

Beverly Buchanan

1978 - 1981

The essay "Beverly Buchanan's Constructed Ruins," by Lowery Stokes Sims, was originally published in conjunction with the solo exhibition "Beverly Buchanan: Recent Sculpture" at Heath Gallery in Atlanta, Georgia (September 19-October 14, 1981). It is reprinted here with permission by the author. The untitled poem by Alice Lovelace, originally included in the artist's book "Shack Stories (Part I)" (1990), is previously unpublished and printed here with permission by the author. This edition is independently published by a non-profit press.

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Beverly Buchanan

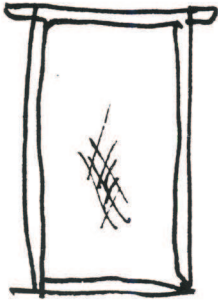
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ARTISTS SEE THINGS OTHERS DON'T.
(OR WAS THAT AN X-RAY MACHINE)



MIRROR



MIRROR WITH FLOWERS
AND FRUIT

Beverly Buchanan's Artist

Park McArthur and Jennifer Burris Staton

Beverly Buchanan's *The Artist—A Visual Journey* is a small book made up of a series of drawings and personal aphorisms, five of which are used as subheadings in this essay. Photocopied and spiral-bound, the work tells us that there is always another option to being an artist: artist or skilled professional, artist or machine, artist or animal. This illustrative articulation of how artists constitute their everyday choices puts questions of social utility to work, so much so that the attempt to articulate the difference between the perceptiveness of an artist and that of an X-ray machine is found in the distinction between a mirror alone and one before which fruit and flowers have been laid. In a 1993 interview with Marcia Yerman for the New York City cable series "Women in Art," Buchanan orients this understanding of vocation to her personal history, saying:

I had an opportunity to go to medical school. I was devastated because I said no. At the time, I thought that I really ruined it for other black women. Then I thought the best thing that I can do for myself is to try to do what I want to do, and be the best that I can be at that. In spite of health problems and money problems that happened early, I said: "I'm still going to do this, because nobody's asking me to do it."¹

Buchanan's will towards art occurred, as it does for many people, against alternative career paths, the art world's structural inequality, and familial expectation. This book focuses on two connected bodies of work made between 1978 and 1981: the years in which she decided to fully commit to a life as an artist.² In the summer of 1977, following a ten-year career as a public health educator in the Bronx and East Orange, New Jersey, Buchanan exhibited a selection of what would later be called her *Frustula* sculptures at Truman Gallery on 38 East 57th Street. Jock Truman, the gallery's founder, was a former director of Betty Parson's Gallery and had a reputation for looking at work by emerging artists.³ Encouraged to visit him, Buchanan was immediately accepted into the gallery's upcoming "New Talent Show:" her name written in blue ink on the invitation card alongside the other twelve artists' names in print. Following this initial exhibition, Truman became Buchanan's dealer and influenced her decision, at age thirty-seven, to leave public health in order to focus exclusively on her work as an artist. Three years later, in 1980, Buchanan received a Guggenheim Fellowship to create a large-scale public artwork in the Marshes of Glynn in Brunswick, Georgia. It was only then that her adoptive mother, Marion Buchanan, stopped saying, "Beverly's the health educator for the city of East Orange," and starting saying, "My daughter is an artist."⁴

Women in Art: Interview between ^①
Marcia Yerman and Beverly Buchanan (video-recording), edited and produced by Marcia Yerman (New York City Time Warner Cable System, 1993). Original video footage was digitally migrated by the New Museum's 2013 *XFR STN (Transfer Station)* initiative, with permission from Yerman and Buchanan. This program is now available to download via the Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/xfrstn>.

Buchanan is better known for ^②
her representational sculptures and photographs of Southern single-story, wood-frame shack structures—also called shotgun houses or shanties. Resonating with the West African griot tradition of storytelling, these architectural renderings tell the stories of the people who inhabit them, and are often titled after individual residents. While inextricably influenced by Buchanan's later engagement with domestic architecture as cultural and economic metaphor, this book focuses on her earlier work: abstract or minimalist forms that predate her inhabitable structures and homesteads.

Prior to his career as a ^③
dealer, Truman studied art at Harvard's Graduate School of Design under Josef Albers, Hyman Bloom, Naum Gabo, and György Kepes.

Eleanor Flomenhaft, "Shack ^④
Portraiture: An Interview with Beverly Buchanan," in *Beverly Buchanan: ShackWorks*, ed. Eleanor Flomenhaft (New Jersey: The Montclair Art Museum, 1994), 12.

Artists see things others don't (or was that an x-ray machine)

Buchanan was born October 8, 1940 in Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina when her birth mother, Irene Rogers, was interrupted on the way to the State Fair in Raleigh. As Buchanan tells it, she just decided (in utero) not to ride the Ferris wheel.⁵ Her parents' subsequent divorce encouraged the extended family to move Beverly to her great-aunt and uncle Marion and Walter Buchanan's home on the campus of South Carolina State University, where Walter served as Dean of the School of Agriculture. Each summer she would travel from this adoptive home in Orangeburg, South Carolina to visit Irene in Lillington, North Carolina.

⁵ Ibid., 9.

In this way, Buchanan's childhood took place primarily on the college campus of South Carolina State University: making use of chemistry laboratories and carpentry workshops, appropriating found objects and materials like test tubes, Petri dishes, pieces of glass, and scraps of wood into small compositions. She also frequently accompanied Walter on his visits to the homes and workplaces of tenant farmers across South Carolina.⁶ A state agricultural agent in addition to a Professor and Dean, Walter advised farmers on crop care and rotation. He describes his experience visiting these farmers' homes in his 1929 Master's Thesis "Economic and Social Conditions of Negroes as Tenants and Farm Laborers in South Carolina" as follows: "it is easy to see the ground through the cracks in the floor and the moon and stars through the housetops and the sides... In winter these houses cannot be kept warm. It matters not how much fire in the fireplace, keeping warm on more than one side is not feasible so rapidly does the cold wind rush in."⁷

⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁷ Walter May Buchanan, "Economic and Social Conditions of Negroes as Tenants and Farm Laborers in South Carolina" (MA thesis, Ohio State University, 1929), 28-29.

These early experiences affected Buchanan's formal inclinations as an adult. In describing this connection, her friend Jane Bridges states, "Beverly has strong recollections of two things that are connected, here, in my book: one, you loved to collect rocks and you'd put them in your pockets and go home and you'd hold them out to your parents and you realized they saw nothing of the unusual or wonderful things about them that you saw. But, they didn't dissuade you. And two, you would draw pictures in the ground with sticks."⁸ In the spaces of the University as well as the rural landscape of the American South, Buchanan began to call the small rocks she found her art. Gathering them from one site and placing them elsewhere, these stone piles served a "functional" purpose. In her words: "If I see some rubble, my thought is, 'Let's see, now where in Georgia could that go?' I immediately claim it. Psychologically, it's mine."⁹

⁸ Jane Bridges and Beverly Buchanan. Conversation with Park McArthur. Personal interview. Ann Arbor, 18 September, 2013.

⁹ Ibid.

Walter died when Buchanan was in the sixth grade, and Marion — a school principal — became her primary caregiver. An experimental gardener with a particular bent towards Catholic school and the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Marion wanted a doctorate in the family. Adhering to this desire, Buchanan received a bachelor's degree in medical technology from Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1962 before moving to New York to pursue a master's degree in parasitology and public health at Columbia University. Following her graduation in 1969, she worked as a medical technologist for the Veterans Administration in the Bronx and as a public health educator for the East Orange Health Department in New Jersey, focusing on best practices for childhood vaccination, breastfeeding, and birth control.

Artists don't like galleries (they are usually too weak to stand in line to be rejected)

While working with communities throughout the greater New York City area, Buchanan also began to take painting classes at The Art Student's League on West 57th Street. It was here that she met Norman Lewis: a painter who drew a sharp distinction between his formal investigations in color-field, hard edge, and minimalist painting and his outspoken political activism. The older artist became a close friend and mentor; Buchanan would housesit for Lewis and his wife, Ouida, over the weekends, taking care of their mynah bird named Romy. In addition to Lewis, Buchanan was deeply influenced by the representational collage work of Romare Bearden. Attending a Dizzy Gillespie concert at Alice Tully Hall and buying a poster that Bearden designed for the David Frost Jazz Series, Buchanan unintentionally followed him into the men's bathroom at intermission. Bumping into Lewis while backing out of the bathroom, Buchanan managed to introduce herself to Bearden by way of telling him, "I loved your work even before I knew that you were black."¹⁰

These connections led to Buchanan's first opportunity to exhibit in the city. In 1969, along with the self-defined realist painter Ernest Crichlow, Lewis and Bearden founded the Cinque Gallery in an effort to redress social, racial, and economic inequality in New York's art world. In an unpublished interview with Crichlow entitled "When that Time Came," he describes the collaborative venture's mandate:

We were concerned about the fact that most of our work was being bought by non-blacks and we thought, "Gee, wouldn't it

Women in Art: Interview between ¹⁰
Marcia Yerman and Beverly
Buchanan (video-recording),
1993.

be nice if we had a little place where we could sell stuff at prices that black folks could afford?"... So we went and thought about this some more. And, we said, "If we're thinking about this, it must be even more of a problem for artists who are just trying to get off the ground!" So we thought we should use our influence to start a gallery where younger artists could show without having to pay any rent [as they would have to in a co-operative gallery] or commissions [as they would have to if they sold their work through a private dealer or a commercial gallery].¹¹

¹¹ Ernest Crichlow, "When That Time Came/II," n.d. Private Collection of Camille Billops and James Hatch, New York, N.Y.

Named for Joseph Cinque, the leader of an 1839 mutiny on the slave ship *Amistad*, the project was started with an initial grant of thirty-three thousand dollars from the Urban Center at Columbia University combined with in-kind support from Joseph Papp's Public Theater in Soho, which offered the start-up exhibition space without charge. The gallery's policies were explicit: artists were only responsible for transporting their work to and from the gallery; 100% of the sales price went directly to the artist; and the gallery covered all costs related to publicity, catalogues, opening events, and installation. Other self-enforced limits included no more than two shows per artist and a focus on practitioners younger than thirty. Each founding director worked for free during the gallery's first eight years and their approach was open door: "no artist who comes to Cinque Gallery is ever completely ignored. If, for instance, a young [sic] shows talent, but does not appear to be ready for a one-man, or one-woman exhibit, we try to use such artists in group shows."¹²

¹² Romare Bearden, Ernest Crichlow, and Norman Lewis, "Ten-year anniversary mission statement," c.1979. Cinque Gallery Papers, Romare Bearden Foundation, New York, N.Y.

Buchanan's first New York exhibition was in one such show at Cinque Gallery in May 1972, which also included work by Kenneth Anderson, Kenneth Fordan, Louise Parks, Frank Sharpe, and Fern Stanford. In December of that same year, Cinque's founding directors decided that she was ready for a solo show as well — unique circumstances arrived at "when the young artist has shown sufficient development."¹³ Another notable show for Buchanan during this time was a 1976 group exhibition at The Montclair Art Museum in New Jersey, where she exhibited her abstract paintings. Curator Lowery Stokes Sims describes the transition from this initial approach to her three-dimensional castings as follows:

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Lowery Stokes Sims, "Home is Where the Heart is: Beverly Buchanan's Shack Sculpture in Context," in *Beverly Buchanan: ShackWorks*, ed. Eleanor Flomenhaft (New Jersey: The Montclair Art Museum, 1994), 33.

The work she produced...showed indeterminate color shifts and mottled surfaces, which re-enacted the erosion on urban surfaces caused by time, weather, and pollution. Sometimes called the "City Wall Paintings," they are exemplified by *Black Wall Painting* (1977) and *Black Walls* (1977). The paintings evolved into relief works in textured paper, and, by the late 1970s, to fully developed sculptural works.¹⁴

Artists always live with a cat (cat food tastes better than real tuna and is cheaper)

Frustula is a title given to these cast concrete works by Jock Truman (a nomenclature Buchanan later adopted) for her first solo show at his gallery in 1978. Evolving from her initial focus on abstract expressionism, developed when studying with Lewis and Bearden, Buchanan began to construct multi-part sculptures using cement bricks, achieving surfaces similar to the rough look of her paintings. In her artist's statement about this series, reproduced in full in this book, she explains:

Often, when buildings are in a state of demolition one or two structural pieces (*Frustula*) stand out that otherwise never would have been "created." This state of demolition presents a new type of "artificial" structural system that by itself (its un-demolished state) would not exist. These "discards" or piles of rubble can be pulled together to form new systems.¹⁵

The photographs in the first part of this book represent sculptures from Buchanan's solo exhibition at Truman Gallery as well as related works that were never publicly exhibited. At present, the sculptures' locations are unknown and the photographs are housed in Buchanan's personal archive in Ann Arbor, Michigan, as well as in her artist file at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Photographed by the artist, these black-and-white images capture work making its entry into the world: the concrete rectangles' dust leaving traces on the wooden floor, the white canvas duct backdrop framing rough contours. Accompanying this series of images, many shown here for the first time, is a short text written in 1981 by Buchanan's longtime advocate Lowery Stokes Sims. Titled "Beverly Buchanan's Constructed Ruins" and previously published in support of Buchanan's solo exhibition at Heath Gallery in Atlanta, which traveled to Georgia from Kornblee Gallery in New York (the gallery that briefly represented Buchanan following the premature closure of Truman Gallery in 1979), this essay outlines the material process and symbolic associations of Buchanan's work.¹⁶

Although primarily fabricated in Macon, Georgia—where Buchanan moved in 1977 to teach art at Stratford Academy—the *Frustula* series was conceptualized during Buchanan's time in the Bronx and East Orange. These works figure late-twentieth century social and economic histories of upper New York and northern New

Beverly Buchanan, "WALL
FRAGMENTS – Series Cast in
Cement," 1978. Frances Mulhall
Achilles Library, Artist File,
Whitney Museum of American Art,
New York, N.Y.

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Directed by pioneering dealer
Jill Kornblee, the 79th Street
gallery also represented
artists Rackstraw Downes, Janet
Fish, Dan Flavin, Al Hansen,
Howard Hodgkin, Mon Levinson,
Michael Mazur, Peter Phillips,
and Richard Smith.

16

Jersey in their minimal structures. Starting with found bricks that she deployed as molds, Buchanan cast each form using a mixture of cement and rocks ground into powder for pigmentation. This intense physicality of process produced a rough texture integral to the work. As she explains in a letter to Betty Parsons dated October 12, 1980:

I'm going back to using old bricks for molds because I think I'm beginning to get a "slick" look in my work and I don't want that. Using cardboard boxes was easier and I could pour more pieces simultaneously but it won't work. I hate a slick look and I was starting to lose the ancient look of stone, I think. So, it will take me longer and the work is physically more demanding but I'll do it. Saw a notice of your show in Alabama; I've sort of decided to stay out of Alabama.¹⁷

¹⁷ Beverly Buchanan to Betty Parsons, 12 October, 1980. Betty Parsons Gallery records and personal papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸ An excellent essay by Kat Griefen details Mendieta's involvement with A.I.R. Gallery from 1977 to 1982. Curators Lucy Lippard and Lowery Stokes Sims—both of whom have repeatedly advocated for Buchanan's work—were also involved in this project. See: Griefen, "Ana Mendieta at A.I.R. Gallery, 1977–82," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, 21:2 (July 2011): 177–181.

¹⁹ Carrie Rickey, "The Passion of Ana," *Village Voice*, 10 September 1980, 75.

²⁰ Ibid.

In September 1980, the Cuban-American artist Ana Mendieta organized a group exhibition at A.I.R. Gallery on 97 Wooster Street with fellow artists Zarina Hashmi and Kazuko Miyamoto.¹⁸ This exhibition, titled *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*, is described by Mendieta as an effort to point "not necessarily to the injustice or incapacity of a society that has not been willing to include us, but more towards a personal will to continue being 'other.'"¹⁹ Three of Buchanan's *Frustula* sculptures were included alongside works by Senga Nengudi, Selena Whitefeather, and Howardena Pindell (among others). Images of two of these works are reproduced in this book; the third is a four-part sculpture titled *Wall Column* (1980) in the permanent collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

In a *Village Voice* review of the exhibition, critic Carrie Rickey articulates—in her view—a discrepancy between the exhibition's sociopolitical "affinity" and its formalist predilections. She writes:

Despite Mendieta's avowal of otherness, most of the work here extols the phenomenological, the lyrical... Witness Beverly Buchanan's cast cement bricks, which are tinted with an admixture of iron oxide and acrylic paint, exuding the red earth color of Buchanan's native Georgia. Hers is a very sophisticated procedure for making what appear to be primitive artifacts, her sculptures having the excavated look of brick shards arranged evocatively, like the rocks at Stonehenge.²⁰

In contrasting the phenomenological with a critique of social marginalization, Rickey misses the point. The strength of both Buchanan's work and Mendieta's curatorial proposition lies in the

extradition of the phenomenological—experience in or of the world, which ultimately shapes what that world becomes—away from mythologies of objectivism and towards social constructions of gender, race, and class. By expecting the political to announce itself as subject or object, critiques such as Rickey’s (titled “The Passion of Ana”) fail to recognize the nuanced complexity of form, in which intensely subjective histories grounded in the politically-informed worldview of the artist are manifest through minimal or abstract techniques. In other words, this review articulates via negation the subtle power of Buchanan’s work.

Artists have large hands (or is it plumbers)

Similar to Mendieta’s earthworks, which are inextricably tied to specific geographic locations, be they Oaxaca or Iowa, the “where” of Buchanan’s sculptural precision requires the combination of a historian’s knowledge and an activist’s desire with an architect’s attunement.²¹ Buchanan articulates this process as follows:

I did a piece somewhere in Orangeburg, somewhere in my hometown. It’s probably overgrown now because it was just spontaneous. I stopped the car and I had some stones in the car, actually looking for a place to put them. And I saw this site that for some weird reason I thought could be part of a graveyard. It’s not, but it was there—an industrial area that had recently hired black men. And that had never happened before and I wanted something there to commemorate that without having a big giant sign that said “We finally hired some black people!” So I took the stones I had in my car and made a little pile there. But I didn’t put a sign.²²

In 1979, the Museum of Arts and Sciences in Macon, Georgia commissioned a public sculpture from Buchanan. Calling this work *Ruins and Rituals*, she placed it across three separate sites on the Museum’s property as well as its surrounding environment. One of her seven known site-specific earthworks located across the Southeast (Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida specifically), *Ruins and Rituals* was made using a similar process as the *Frustula* sculptures: a laborious cracking and grinding of organic material found at the site to create pigment mixed with concrete and cast in molds. In her 1983 book *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*, writer and curator Lucy Lippard describes the work as follows:

Aside from Mendieta, another artist who elicits comparison to Buchanan is Robert Smithson. Like Buchanan, Smithson’s experience with the urban and suburban environments of New Jersey grounds the materialization of his work, which he discusses in a 1969 text “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey.” The two artists also share a fascination with a long view of time. Preoccupied with entropy as a potent symbolic and material force—the “cosmic rupture” of lost past and distant future colliding—Smithson’s sculptural formulation of “site” and “non-site” resonates with Buchanan’s vision of ancient ruins in everyday rubble.

Buchanan. Conversation with Park McArthur, 2013.

23 Lucy Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* (New York: The New Press, 1983), 33.

This is the first, public part of a three-part work, the forms of which recall unburied tombs or giant reliquaries. The second part is private, hidden in the woods nearby and intended only for the searching audience. The third is still smaller, and totally personal; it was buried in a river by the artist... All of her works might be read as an archaeology of the levels of consciousness.²³

So evocative of a graveyard that Buchanan thought of calling the sculpture *Southern Comfort*, this dispersed monument to unknown individuals is anchored by invisibility: the majority of its parts abandoned in unknown woodlands and sunk in the Ocmulgee river.

In 1980, while still living in Georgia, Buchanan was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to produce *Marsh Ruins*, a multi-part sculpture for the Marshes of Glynn outside the town of Brunswick. Throughout that year and the following, she refined her plans and acquired the government permits needed for construction. Working with local concrete manufacturers as well as an installation team, Buchanan started to create concrete forms on top of which she applied tabby concrete, painting each mound by hand. Moving past her earlier use of ground stone as patina and pigmentation, Beverly's choice of tabby as a core material for *Marsh Ruins* embeds specific political and historical (in addition to geographic) narratives in the artwork itself: that of the relationship between settler-colonialism and slavery in the American Southeast. An amalgamation of shells, sand, and water, tabby gains its durability from the ingredient lime, which manufactures the binding component of concrete. Brought to the Americas by Spanish invaders in Florida and British invaders in South Carolina and Georgia, this ancient construction technique bypasses the need for clay brick or felled timber. Although there are few limestone deposits in the low-lying Southeastern coastal marshes, there were, at the time of European colonialist expansion, copious oyster shells left in neat heaps by the Timucua people. These shells—layered after years of oyster roasts—provided an accessible source of extractable lime.

The process of constructing tabby from shells, like the process of casting sculptures from brick molds, is labor-intensive. First cleaned of salt to prevent corrosion, shells are crushed and burned over fire, transformed through heat into crumbling lime particles that are then mixed with sand, water, and the remaining crushed shells. This mixture—poured and set into wooden braces—makes shapes and stackable bricks of all kinds. Constructed from inexpensive and locally sourced materials, and materialized through the collective labor of slaves, tabby was used to build houses and walls on 19th century plantations in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

Buchanan's decision to use this material for *Marsh Ruins* speaks to the lost social histories of indigenous people, material economies of slavery, and the flow of early cosmopolitan trade, travel, and expansion: the open fires of Timucua oyster roasts fueling the smoking lime pits of West African slaves and European plantation owners centuries later. Today, *Marsh Ruins* sits submerged in Georgia coastal waters. Its surface is clearly weathered, broken by large cracks that reveal layers of dirt, rocks, concrete, and tabby. Anticipating the sculpture's erosion, Buchanan chronicled the entire scope of its construction. She photocopied and bound these notes and photographs into a narrative that she then sent to the Guggenheim Fellowship Committee. This document is reproduced in full in the second part of this book. Including permits from the Georgia Marshlands Protection Committee and the Department of Natural Resources, the booklet pairs a fragmented narrative with images organized chronologically. It begins on Tuesday July 14, 1981—"Day before work begins. Site is 'empty'"—and ends in November of that year with photographs of the newly-made and ever-sinking "ruins." In a 1982 interview, she explains this choice of terminology by saying: "a lot of my pieces have the word 'ruins' in their titles because I think that tells you this object has been through a lot and survived—that's the idea behind the sculptures. . . it's like, 'Here I am; I'm still here!'"²⁴

Judith Wilson, "Coming of Age: (24)
Look at Three Contemporary
Artists," *Essence* (May 1986),
122.

Artists like to be alone

In the introduction to *Overlay*, Lippard describes her interest in pre-historical forms as stemming from the fact that they are fundamentally unknowable: subject to speculation, mystery, and myth. Ancient narratives linger as stones left in circles, in mounds, in spirals, and spanning axes—their ragged structures relaying a "social message from the past to the present about the meaning and function of art."²⁵ Throughout her book, Lippard extends this articulation of the relationship between site, signs or signage, and absence, landing on inquisitiveness:

Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary (25)
Art and the Art of Prehistory*, 1.

When I cross a moor on which no tree, habitation, or person is visible, and come upon a ring of ragged stones, a single rough-hewn pillar, a line curving away over a hill, a gently rounded mound or cairn of stones, I know this is human-made. I think neither of a boundless nature nor of gods or goddesses, but of the people who made these places. Art itself might be partially defined as an expression of that moment of tension when human intervention in, or collaboration with, nature is recognized. It is sufficiently compelling not to be passed by as part of

26 Ibid., 4.

27 Lippard, "Memory Made Modern," in *Honor Awards for Lifetime Achievement in the Visual Arts* (Chicago: Women's Caucus for Art, 2011), 6.

28 Flomenhaft, "Shack Portraiture: An Interview with Beverly Buchanan," 14.

29 Almost every page of *The Artist—A Visual Journey* includes a declarative sentence followed by the repeated question "or is that..." Together, these propositions notate some of Buchanan's lived concerns as an artist. This footnote includes the booklet's full text; each line received its own page and attending illustration, one of which is included on this essay's title page.

Artists have large hands
(or is it plumbers)

Artists can draw straight lines
(or is it architects)

Artists see things others don't
(or was that an x-ray machine)

Artists can go without water for long
periods of time
(or is that camels)

Artists like to be alone

Artists never go to the dentist
(they sell off their teeth to pay the
rent)

Artists always live with a cat
(cat food tastes better than real tuna
and is cheaper)

Artists don't like galleries
(they are usually too weak to stand in
line to be rejected)

"amorphous nature." One stops and asks oneself: Who made this? When? Why? What does it have to do with me? One of art's functions is to recall that which is absent—whether it is history, or the unconscious, or form, or social justice.²⁶

It is this sense of the absent—manifest through formal and conceptual affiliation—that Buchanan's sculptures engage; her work plays in a space between legibility and concealment. For instance, the original description of *Marsh Ruins* was "a sculpture in tall grass [that] simultaneously blends with and enhances its coastal environment"²⁷ Blended enhancement as a tactic for complicating legibility recalls Buchanan's childhood preoccupation with the writing of her adoptive father:

Walter Buchanan had a series of strokes and before he died he started to write letters to his sister, Carrie, who was my grandmother. He was trying to say something to her that he considered very important. Some of the words were legible and some were in this kind of script that later I tried to imitate. At first I didn't see any relationship. I was just trying to get this overall textural thing and they were just these marks. But now they are important and I like to think I've created a conversational script... some of Walter's words—even though you couldn't figure out what the words were—some of the designs of the words you could call a scribble. And what I thought about in his scribbling was an interior image. It took me a long time to absorb that part of his writing into my work. I guess maybe I'm incorporating what I want to choose from his type of markings, condensed scribble versus not so condensed scribble or a combination of both. And I can also see the relation of his markings to sea grasses, the tall grasses, the marsh grasses that I paint.²⁸

The work and the ways of artists are often in need of defense: a play between risk and control in calling what one does art. The journey that Buchanan outlines in her work at large, as well as in her book *The Artist*,²⁹ is a shared social one: where the only thing that isolates artists is their pleasure in being alone, and even that trait stands to be challenged. Artists stretch against and through the traditions and omissions of objects, activities, ideas, and experiences qualified as art, brought into the world by other people identified as artists. This stretch is a question, over time, of how to make decisions towards art matter.





Frustula

1978 - 1980

The following images were all scanned from original prints: discrepancies in borders and shading reflect the originals. Grouped under the title *Frustula* in accordance with Buchanan's artist statement from 1978, the works include sculptures shown in gallery and museum exhibitions as well as those that never left the studio or home.











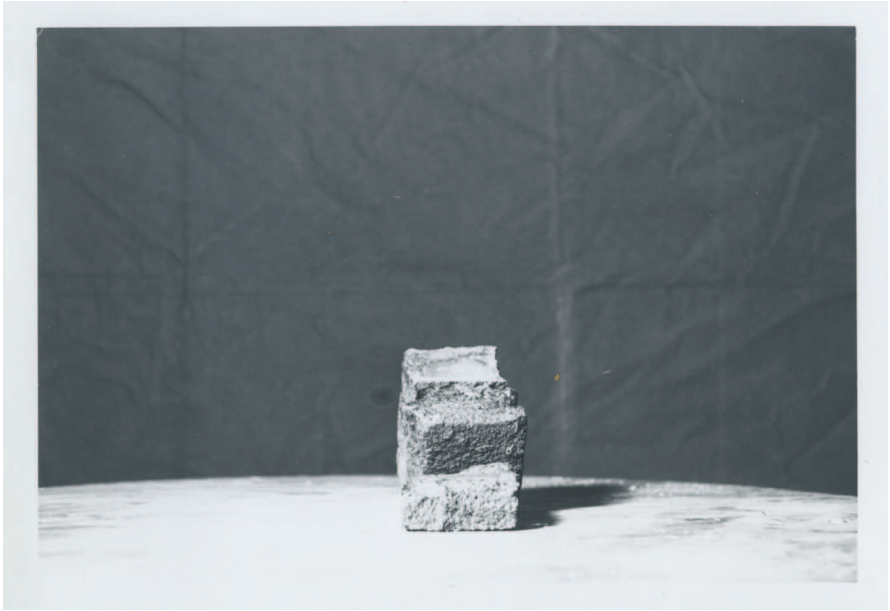


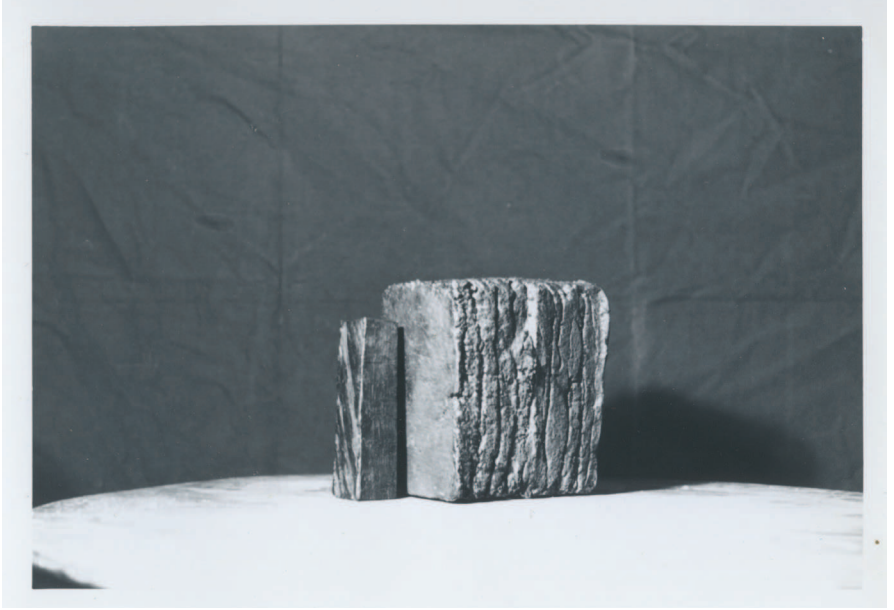






















ARTIST'S FILE

WALL FRAGMENTS - Series Cast in Cement

The entire series is called- "FRUSTULUM"- or fragments. Each piece of each fragment is cast, individually, in cement using brick as molds. The newer pieces incorporate steel forms within the cement. Each fragment is then cemented to other fragments and the structure, then, becomes-FRUSTULUM.

(An entire large wall piece could be called, FRUSTUMS or FRUSTULA. By definition, Frustum is a piece broken off; the portion of a regular solid left after cutting off the upper part by a plane parallel to the base; A portion of a fragment.)

Each piece is meant to stand alone and at the same time maintain its integrity; each one must support itself esthetically. My interest in walls involves the concept of urban walls when they are in various stages of decay; walls as part of a landscape. Often, when buildings are in a state of demolition- one or two structural pieces (Frustula) stand out that otherwise, never would have been "er ated." This state of demolition presents a new type of "artificial" structural system piece that by itself (its undemolished state) would not exist. These "discards" or piles of rubble can be pulled together to form new systems. These new systems are very personal statements to ~~and for~~ me. They are inspired by urban ruins but are created, "in my own image" by me, in concrete and painted with dark paint. Deceptively, they appear to be black. (One of My Dreams: To place fragments in tall grass where a house once stood but where, now, only the chimney bricks remain.)

The energy and strength of the inner wall is what I call "essence". The feeling or stance of the piece when viewed, either alone or in natural or artificial surroundings, is what I call the "presence" of the piece. Presence is superficial and temporary whereas Essence maintains its integrity and "self", permanently, regardless of surroundings.

Beverly Buchanan

**WALL FRAGMENTS –
Series Cast in Cement**
Beverly Buchanan

Composed on the occasion of her first solo exhibition at Truman Gallery in New York (September 8–October 7, 1978), this typewritten and signed artist statement is a concise articulation of Buchanan’s thought process behind her early cast concrete sculptures. The “dream” of placing fragments in tall grass anticipates site-specific work like the multi-part *Marsh Ruins*.

Marsh Ruins

1981

These scans of an unpublished report document, compiled by Buchanan for the Guggenheim Fellowship Committee, depart from the booklet's original composition in that they are shown as two-image rather than one-image spreads; any seeming incongruence in sequencing reflects this transition. The ghosting of images through a selection of the scans is an effect of the translucent paper used by Buchanan.





THE GEORGIA

COASTAL MARSHLANDS PROTECTION COMMITTEE

HEREBY ISSUES THIS

PERMIT

TO

Mrs. BEVERLY BUCHANAN

FOR

CONSTRUCTION OF A PARTIALLY BURIED SCULPTURE OF TARRY OVER CONCRETE TO ACHIEVE A LOOK OF ANCIENT RUINS. THE SCULPTURE WILL BE FREE FORM AND DESIGNED IN PLACE AT THE TIME OF CONSTRUCTION. ISSUED THIS 14 DAY OF MAY 19 81

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Use of Permit, Copy to: BY: *Fredrick C. M... ..*

Permit No. 131



Joe B. Tanner
COMMISSIONER

Robert J. Reimold
DIRECTOR

Department of Natural Resources

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
COASTAL RESOURCES DIVISION
COASTAL PROTECTION SECTION
1200 GLYNN AVENUE
BRUNSWICK, GEORGIA 31520
(912) 264-7365

December 29, 1980

Ms. Beverly Buchanan
578 College St. #5
Macon GA 31201

RE: Joint Application
Overlook Park near Back River
Glynn County, Georgia

Dear Ms. Buchanan:

This is to acknowledge receipt on December 16, 1980 of the following Joint Application materials:

1. Joint Application, undated, signed by Beverly Buchanan
2. Check for \$25.00 made payable to the Department of Natural Resources, dated 12-15-80
3. Statement of Intent, signed Beverly Buchanan, dated Dec. 15, 1980
4. Two black and white 14" x 11" photos showing the proposed environmental sculpture on site in marsh.

In addition to the above materials, you are requested to furnish this Department with a copy of the deed for the location site or letter from the owner granting you permission to place the sculpture on the site in the marsh. A map showing the exact location is also required. After review and site inspections of the proposed area, you will be advised if additional materials are required. When the date for the Coastal Marshlands Protection Committee meeting has been set and a place for the meeting is determined, you will be notified.

Sincerely,

Frederick C. Marland, Ph.D.
Director, Coastal Protection

FCM:mat

cc: Ms. Jenny Phillips
Dr. Robert J. Reimold

To: Dr. Frederick Marland, Director
Coastal Protection
Department of Natural Resources
1200 Glynn Ave.
Brunswick, Ga. 31520

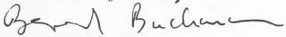
From: Beverly Buchanan, Sculptor
312 College St.
Macon, Ga. 31201

Date: May 4, 1961

Subject: Substitution of tabby material for sculpture

Request: Please attach notice of substitution to marsh permit application. This applies to no. 6, no. 12, no. 16A and 16B(2) lines on application, and also word CONCRETE is to now read TABB material on statement of intent.
Emery Enterprises of Brunswick, Ga. is the anticipated contractor for the project.

Thanks very much,


Beverly Buchanan



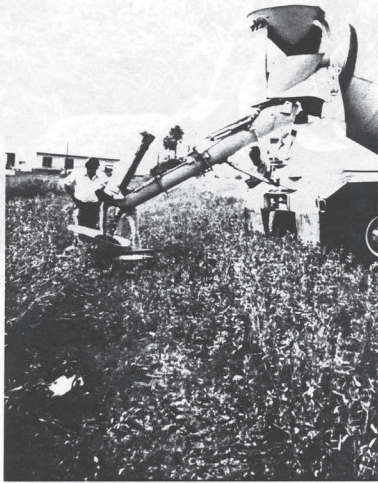
July 13, 1981
An hour crew guiding flow into
wharfbarrow. It's the only way
to get material down into the
marsh. The leader himself (Max
"Dory") watches developments.
Dory remains on site.

Day before work begins.
Site is "empty."
Tuesday July 14, 1981



Max Emery-Emery Enterprises

July 15, 1981
Concrete crew guiding flow into wheelbarrow. It's the only way to get material down into the marsh. The Leader himself (Max Emery) watches developments. Permit remains on site.



Concrete continues downward
into wheelbarrow.



Smoothing top of first
rock to allow for
more height.



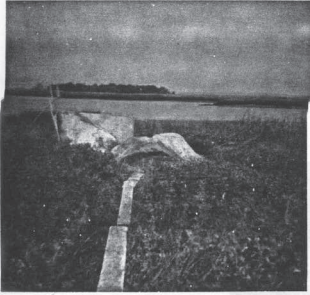
The start of rock-making; one load at a time.

Wednesday, July 14, 1981
Marshes of Glynn
Brunswick, GA

Hot is hot.



Smoothing top of first
rock to allow for
more height.



Wednesday, July 14, 1981
Marshes of Glynn
Brunswick, GA



Hot is hot.



Close-up of one support on largest rock.

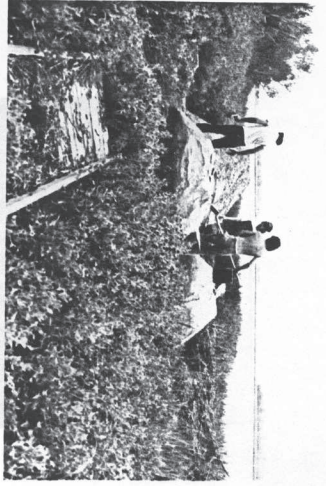


Coastal protection permit sits (stands) in front of partially completed sculpture.



Three rocks and support boards and narrow boards for hauling materials to area-minimizing damage to grasses (spartina) as much as possible.

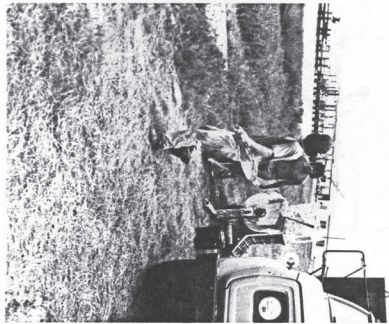
slabby being hauled from truck down to road



July 16, 1981 tabby crew - Carl with his hat.



Carl becomes possessive about this rock.



Tabby being handed from truck down to road.



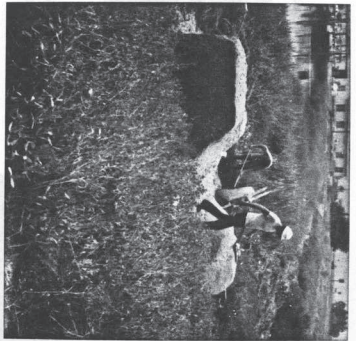
July 16, 1981 9:30 a.m.
Tabby Crew



July 16, 1981 9:30 a.m.
Carl adding tabby on "his" rock.



July 16, 1981
Putting on the labby

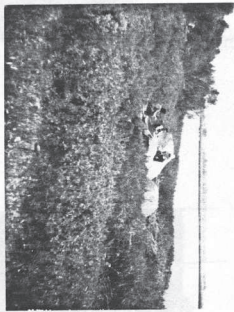


July 16, 1981
Carl (without hat) is really into the "rocks."
Names one for himself.

July 16, 1981
Shuttle and the museum is down



July 16, 1981
Shells are hot-sun is hot



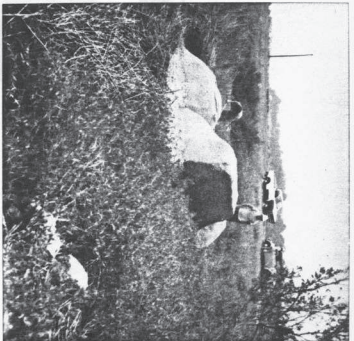
July 16, 1981
Taking a break



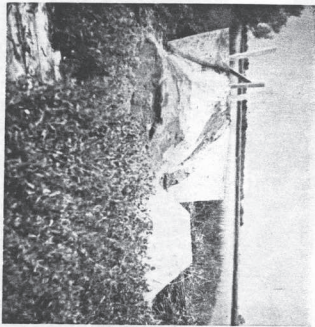
July 16, 1981
Marsh ruins



July 16, 1981
11:40 a.m.
My VW is behind tabby truck.



July 16, 1981
While backing up to take this photo, dolphins
gave me a scare. Dropped camera and ran
out of water for my car.

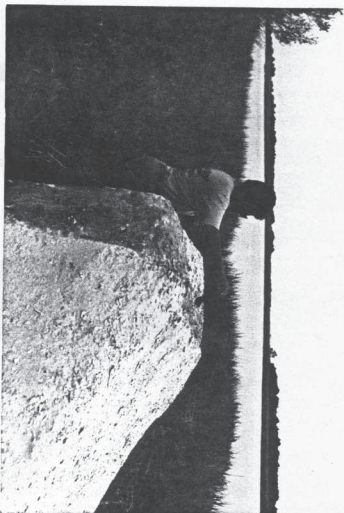


July 15, 1981
Rocks basking in hot, hot sun.

A hot day for hot rocks.

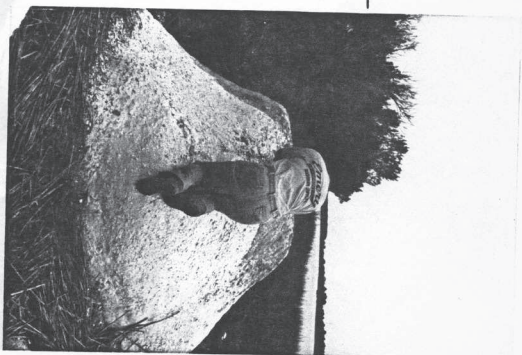


A hot day for hard work.



Why such a small brush?

Mixing paint



Wish I had a hat.

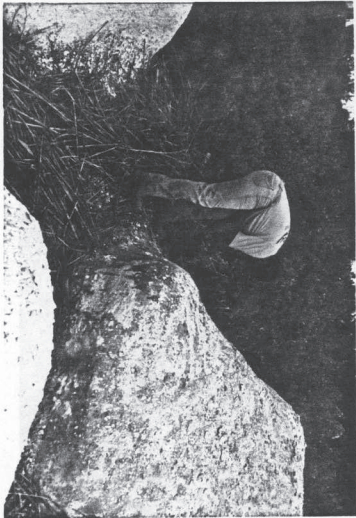
WHAT SHARK?



Mixing paint.



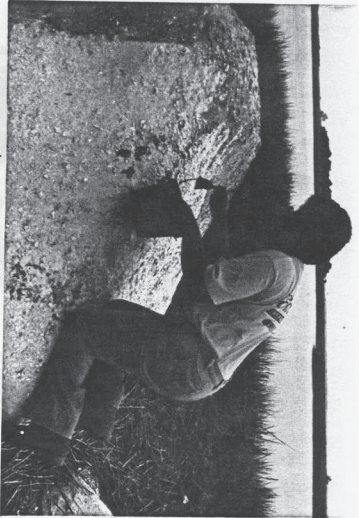
WHAT SHARK?



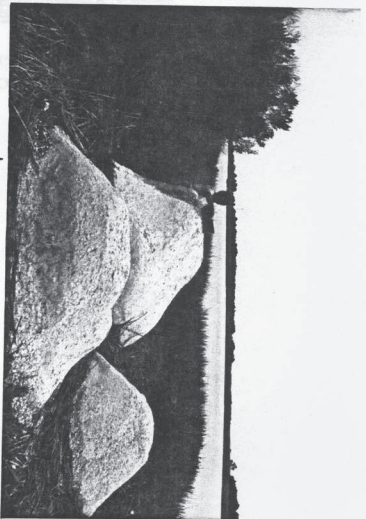
Two more to stain.
The person is on top.



Mixing stain paint.



This stuff is HARD.
Shells layered on top.



Sun shows no mercy.



Adding a little acrylic
color to rocks.

When used for a variety of
purposes, acrylic





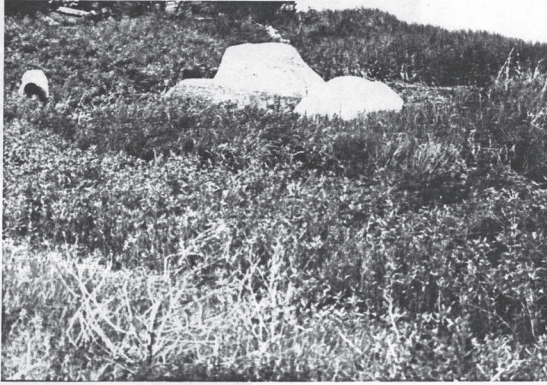
Painting marker.



Is there water or kua-aii here?

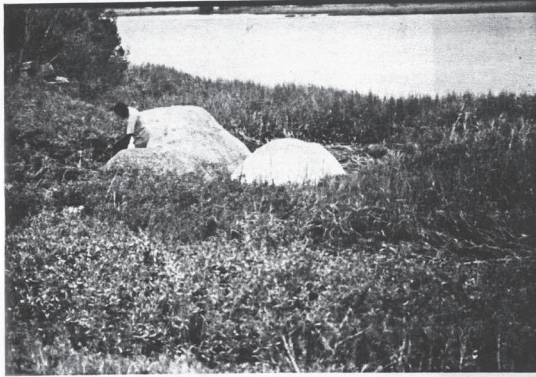


Wet head band courtesy of
Margaret Melton.



Is there water or kool-aid here?

Taking a Break

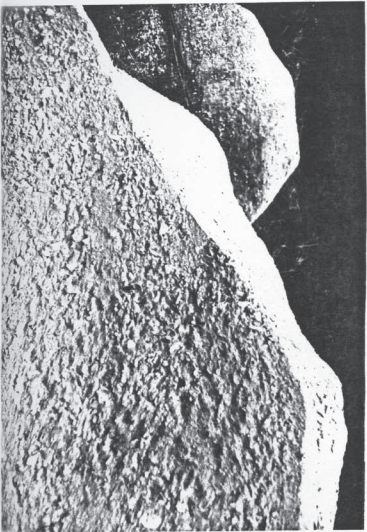


Taking a break.



Sun takes over.

Tabby-up close.



November 1981

• W • 187

Underwater



Marker

smaller pieces
underwater



November 1981

Marker Underwater



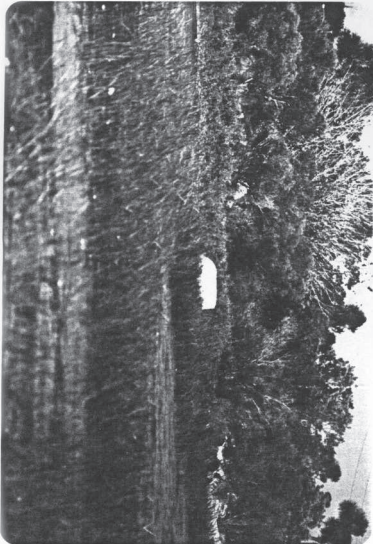
Two smaller pieces
underwater



Partially buried ruins...

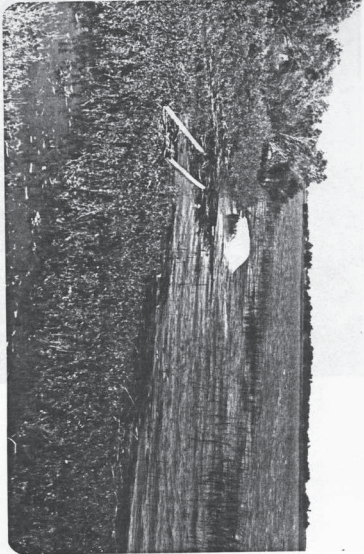


Dolphins must have had fun...

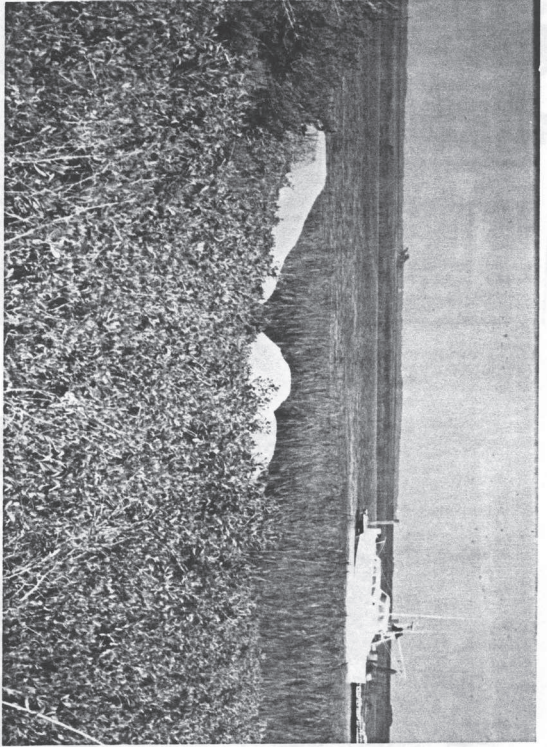




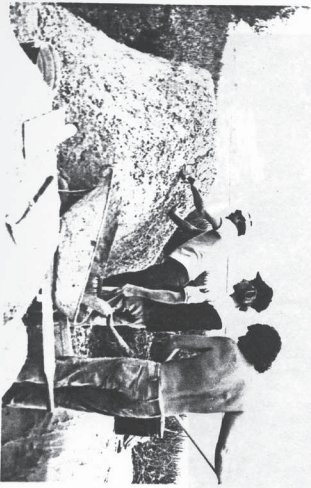
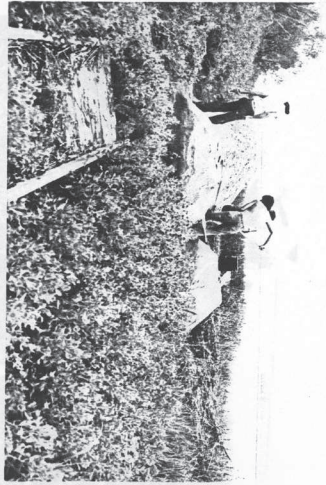
Partially visible ruins.

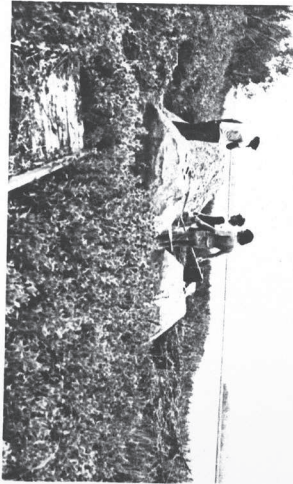


High water in Fall...



What's that over there?







Beverly Buchanan's Constructed Ruins

1981

This text was originally published in conjunction with Buchanan's solo exhibition "Beverly Buchanan: Recent Sculpture" at Heath Gallery in Atlanta, Georgia (September 19–October 14, 1981). Lowery Stokes Sims, the text's author, was at that time Associate Curator of Twentieth Century Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and also led the museum's acquisition of Buchanan's cast concrete sculpture *Wall Column* (1980) for its permanent collection. From 2000-2007, Sims served as Executive Director, President, and Adjunct Curator for the permanent collection at The Studio Museum in Harlem. Currently, she is the William and Mildred Lasdon Chief Curator at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York.

Beverly Buchanan's runes/ruins developed out of a long-standing preoccupation with decay and demolition. Initially, the artist's inspiration came from her observations of urban sites, and an early series of paintings ("Torn Walls") featured mottled surfaces which approximated the eroded back-end facades of turn-of-the-century buildings in New York. Buchanan then attempted to render these encrustations and eroded pockmarks by means of dimensional textured paper works. These, in turn, indicated a logical progression to sculpture.

While Buchanan's favored materials—concrete and tabby—literally reek of associations with the monumental urban aspirations of ancient Roman and modern empires, in the artist's hands these materials assume a more private, ritualistic cast. Buchanan's approach to her art is characterized by an adherence to specific processes carried out according to specified steps. Like the shaman/artist in New World and African cultures, who must constantly propitiate interested spiritual forces during the act of creation, Buchanan has discovered that any deviance from her own "traditional" methods will sabotage the final product. Thus old bricks must be used as molds. The pigment is produced from rocks which

must be searched out in the landscape, and then carefully cracked and ground down to powder. This pigment is added to the form at a precise moment so that it will weather when the piece is placed out-of-doors, and the precise formula of concrete, clay, and pigment has been combined carefully to enable them to maintain their cohesion. This process of permutation and transformation of materials from solidity to dissipation and then as recast solid forms conjures the magical quality of the art-making process which first captivated humans thousands of years ago.

Although Beverly Buchanan's sculptures are clearly contemporary, once located within a forest, or along a coastal marsh, they assume a more ancient presence and have often been associated with burial mounds of the Creek Indians which are part of the Georgian landscape.

Thus while Buchanan's sculptures grew out of a more temporal, ever-changing urban context, the imperceptible transformation to which they become subject in nature seem to defy the exigencies of our immediate history. By their very nature, they reassert Buchanan's—and our—affirmation of a continuity within evolutionary changes on this planet.

Shack Stories (Part I)

Alice Lovelace

In 1990, while in residence at The Arts Exchange in Atlanta, Georgia, Buchanan asked the organization's executive director Alice Lovelace to collaborate on a book in response to an open call from Flossie Martin Gallery: "Coast to Coast: A Women of Color National Artists' Book Project." A folk poet, performance writer, and arts activist, Lovelace also taught poetry in small towns throughout Georgia and Alabama. Together, they composed the artist's book "Shack Stories (Part I)." Taken from this original document, the adjacent image's interplay of text and washed ink is indicative of Buchanan's long-term interest in the relationship between language and sculpture, prose and drawing; the invitation card for her 1978 show at Truman Gallery, as example, includes a biographical poem by Charlotte Perkins.

TREKKING ALONG AN ALABAMA STREET
I DREG MY TOES THROUGH
FALLEN PINE CONES
WIRE GRASS
SAND
RED CLAY
LEAVE IMPRINTS TO ILLUSTRATE
MY PILGRIMAGE SOUTH
THINK OF LANGSTON'S DESIRE
TO COMPOSE A SYMPHONY
ABOUT DAYBREAK IN ALABAMA

image credits

All photographs were taken by Beverly Buchanan and are courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted. Many of these photographs exist as duplicates and are located in multiple archives; the image citations refer to the specific archive where permission has been granted. All titles and dates represent the editors' best knowledge of the material.

frustula



25

Wall Column, 1980

Three painted cast concrete sculptures with wood plinth

Dimensions unknown

Photograph courtesy of the Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Artist File, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, N.Y.



26

Slab Piece One, 1978

Cast concrete sculpture with acrylic paint

Dimensions unknown

Photo: Martin W. Kane

Previously exhibited at Truman Gallery, New York, N.Y. (1978) and A.I.R. Gallery, New York, N.Y. (1980)

Photograph courtesy of the Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Artist File, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, N.Y.



28

29

Wall Fragments (multiple views), 1978

Multi-part cast concrete sculpture with acrylic paint

Dimensions unknown

Previously exhibited at Truman Gallery, New York, N.Y. (1978)

Photographs courtesy of the Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Artist File, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, N.Y.



30

Wall Fragments , 1978

Three-part cast concrete sculpture with acrylic paint

Dimensions unknown

Previously exhibited at Truman Gallery, New York, N.Y. (1978)

Photograph courtesy of the Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Artist File, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, N.Y.



1

Self-portrait of artist with original paint marks, n.d.

Dimensions variable

Photographer unknown

Beverly Buchanan Personal Archive, Ann Arbor, MI.



6

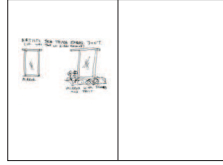
7

Beverly Buchanan's business card, n.d.

Laser print on yellow card stock

2 x 3.5 inches

The Hatch-Billops Collection, New York, N.Y.



8

The Artist—A Visual Journey (X-ray drawing), n.d.

Spiral-bound and photocopied artist's book

Edition size unknown

11 x 8.5 inches

Beverly Buchanan Personal Archive, Ann Arbor, MI.



20

21

Black-and-white photograph of woman in front of house, n.d.

Buchanan reprinted this archival image as a postcard that she then distributed. While the date and photographer are unknown, we can guess that Buchanan's adoptive father Walter (an amateur photographer) took it during one of his many research and advocacy trips throughout sharecropping communities in South Carolina.

Beverly Buchanan Personal Archive, Ann Arbor, MI.



32

Wall Fragments, 1978

Three-part cast concrete sculpture (including vertical slab) with acrylic paint

Dimensions unknown

Previously exhibited at Truman Gallery, New York, N.Y. (1978)

Photograph courtesy of the Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Artist File, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, N.Y.



34

35

Wall Fragments, c.1978-1980

Seven-part cast concrete sculpture with acrylic paint and red oxide

Dimensions unknown

Beverly Buchanan Personal Archive, Ann Arbor, MI.



36

37

Wall Fragments, c.1978-1980

Photographs of multiple cast concrete sculptures with cloth backdrops; shot in Buchanan's studio in Macon, GA.

Dimensions unknown

Beverly Buchanan Personal Archive, Ann Arbor, MI.



38

39



40 41

Wall Fragments, 1978

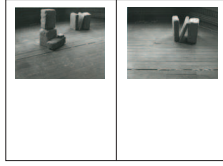
Cast concrete sculpture with acrylic paint

Dimensions unknown

Photo: Martin W. Kane

Previously exhibited at Truman Gallery, New York, N.Y. (1978) and A.I.R. Gallery, New York, N.Y. (1980)

Beverly Buchanan Personal Archive, Ann Arbor, MI.



42 43

Slab Works, c. 1978-1980

Cast concrete sculptures with acrylic paint

Dimensions unknown

Previously exhibited at Truman Gallery, New York, N.Y. (1978)

Photographs courtesy of the Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Artist File, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, N.Y.



44

writings



46

Wall Fragments - Series Cast in Cement, 1978

Typewritten on bond paper

8.5 x 11 inches

Photograph courtesy of the Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Artist File, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, N.Y.



91

Untitled by Alice Lovelace, 1990.

Typewritten poem with original drawing on paper

Beverly Buchanan Personal Archive, Ann Arbor, MI. Courtesy of the artist and Alice Lovelace

back cover



96

Self-portrait, n.d.

Silver gelatin print mounted on cardstock, made into a postcard

Photographer unknown

Photograph courtesy of the Frances Mulhall Achilles Library, Artist File, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, N.Y.

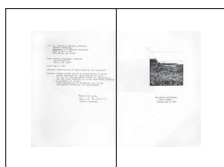


51



52

53



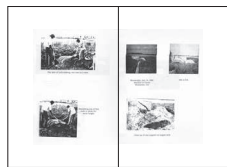
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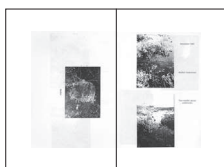
74

75



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77



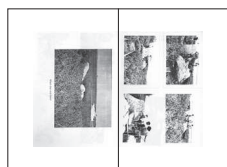
78

79



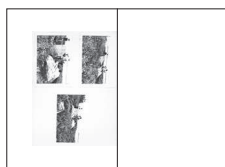
80

81



82

83



84

Guggenheim Fellowship Report Document, 1981

Photocopied book of black-and-white photographs and typewritten text with color cover

8.5 x 11 inches

Beverly Buchanan Personal Archive, Ann Arbor, MI.

Thanks to Beverly Buchanan,
Jane Bridges, Lowery Stokes
Sims, Alice Lovelace,
Patti Phagan, Jake Hobart,
Camille Billops, James Hatch,
Margaret Hitch, Francisco
Staton, Thomas Lax, Ellie Meek
Tweedy, Diedra Harris-Kelley,
James Moske, Rebecca
Tilghman, Seth Thompson,
Simone Swan, Arden Scott,
Andy Campbell, Marcia Yerman,
Emily Arensman, Danielle
Linzer, Kathryn Potts, Clara
Goldman, Jillian Suarez,
Lindsey Reynolds, Kristen
Leipert, Ivy Blackman, Harry
Swartz-Tuttle, Anthony Elms,
Mindy Gales, Mariam Ghani,
Chitra Ganesh, Amita Manghani,
Sarah Frohn, Eleanor
Flomenhaft, Margaret Herman,
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related research.