly together by strong, regularized stitches create an underlying geometric structure and form. Suspended within a cage-like frame and saturated with an epoxy resin, Livingstone manipulates the hollow form, creating an organic, undulating entity mirroring the dualities of human existence and vital life forces. She exploits this alternative methodology to reflect her experience as a female, as



Uma (detail) 1990
 Felt, suture thread, epoxy resin
 24" x 87" x 26"
 Private collection

well as expands the realm of sculptural concerns. Livingstone is inspired by such artists as Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois and Joseph Beuys who move beyond their training in Minimalism to express multi-layered, multi-faceted personal and cultural experience. In doing so she has developed a language that encompasses self, family, life and process, that now defines her medium.

□ With the human presence inherent in her work, Livingstone has set up a

dialogue among forms, alluding to conversation, communication and relationship, which perhaps, leads to transformation and evolves to transcendence. *"They could be rearranged and take on a new life,"* she adds. Not only keenly aware of the relationship of one form to another, but also the connection to the greater whole, Livingstone likewise speaks to the conditions of sculpture, that of forms interacting with and defining space. She perceives sculpture as a measure of one's self, adding, *"As we encounter sculpture, we share the same physical space with the object and relate to it on a one to one basis."*



Breathing Lessons (detail), 1994
 Felt, suture thread, pigment,
 epoxy resin, varnish
 54" x 102" x 12" (overall)
 Collection of the artist

Livingstone's sensibilities grew out of the rugged and beautiful Oregon landscape where she exhibited a strong interest in nature, focusing on the transformative process of botanical forms. Coming of age in the 1960s led to her experiences in agitprop street theatre. It was those inventive and self-reliant conditions which propelled her into the art world. Her interest in the material of felt began with a personal study of the history of textiles. That a garment could carry a

record of life, intrigued Livingstone. From the worn and constantly repaired robe of St. Francis of Assisi, to the costumes of shamans, Livingstone began to investigate objects made of felt in other cultures. Discovering the pliable and draping qualities of cloth that could both conceal and reveal, she understood its integral relationship not only to the body, but its ability to achieve an apotheosis and become the body. Hence, the conditions of life -breathing, taking in air, expanding, filling to capacity and oozing out. □ **Limits of Capacity** brings together a large body of work from 1990 to 1998 and reflects a growth, a thinking process, and perhaps, prefigures her next body of work which suggests a transgression of these limits.

—Jacqueline Shinnors, *Curator*



Livingstone Studio Works in Progress
 1998, Cast felt, suture thread, stain, rubber, epoxy resin, pigment, metal, sacking cloth, plaster

Joan Livingstone lives and works in Chicago, Illinois and is a Professor at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She most recently has been awarded the 1998 Virginia A. Groot Foundation grant to return to India to pursue her research in sculpture.

(on the cover)

Seeped I & II 1997-98

Felt, suture thread, dye, epoxy resin, pigment, metal, cord

(overleaf)

Spew 1995

Felt, suture thread, stain, pigment, epoxy resin, varnish, 40" x 45" x 9"

Collection of the artist

(photography credits)

Uma, Sirens, Spew, Livingstone studio-works in progress and Breathing Lessons —Lewis Toby
Bellows II —Jerry Kobylecky and *Spine* —Bill Bachhuber

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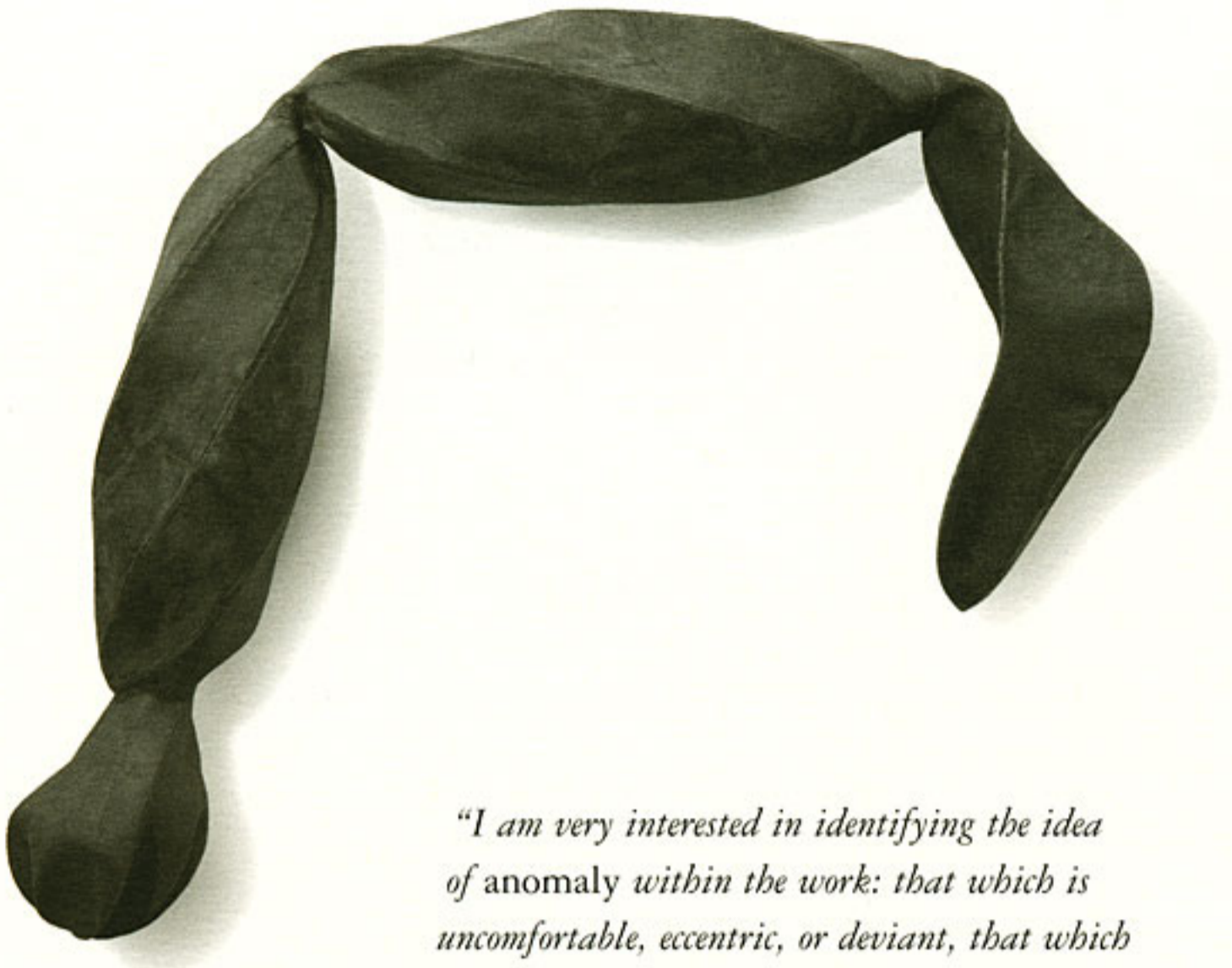
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Eugene Jenneman, *Director*

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"I am very interested in identifying the idea of anomaly within the work: that which is uncomfortable, eccentric, or deviant, that which associates startlingly conflicting features while at the same time remaining oddly, and uncannily familiar." –Joan Livingstone

Set within the context of contemporary thought,

Joan Livingstone's work investigates the complexities

of life through a dialogue of forms that question the

disjunctive nature of human beings, and the need

to bring together disparate elements to create a

cohesive, coherent and connected body, mind and

soul. Her anthropomorphic forms parallel the

expanding and contracting qualities of our-

selves as we evolve and come to know who

we are within the greater cosmos.