



*variable quantities*

Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, Or  
January 4-27, 2001

Sybaris Gallery, Royal Oak, MI  
September 9-October 21, 2000

James Yood

Materials. They're the first and just possibly the final frontier of art. Materials are not merely raw substances to be transformed by an artist into some other thing, nor are they stuff to be altered forever out of themselves and into the neutral realm of art. Materials are art's vocabulary, its vernacular language, its DNA. Joan Livingstone's sculpture makes me think of a lot of things, but I always return to its physical presence, its *thereness* and insistence on intrinsic palpability. There is almost a psychological compulsion to touch her works, to feel their heft, to have fingertips explore surfaces that somehow sight alone cannot circumscribe. Touch, but not caress—there is a rawness in Livingstone's work, and a power that always takes me just beyond that point where words and vision might suffice.

Livingstone clearly has tremendous respect for her materials, more than enough to take them very seriously. She pinches and pulls, stains and folds, turns and collapses, ceaselessly subjecting her stuff to thoughtful permutations that to us finally seem inevitable and organic (they are neither). Ruminations about *the body* are often the central strategy used to consider Livingstone's work, but I would opt for deeper consideration of another art term, *process*. That's what I regularly come to, the thought of her in the studio,

submerged amidst materials, trying to wreak a satisfying gesture out of an infinity of possibilities, to make materials somehow congeal into attentive and allusive form. It was not a surprise, for example, that for much of Livingstone's career color seemed a tangential issue, to be dolloped out rather reservedly. This is an artist of shapes and substances, of, to speak of a specifically Chicago tradition, the subtlety and *gravitas* of artists such as Martin Puryear and Richard Rezac, though touched by a biotic earthiness those artists do not usually assay.

Livingstone's recent work is both a sumptuous departure and arrival. While molding and adhering had long been her central activities, her newer process of casting epoxy resins affords her with a new investigation of sculptural form. The funnel and tube shape is wonderfully manipulable by Livingstone, but at its core it provides a remnant and residue of a physical process. Lots of associations run riot here, not limited to intimations of the vessel and the dictates of gravity. This technique also invites Livingstone to indulge in new and more sensual approaches to color, and to the creation of specific parts that can take on endless variety through strategies of installation. It provides Livingstone another arena in which to investigate materials, to test their possibilities and examine their interrelation, and, as she has always done, to expand visual interest by sensitive and thoughtful sculptural intervention.

**James Yood**

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