



Migrations

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Imagine the map as the skin of the earth. It is a wrapping that is removed, unfolded from the globe's mass, smoothed out and laid open to view. Its topographical surface makes a tattoo across the parchment, inscribing the planet's identity in a drawing on its skin.

Now imagine the skin as the map. It is the document that houses physical and psychic territory, its surface recording the nomadic body as the boundaries grow and shrink, constantly undergoing displacement and relocation. This map would reveal what coursed beneath. The subtle fissures on the surface are the result of a shift in the emotional plateaus, and the smooth striations are the typography of physical stress and rupture.

Joan Livingstone's new "Migrations" are drifting skins. These reconstructed, unlocatable fragments have coasted towards the edge, leaving a smooth, blank canvas on which to rebuild and reinscribe; a palimpsest that is more self-healing than self-obliterating.

They are a disclosure. They are maps laid open to view and spread across the wall like personal trophies. They reveal where the interior has been - what realms it has traversed and what domains it has erected - and how those migrations have affected change. They are in the act of transformation however, their fragments not at fixed locals, but still journeying to the boundaries.

These skins are housings loosened from their frames, whose pulsing interior is absent but implied by a complex assemblage of appendages. If the skin protects and negotiates the contents for the observed and the observer, these reassembled sheaths both reveal and conceal the ductwork, hinting at what has been both necessary to operate and what has been cosmetic by choice.

Goethe described the human being as having "many skins to shed before he is even somewhat sure of himself and of worldly things." Livingstone's "Migrations" finds the human body as capable as that of the reptile's shedding or molting and the hermit crab's abandoning and reinventing: a life cycle where the tired is replaced, recycled and regenerated.

Livingstone's sculptures are sensuous organs, their abstractions borrowing as freely from the human form as they do from plant life, geometry and the internal, functional frameworks of architecture. Past work has addressed the capacity of the body as container, and the stress on the membrane as it begins to give way to seepage. Her forms raise questions about the permeability of the self, the boundaries imposed upon it by nature and the imagined or constructed boundaries we assemble for ourselves. Through investigations of the exterior form, interiority and now, the membrane between the two, Livingstone maps the body in motion, leaving it open to permutation through resisting the definition and imposition of borders.

Shannon Stratton, independent curator, critic and artist; May, 2004, Chicago.