

Spike Island

BEVERLY BUCHANAN

WEATHERING

26 September 2026

– 31 January 2027



EVENTS

SPOTLIGHT TOUR OF EXHIBITION

Every Saturday, 1pm

KIDS ART CLUB

with Adele Lippiatt

Workshop (0–5 years old and carers)

First Friday of each month, 10–11am

GOOD MORNING SPIKE ISLAND!

Coffee morning and exhibition tour

Thursday 22 October, 10–11.30am

NIGHT OF THE FELLOWS 2026

An evening celebrating our

Graduate Fellowships

Thursday 22 October, 5–8pm

WRITING ART WRITING ART WRITING:

TO SHIMMER BETWEEN SENSES

with WITTA and Sarah Hayden

Saturday 24 October, 2–5pm

FLOWERS AND ROCK

Collective gardening session

Friday 30 October, 11.30am–12.30pm

BSL TOUR OF EXHIBITION

with Martin Glover

Saturday 31 October, 2–3pm

JARMAN AWARD SCREENING AND CONVERSATION

with Sadia Pineda Hameed

at Watershed

Wednesday 4 November, 6–9pm

MUDBELLY CERAMICS: ANGELS

with Phoebe Collings-James

Workshop for Black people of all ages

Saturday 14 November, 12.30–4pm

CURATORS' TOUR

with Clémentine Proby and Nicole Yip

Saturday 21 November, 2–3pm

BEVERLY BUCHANAN:

I BROKE THE HOUSE

Book launch and symposium

Saturday 30 January, 3–7pm

Visit our website for more information
on the events programme

INFORMATION

Spike Island

133 Cumberland Road

Bristol BS1 6UX

0117 929 2266

admin@spikeisland.org.uk

spikeisland.org.uk

Instagram: @SpikesIsland

Facebook: SpikesIsland

LinkedIn: Spike Island

OPENING HOURS

Gallery: Wednesday–Sunday, 12–5pm

Café: Monday, 9am–3pm

Tuesday to Sunday, 10am–4pm

SUPPORT US

DONATE

Help shape the future of
contemporary art by making a
donation today:

spikeisland.org.uk/support us



BECOME A PATRON

Join a passionate group of
patrons who amplify the voices
of artists and support our
pioneering ecosystem of creative
communities.

Starting at £25 a month, become
an Artist Champion or member of
our Director's Circle to enjoy
unparalleled access to our work:
spikeisland.org.uk/support us

Spike Island is a registered charity
(no.1003505)



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Haus am Waldsee

49 Nord
6 Est

Frac
Lorraine



Art Fund



terra

Foundation for
American Art

BEVERLY BUCHANAN

WEATHERING

Weathering brings together four decades of work by Beverly Buchanan (1940–2015), tracing an expansive and materially diverse practice across sculpture, painting, drawing, environmental works, artists' books and archival material. Buchanan's practice explores how memory and African American histories of violence and survival are held in architecture, landscape and everyday materials, often through the prism of the geographies and building traditions of the American Southeast.

The title *Weathering* describes a recurring motif in Buchanan's work: exposure to time, climate and forces that alter, erode and transform. Working with concrete, tabby, salvaged wood, steel, cardboard and found objects, she embraced materials for their capacity to register change. Weathering and decay became ways of thinking about survival and resilience, but also about what is made visible, concealed or lost.

This enquiry emerges early on in Buchanan's *Wall paintings* (c.1975–77), inspired by the surfaces of deteriorating buildings in New York and New Jersey. Decay serves both as a record of time and a trace of the social histories embedded within the built environment. After returning to the American South in 1977, Buchanan turned more directly towards landscape and vernacular architecture. Her environmental works, including *Marsh Ruins* (1981), were left exposed to the elements, gradually becoming part of the landscapes they inhabit.

Her shack sculptures extend this enquiry into the architectures of Black life in the rural South, based on hand-built houses characteristic of the region. Buchanan understood these sculptures as portraits: records of the knowledge, labour and lives of the people who made and

inhabited them. The violence of the plantation system and its afterlives are registered through fragments, traces and sustained attention rather than conventional forms of commemoration.

Throughout her practice, material and memory are inseparable from questions of power. Buchanan's practice was also sustained by networks of friendship, care and solidarity. Artists' books, writings, small sculptures and personal ephemera reveal an intimate dimension of her work, in which the personal and political remain closely connected.

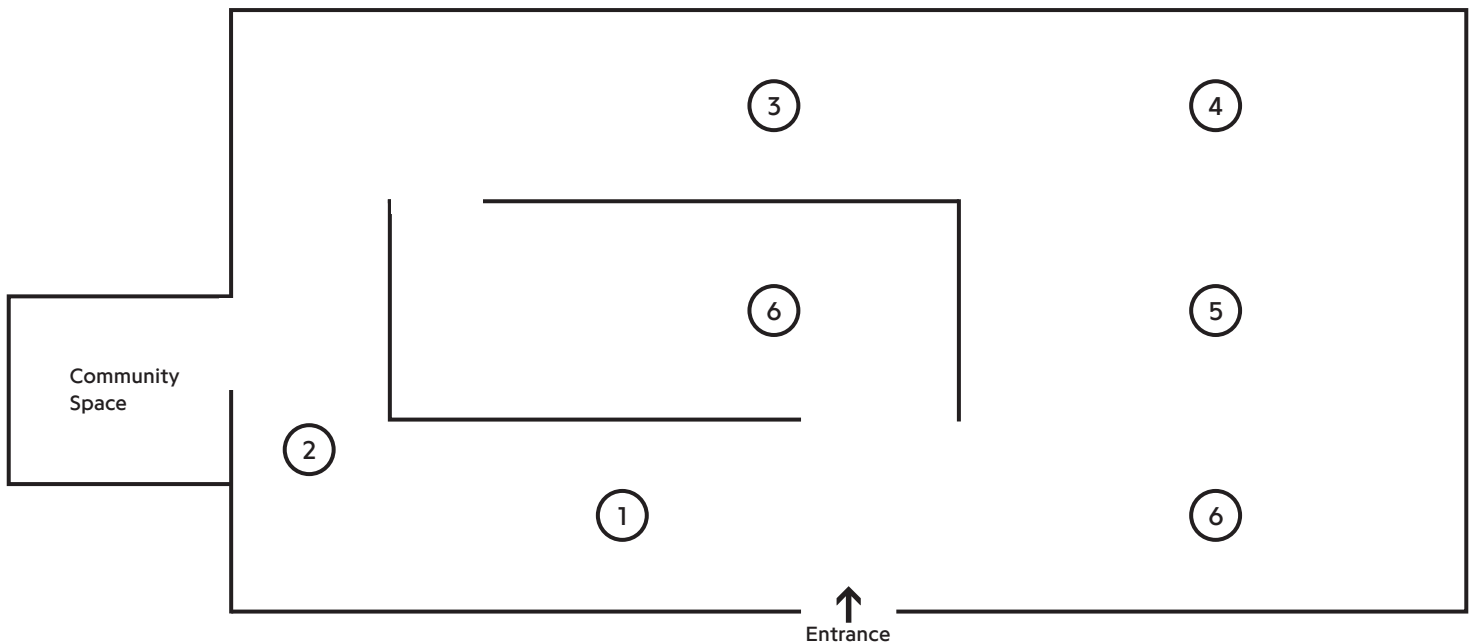
Two new commissions by Phoebe Collings-James (b.1987) extend Buchanan's influence into the present. Together, the works in *Weathering* ask how people and places endure – not through permanence, but through adaptation, memory and continued acts of making.

The exhibition was developed in collaboration with Haus am Waldsee (Berlin) and 49 Nord 6 Est – Frac Lorraine (Metz), and will tour to Vleeshal (Middelburg) from 14 March to 27 June 2027. It is generously supported by Art Fund, the Henry Moore Foundation, the Terra Foundation for American Art, and the Beverly Buchanan Exhibition Circle. With thanks to the Estate of Beverly Buchanan.



BEVERLY BUCHANAN, PHOTO OF MARSH RUINS (1981). COURTESY OF ANDREW EDLIN GALLERY, NEW YORK
© THE ESTATE OF BEVERLY BUCHANAN

FLOORPLAN



① WHAT'S UP?

Beverly Buchanan was born in North Carolina in 1940, and grew up on the campus of South Carolina State College, where her father was Dean of Agriculture. As a child, she accompanied him on visits to Black tenant farmers and sharecroppers, encountering the hand-built homes, shanties and shotgun houses in which they lived. These encounters remained a powerful presence throughout her life and work.

Buchanan initially trained in medicine and public health, first at Bennett College (1962) and later at Columbia University (1969). She began her artistic career in New York in the early 1970s, studying with Norman Lewis at The Art Students League, while working as a public health educator in the Bronx and East Orange, New Jersey.

Her early *Wall* paintings (c.1975–77), which move from vivid colour to near-black monochromes, emerged from an attention to the weathered surfaces of the city's deteriorating buildings. She translated cracks, stains and accumulated layers into abstract compositions, describing her interest in the 'aesthetic qualities of decay'. In *Untitled (Black Wall)* (c.1977), traces of erosion across a painted surface evoke both the physical decay of architectural skins and the wider conditions of urban neglect shaped by discriminatory housing and development practices. Her cast-concrete *Frustulas*, begun in the late 1970s, similarly transform architectural fragments into sculptural forms.

In 1977, Buchanan left public health to become an artist full-time. 'I don't want to be a doctor who paints. I want to be a painter,' she explained. She relocated to Georgia – perhaps with a renewed perspective on the contours of anti-Blackness that continue to shape the South – living in Macon (1977–85), Atlanta (1985–87) and Athens (1987–2003), before moving to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 2003. Until her deteriorating health prevented her from travelling, Buchanan continued to return to the South, finding subjects in shacks, hurricane houses, churches and other structures whose histories are embedded in their materials and forms.

② RUINS AND RITUALS

In 1977, Buchanan moved back to the American South. This return marked a period of expansion in her practice: the *Frustula* works she had begun experimenting with developed into environmental works: large-scale sculptures made through intense physical labour, cast in cement, concrete and tabby, and installed in public spaces and natural landscapes. As Buchanan put it, 'The "big work" is her first love.'

Left vulnerable to the elements, these works often occupy sites marked by the violent and layered histories of the South, offering an alternative to the commemorative monument. She resisted readings of her work as nostalgic or mystical, insisting instead on its material presence: 'I know how grit feels – and the concrete – and how the light falls on it. I don't have to sift through what it means; I know how it feels.'

The materiality of *Marsh Ruins* (1981), Buchanan's best-known environmental work, invokes the racialised material economy of coastal Georgia. Tabby is made from lime, sand, oyster shells, water and ash, and its production historically relied on the labour of enslaved people for use in plantation construction. *Marsh Ruins* takes the form of three domes concealed in the marshes near the historic site of Igbo Landing, where captive Igbo people chose to die by suicide rather than endure enslavement in 1803. Today, *Marsh Ruins* continues to surface and disappear with the tides.

Buchanan regularly drove through the rural South, photographing shacks, stones, churches, trees and ruins, often from the car window. 'I've read that my work is about nostalgia. It is not. It's about "drawing" with my camera and documenting old, former slave cabins, turned tenement houses.' Near overlooked sites of African American history, she sometimes left humble arrangements of stones. These ephemeral interventions offer an alternative form of memorialisation, attentive to Black survival and resistance.

The sound piece *come closer* (2026), a new commission by Phoebe Collings-James, responds to Buchanan's work through a whispered repeating mantra, carrying forward its quiet yet determined resistance. The work considers a subject that could be a sculpture, the land or another person, and a desire for an intimate exchange.

③ THE COMMUNITY

Buchanan built and sustained a strong community wherever she lived. This section foregrounds the intimate forms through which Buchanan nurtured these relationships: tiny chairs, ladders, angels, creatures and spirit jars, assembled from scraps of wood, foamcore, metal and whatever else she found. She drew greeting cards and made calendars featuring photographs of her work and self-portraits. Many were sold or given away to friends, her accountant, plumber or pharmacist, sometimes in exchange for a service, or simply as gestures of love or gratitude.

While she continued to exhibit in museums and galleries, these works circulated within a different, more intimate network of care and exchange. As a Black woman living with chronic illness, these communities of friendship and mutual support were integral to sustaining her life and practice.

Her local pharmacy in Athens, Georgia was also a place of socialising: 'My pharmacy is a social, friendly place where you can eat lunch while waiting for your arthritis medicine.' She grew close with her pharmacists at Hawthorne Drugs, even designing them a promotional T-shirt. Such relationships extended beyond conventional structures of family and partnership, forming a network of chosen kinship.



BEVERLY BUCHANAN, *BUCHANAN SELF-PORTRAIT IN MIRROR ON KONICA* (1976). COURTESY OF ANDREW EDLIN GALLERY, NEW YORK © THE ESTATE OF BEVERLY BUCHANAN

Buchanan's generosity existed alongside considerable economic precarity. Beside a self-portrait drawn on a paper plate, the inscription 'WILL TALK FOR FOOD' speaks plainly to her circumstances. In a letter to cultural patrons, she wrote: 'One of the large hurdles to overcome is my monthly mortgage and medical expenses. As a member of my support team, I am calling on you to help me survive.'

The angels that recur throughout her work speak to this vulnerability and need for belief in a higher protective power. The *Hospital Gown Angel* connects directly to her experiences of illness, while her angel cards served both practical and emotional purposes: sold or exchanged they helped pay the bills; given away, they thanked her real-life 'guardian angels'.

④ HOME IS FUN

This section takes its title from an artists' book of the same name, in which Buchanan – with her characteristic humour – offers 'inspiration for the briefly shut-in'. For Buchanan, home was variously a living space, studio and place of convalescence, while her garden served as a workshop, sanctuary and resting place for her sculptures.

Photographs and writings offer a glimpse into her domestic reality, revealing how deeply her daily life and artistic practice were intertwined. Both were, in turn, shaped by her lived experience of chronic illness. She lived amongst her materials and artworks, many in various stages of completion: sculptures crowd every surface of her living room, a half-finished shack rests on the folding TV dinner table. From the mid-1980s onwards, her sculptures were typically made at a 'desktop' scale, enabling her to work on them while sitting down.

Buchanan's domestic studio extended into her garden, which she cultivated with great love and care. Excerpts from Judith McWillie's documentary video, filmed at the height of summer in 1995, offer a window onto the sights and sounds of this verdant world in Athens, Georgia. Nearby, Phoebe Collings-James' intimate home video, *I didn't put a sign [discarded Infidel]* (2026), depicts the artist's niece and nephew playing with a discarded ceramic sculpture at the bottom of her grandmother's garden, where her studio is located. Commissioned in response to Buchanan's work, it echoes this movement between spaces and states: between work and play, home and studio.

⑤ I BELIEVE THE ENTIRE WORLD IS DESCENDANT FROM SHACKS

Southern vernacular architecture, particularly the shack, was a perennial influence on Buchanan's work. 'My interest remains concentrated on the structure (homes or shacks) as architecture.'

Buchanan's interest began with the rural homes of Black farming communities she encountered on childhood journeys with her father, then Dean of Agriculture at South Carolina State College, as he visited the homes of Black tenant farmers and sharecroppers. She studied not only these hand-built homes, shanties and shotgun houses, but also the people who built and inhabited them.

Buchanan returned to these memories throughout her life, drawing shacks (as well as other structures like schools and

churches) and making intimate sculptures from cardboard, foamcore, recycled wood, steel and other found materials. Some are colourful and spare; others are adorned with buttons, licence plates and marbles, reflecting the ways inhabitants personalised their homes. By the early 1990s, Buchanan understood these sculptures as forms of portraiture. Many are accompanied by short stories, which she called 'legends', giving voice to characters both real and imagined: 'I want to give people who can neither read nor write but made all the measurements and built their own barns and shacks a different way of looking at themselves.'

Buchanan recognised the poverty and racial inequality associated with shack housing, while also seeing in these structures a resourcefulness and ingenuity that she wanted to honour. Her drawn and photographic depictions similarly attend to both the precarity and inventiveness of these vernacular forms, and to the structural inequalities that continue to shape the American South. Ultimately, the shack was less a subject for Buchanan than a way of seeing the people behind it: '...for me the structure was really about the people who built it'.

⑥ OUT OF CONTROL

The exhibition's final section is a tribute to the power running through Buchanan's work: its politics, as much as its passionate, sensual and abundant poetics.

Out of Control (1991) belongs to a series of performances in which Buchanan set some of her shacks on fire. The violence of this gesture recalls her involvement in Civil Rights demonstrations as a student in Greensboro, where she was seriously injured. *Church on Fire* (1997), a painted plaid shirt Buchanan wore while working in the studio, carries a related emotional charge, referring to the devastating wave of attacks in the 1990s when many African American churches were burned.

Buchanan represented herself abundantly, through autobiographical texts and self-portraits she drew or printed on calendars, business cards and postcards. Often witty and gently self-deprecating, these works touch on her health, everyday life and appearance. Elsewhere, alter egos such as Miss Porno and Miss Bunny speak in her place. Together, they reveal Buchanan's playful and fluid approach to identity, and her determination to define herself on her own terms.

The exhibition culminates in the central gallery with a metaphorical homage to Buchanan's spirit of generosity, her lush garden and her understanding of nature as a sensual, vital force. Works from across her career gather here: the minimal *Frustulas* of her early years; mailboxes and birdhouses that echo her shacks; and vivid flower and shack pastels, often including human figures. *Shack South: Inside & Out* (1990), an unusual large-scale shack with its interior turned outward, extends her exploration of the relationship between inside and outside.

In Buchanan's world, nature is not separate from human life, but embedded within its everyday rhythms and pleasures. The exhibition ends here: in a flourishing garden of her making.

BIOGRAPHIES

BEVERLY BUCHANAN (b.1940, Fuquay, North Carolina – d.2015, Ann Arbor, Michigan) was an American artist who explored the relationship between memory – personal, historical, and geographical – and place. Her work encompasses drawing, painting, sculpture, video, photography, poetry, and environmental installations. Her work has been presented in solo exhibitions at The Athenaeum, University of Georgia; Georgia Museum of Art, Athens, GA; Frac Lorraine, Metz (2026); Haus am Waldsee, Berlin (2025); gta exhibitions, ETH Zurich; Fisk University Galleries, Nashville, TN (2024); Spelman Fine Art Museum, Spelman College, Atlanta, GA (2017); Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY (2016); Macon Museum of Arts and Sciences, GA (2014, 1990); N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art, Detroit, MI (2012); Asheville Art Museum, NC; Morris Museum of Art, Augusta, GA (2009); Art Museum of Missoula, Missoula, MT (1997); Tubman African American Museum, Macon, GA (1996); The Montclair Museum of Art, Montclair, NJ; Museum of African American History, Detroit, MI (1994–96); A.I.R. Gallery, New York City, NY (1980); Cinque Gallery, New York City, NY (1975, 1972), among others. The recipient of numerous honours during her long career, including the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship and the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, Buchanan's work is in the permanent collections of the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Whitney Museum, among others.

PHOEBE COLLINGS-JAMES (b.1987, London, UK) is a London-based artist working mainly in ceramics and sound installations. Through the material itself, along with the processes and modifications, Collings-James questions Eurocentric modes of knowledge building and epistemologies.

Recent solo exhibitions include Kunsthau Glarus, CH; KH Künstler:innenhaus, Bremen, DE; Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery, London, UK; Albuquerque Foundation, Sintra, PT (all 2026); KINDL, Berlin, DE (2025); SculptureCenter, New York, US (2024); Camden Art Centre, London, UK (2021).

ELISABETH LEOVICI is an art worker and critic living in Paris. A culture editor at the newspaper *Libération* from 1991–2006, she was involved in ACT UP-Paris and a founding member of the LIG/Lesbiennes d'intérêt general fund. From 2006–2024, she co-curated a seminar at the Ecole des Haute Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) titled *Something You Should Know: Artists and Producers*. Since the 1990s, she has contributed to numerous books, monographs, workshops and conferences on contemporary art, gender and queer studies. Leovici is the author, with Catherine Gonnard, of a history of women artists in France between 1880 and the 2000s, *Femme/artistes, Artistes/femmes, Paris de 1880 à nos jours* (2007). Her book *Ce que le sida m'a fait. Art et Activisme à la fin du 20e siècle (What AIDS Has Done to Me. Art and Activism at the End of the 20th Century)* was awarded the Prix Pierre Daix in 2017 and initiated the exhibition *Exposé-es* at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2023.

'YOUR LOCAL ARTIST AND FRIEND, BEVERLY BUCHANAN'¹
BY ELISABETH LEOVICI

I want to look at the work of Beverly Buchanan (1940–2015) through the prism of a three-fold invisibilisation: 1) That of the individual stories of Black people descended from the enslaved in the American rural South. 2) That of butch lesbians; even if Buchanan didn't identify as such (we lesbians clock her queerness immediately). 3) That of a racialised memory of class, which highlights Black American thinkers such as Saidiya Hartman, who associates this memory with the afterlife of slavery. As she explains, 'If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperilled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery – skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment.'²

This invisibilisation is inscribed in plain sight in Buchanan's work, to borrow the English expression of 'hiding in plain sight': to conceal oneself before the eyes of all, in broad daylight, like Edgar Allan Poe's purloined letter.³ I love the paradox of something hidden in plain sight, which has become a commonly used term to explore the history of unexamined racism and its relationship to visual culture in the United States. It comes up a lot when discussing Beverly Buchanan, describing not only the situation of the artist within critical discourse, but perhaps also a more active tactical stance initiated by the artist herself.

In a text describing the pilgrimage he makes to *Marsh Ruins* (1981) in the Marshes of Glynn Overlook Park in Brunswick, Georgia, Siddharta Mitter writes: 'Here is a major work of American outdoor sculpture, hiding in plain sight (...).'⁴ From afar, it resembles a cluster of haphazardly arranged boulders that are in reality cement structures built out of 'tabby'. A historical material particular to the region, it's a type of concrete composed of oyster shells, lime, sand, ash and water, produced by enslaved peoples and largely used in the plantation architecture of the American Southeast before the Civil War.

If these figures crafted by the artist take on the appearance of supposedly 'natural' formations, it may be because their induced mimicry dooms them to a form of disappearance while simultaneously offering them protection. Is this not, then, a way of at once naturalising and protecting the history of the Igbo Landing? In 1803, on this same coast of Georgia, a group of around 75 captive Igbo Africans⁵ opted to drown themselves in a mass suicide, rather than submit to enslavement. It is a foundational narrative of the Afro-diasporic resistance, evoked by Toni Morrison (*Song of Solomon*), Julie Dash (*Daughters of the Dust*), and Beyoncé (*Lemonade*). If Buchanan was also referencing it, she didn't confirm their direct connection to her sculptures, just as she let the rock formations efface themselves into the landscape. Indeed, Buchanan left them 'in plain sight', indistinguishable from their surroundings and surviving nevertheless, while still inviting our attention (she signed and dated them after all), and prompting us to ask hard questions: who controls historical narratives? What do we choose to preserve? What do we allow to deteriorate into oblivion?

A lot of places like this are comforting in their dark interiors as well as confining in their smallness of breathing room interiors. In trying to present a feeling for an interior as well as show the exterior look of this work, I had to spend some time standing and sitting inside this structure and thinking about where, for example, the coffeepot would stay and how large the table had to be away from the window and where the hat nail goes and what kind of bed to make for sleeping more than one person [...]'⁶

These resonances echo in the artist's life, as they do in each of her environmental sculptures, ephemeral works and performances, which the exhibition *Beverly Buchanan: Weathering* at Spike Island can only document. For example, *Ruins and Rituals* (1979) on the grounds of the Museum of Arts and Sciences; or *Unity Stones* (1983) in black-painted concrete in front of the Booker T. Washington Center (both in Macon, Georgia). However, photographs and films allow us to get an idea. Presented here across three screens is a video by artists Park McArthur and Jason Hirata and curator Jennifer Burris. McArthur and Burris organised a major exhibition of her work in late 2016 at the Brooklyn Museum in New York, embedding her in the art historical discourse of the late 20th century, while at the same time a more intimate exhibition in Atlanta located her within the American South and its histories of resistance to injustice.

Not that Buchanan was a complete unknown. After studying science and medicine, she was taken under the wing of those she called her mentors, Romare Bearden and Norman Lewis, who exhibited her work in their artist-run space Cinque Gallery, while her friend Ana Mendieta invited her to participate in the 1980 exhibition she organised at A.I.R. Gallery in New York. *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States* was a landmark exhibition: it was the first to explicitly challenge the notion of a singular, white feminism. During her years in New York and New Jersey, and even afterwards, Buchanan showed in several galleries (including Betty Parsons Gallery, and most notably, with Parson's ex-assistant, Jock Truman, in 1977). But when you leave New York to settle in Georgia, as she did in 1977, that's when you throw on your invisibility helmet and become an artist-of-all-trades. And that is what Buchanan did – presenting herself as a painter, sculptor, model-maker, documentarian, photographer, illustrator, fanzine maker, landscaper and producer of ephemera, calendars, greeting cards... in other words, like a 'Renaissance Artist', which is how she fashioned herself on one business card. And then you leave your career 'hiding in plain sight' to a benevolent posterity, one that may someday allow you to be rediscovered and loved posthumously, as is the case today.

'What sort of object is a ruined ruin?' asks Amelia Groom in her book dedicated to *Marsh Ruins* (1981).⁷ I have the sense that Buchanan, by way of an answer, would lean into the object's capacity for transformation and its possibility for play (in French, the word *jeu* encompasses play, gambling, and the looseness – the give – between things). Her *Frustulas*, these concrete and pigment sculptures, thus make use of their material properties: at once heavy and durable, but at the same time vulnerable to environmental changes. Placed directly on the floor, side by side or one atop the other, the *Frustulas* are cast from moulds of milk

cartons and found dislodged bricks. In turn they echo the devastated walls of New York in the 1970s and 80s: in the Bronx, for example, where buildings were frequently torched by less than scrupulous landlords. As we can see, this has very little to do with endorsing a romantic nostalgia for ruins. Rather, it's about undermining the euphemistic impulse of a triumphant type of sculpture: the vertical kind, that thrusts the glory of great men towards the heavens, turning them into statues of a fixed and polished unity, with no room left for shadows. What we might call a public monument. And it is precisely this that Beverly Buchanan dismantles in these 'sorts of objects that are ruined ruins'.

The shacks follow this sculptural logic. They have their origin in the handmade houses built of salvaged wood, that stand as an architectural legacy of slavery along the backroads of southern Georgia or amidst the trees of South Carolina. As the story goes, as a child Buchanan drove through these places with her father, dean of the School of Agriculture at South Carolina State College. Before she left for New York, during her second life in Macon, Atlanta and Athens, and even after she moved to Michigan in 2003, she researched these shacks and their inhabitants, often using the outhouses present as landmarks. The shacks are often accompanied by legends, handwritten or typed stories where she recounts (reconstitutes and fictionalises) the emotional experiences associated with them. There is also the physical and emotional descriptions of the shacks, expressed through painting, in oil pastels, coloured crayons, in assemblages of cardboard, metal, wood, or even photographed, photocopied, and arranged in booklets... Presented in Spike Island's central gallery is one of the only examples of Buchanan's 'interiors', whose furnishings she built out of salvaged wood and nails. A sink, a chair, a table, and a bed are strewn around the shack, emphasising its cramped proportions. All of these furniture elements are wonky; in the drawings, the houses – sometimes equipped with feet – slant and lean, their construction revealing their disjointed slats. And yet, they hold up. It is precisely in this precarity, writes Patricia Ekpo, in this place and this manner of making 'that blackness emerges in Buchanan's sculptural shacks'.⁸

'I would look at a building and it would remind me of a person or a family,' said Buchanan. And she insisted: 'I want to give people who can neither read nor write but made all the measurements and built their own barns and shacks a different way of looking at themselves.'⁹

Some of the shacks are localised in their more or less vague titles (*South Florida [Hurricane House Series]*; *Untitled [Athens, GA]*). Others are named after their material properties (*Tin and Wood House*) or a distinguishing detail (*Turned Over House*). But most often, they're dedicated to their inhabitants (*Homage to Juanita*; *For Mallory*; *Tribute to Mary Lou Furcron...*). It seems that Buchanan sometimes combined the traits of several people into one shack dedicated to Miss Mary, Miss Tiny Aiken, Miss Lovie, Miz Hurston... Her attention almost always skews towards elderly, single Black women. I inevitably think, though in a rural setting quite different from the urbanity described by Saidiya Hartman, of the single Black women in *Wayward Lives*.¹⁰ Buchanan also tended to invent what the historian calls 'a mode of close narration, a style which places the

voice of the narrator and character as inseparable, so that the vision, language, and rhythms of the wayward shape and arrange the text.'¹¹

For these women, and with them in mind, Buchanan seeks to shift our perspective of the home. By which I mean, to *not* put it upright, domesticate it, or set it 'straight', according to the criteria born of a white, heteronormative economy and world view. Here we must take into account the debt, the indebtedness that the emancipation of Black people instituted. 'To be free was to be a debtor', explains Hartman, 'it meant to be plunged into an endless cycle of debt, an "already accrued debt, an abstinent present, and a mortgaged future"'. This is where an idea I love comes into play, that of the dedication, which as Roland Barthes puts it, 'has no other meaning than the actual gesture by which I present what I have done (my work) to someone I love or admire'.¹² With the dedication, an unknown force enters the canonical *tête-à-tête* between the work produced and the producer's subjectivity. Buchanan's empathy is made manifest through showing such constant dedication. She makes place for other people's stories and herstories instead of focusing on the persona of the 'diva', as she calls herself, her economy of survival, and the medicalisation of her life.

Beyond the remarkable self-deprecating humour of the diva in question, it is indeed the anecdotal and ephemeral that inscribe themselves in the sculptural episodes Buchanan produced; notably with the innumerable undocumented pieces, gifted to her neighbours, friends, lovers no doubt, pharmacists, people who counted, those who were invented to count. 'She might add a tabby brick to a graveyard; place an ephemeral rock arrangement by the roadside; immerse a concrete piece in the Ocmulgee River to sink, or a wood one to drift away. She kept materials to these ends in her yellow VW Beetle,' writes Siddharta Mitter. Alongside her materials – and just as characteristically – are the continuous presence of her paintings of shacks, landscapes, or flora, or thick coats of pure, strident colours applied in broad strokes. All these additions, these 'supplements' – these gifts, ultimately – are integral, I would add, not only to Beverly Buchanan's material practice, but to her *ethical* one, as well.

- 1 Beverly Buchanan, *Beverly Buchanan, artist and diva*, Letter to Cultural Patrons, The Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2001.
- 2 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. Prologue.
- 3 Edgar Allan Poe, 'The Purloined Letter', 1844.
- 4 Siddharta Mitter, 'A Vanishing Masterpiece in the Georgia Marshes', New York Times, 29 July 2023.
- 5 Corresponds to a Southeastern area of present-day Nigeria.
- 6 Beverly Buchanan, *Shack South: Inside & Out*, Athens, Georgia, 1990.
- 7 Amelia Groom, *Beverly Buchanan: Marsh Ruins*, Afterall Books / One Work. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2021.
- 8 Patricia Ekpo, '"A Little Shortness of Breath": The Open Black Body as Southern Landscape'. *The Georgia Review*, winter 2025.
- 9 Esther Adler and Eleanor Flomenhaft. 'Beverly Buchanan'. *MoMA Magazine*, Museum of Modern Art, 11 Nov 2024.
- 10 Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*. New York: Norton, 2019.
- 11 *ibid*, xiii-xiv.
- 12 Roland Barthes, writing about Cy Twombly, 'Non Multa Sed Multum' (1976–79) collected in *The Responsibility of Forms*, 1985.