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MASTER'S THESIS

Guns, Ghosts, and So Forth:

BEVERLY BUCHANAN'S RECONSTRUCTIONS OF BLACK HISTORY

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Table of Contents

Description	**Page Number**
I: Introduction	4
II: *Unity Stones*	12
III: *Patching Up*	20
IV: *Marsh Ruins*	31
V: Conclusion	41
VI: Bibliography	43

List of Figures

Description	**Page Number**
Figure 1: *Beverly Buchanan* by Jerry Siegel	4
Figure 2: *Unity Stones* by Beverly Buchanan	12
Figure 3: Detail of *Unity Stones* by Beverly Buchanan	17
Figure 4: *Patching Up*, Beverly Buchanan	20
Figure 5: *Three Families (A Memorial Piece with Scars)* by Beverly Buchanan	22
Figure 6: *Ms. Mary Lou Furcron* by Beverly Buchanan	24
Figure 7: *Dancing Shack for Alice* by Beverly Buchanan	27
Figure 8: *Marsh Ruins* by Beverly Buchanan	31
Figure 9: *Ibo Landing* by Donovan Nelson	34
Figure 10: Beverly Buchanan with *Marsh Ruins*	38
Figure 11: *Macon Georgia* by Beverly Buchanan	41

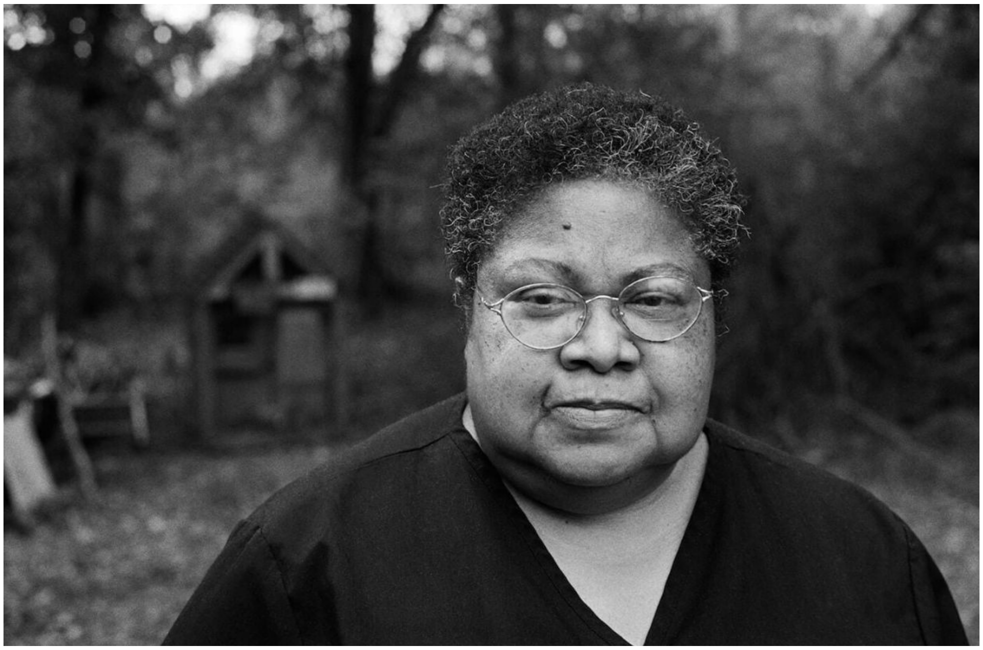

Figure 1
Jerry Siegel: *Beverly Buchanan*, Athens, GA, archival inkjet print, 11.3 x 17 inches, Museum of Contemporary Art of Georgia, Athens, GA, photo courtesy of Jerry Siegel.

I: Introduction

Beverly Buchanan (Figure 1), born in Fuquay, North Carolina, October 8, 1940, was a prolific artist, scientist, and activist until her death on July 4, 2015. Her works of art range from beautifully bright oil pastels to austere stone sculptures to whimsical wooden shacks. While she implemented many creative methods related to folk art such as found materials and traditional modes of construction — tabby, a material predominantly created by slaves in the coastal South, for example — Buchanan also drew from her peers in the New York contemporary art scene, notably Norman Lewis and Romare Bearden. Her unique ability to simultaneously look towards the past, present, and future has both puzzled and enchanted art historians. Is she a folk artist? Is she contemporary? Or perhaps she is a land artist? Throughout her career, time and time again, Buchanan refused to be pigeonholed by terminology; instead she continuously changed her practices, moving from one medium to another, defying definition. The artist recalls in a 1985 interview with Laura Lieberman:

> In the late ‘60s, maybe early ‘70s, I was taking work around to galleries to see if they might be interested in showing my work…. I walked into one gallery in Soho, and I asked ‘are you looking at work?’ They said ‘Yes, but we don’t show black art.’ I said, ‘Oh good! Let me show you my slides.’[1]

She called creators and scholars alike to refute both economic and academic modes of classification; art, for Buchanan was more than theory and research, it was more than a gallery’s sales, and it was certainly more than a hobby.

Art was a vessel through which Buchanan could communicate with and preserve the ghosts that haunted her home, her land, and her history — ghosts that I hope readers might become better acquainted with throughout this paper. Buchanan once described herself and her art “as being of and from the same place with the same influences[:] food, dirt, sky, reclaimed land, development, violence, guns, ghosts and so forth.”[2] Each of these influences can be found throughout the artist’s oeuvre; her sculpture *Unity Stones* (1983) reclaims and further develops land that was once home to thousands of slaves; *Patching Up* (2009) celebrates the tenacity and humor of exploited tenant farmers in rural regions; *Marsh Ruins* (1981) preserves the memory of slaves from the South who were carelessly buried without a headstone, and *Macon Georgia* (2003) rejoices in the beautiful sky watching over each atrocity committed against African

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[1] Edward Wadell, “Life… Ain’t Been No Crystal Stair,” *Art Papers* 9, no. 6 (1985): 15.

[2] Audrey Arthur & Wyatt Phillips, “The Spelman College Museum of Fine Art Launches its 2017 Season with a Solo Exhibition Featuring Acclaimed Artist Beverly Buchanan,” Spelman.edu, Spelman College, 2017, https://www.spelman.edu/about-us/news-and-events/news-releases/2017/08/17/the-spelman-college-museum-of-fine-art-launches-its-2017-season-with-a-solo-exhibition-featuring-acclaimed-artist-beverly-buchanan.

Americans under the guise of economic embetterment. Four different mediums, four different histories, and four different sides of Beverly Buchanan.

The artist's works, despite their variations in medium and form, all follow a common thread: ghosts and hauntings. In 1997, Avery Gordon, professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, wrote a book on this very subject, examining the nature of ghosts and hauntings within the realms of academia. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* seeks to understand what history cannot; forgotten memories, silenced voices, unmarked graves, half-burnt buildings, remnants of a tune hummed years ago — histories lost in translation. Gordon explains

> Following... ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future.[3]

While Buchanan does not *write* ghost stories, she constructs — or *re*-constructs — the stage on which these stories took place, allowing the characters of each tale to be revived through their remembrance.

Ghosts linger around her creations; ghosts of African captives who walked into the water off of Ebo Landing on St. Simons Island, Georgia, still wearing their chains, drowning themselves in Dunbar Creek rather than enduring the horrors of slavery; ghosts of sharecroppers who died of heatstroke under the Georgia sun, still laboring to feed mouths that were not their own; ghosts of Emmett Till and Martin Luther King Jr. — community members martyred in the name of civil rights; ghosts of the past.[4] Each painting, each sculpture, each wooden construction made by Buchanan is a monument — a shrine, even — to Black citizens of the rural South; a reminder of a dark history, a grounding energy focused on present circumstance, and a beacon lighting the way to an equitable future. Gordon asserts in her book that ghosts are "one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us."[5] Following this interpretation, Buchanan's art, then, emboldens these "barely visible… forms," giving shape to the ghosts that haunt the Southern marshes and fields.[6] She places objects within or near sites charged with the energy of these spirits — sites where hauntings might take place such as graveyards and secluded marshes — in the hopes that observers might see more than simply art. The act of conjuring these ghosts; however, Buchanan leaves to the individual viewer. They must meditate on the land — on the history of that land and the history of the *people* of that land — they must, as Gordon puts it, "[call] up and [call] out the forces that make things what they are in order to fix and transform a troubling situation."[7] In other words, in order to truly see the ghosts preserved in Buchanan's art, observers must contemplate their place in the world; in society, in the economy, in their vocation, in every facet of life, and attempt to understand *how* and *why* they arrived at this moment in time.

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[3] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 22.

The history of the South, particularly its ghost stories and lore, are products of various types of folk art traditions such as oral rather than written story-telling. Folk art, from a scholarly standpoint, has proved a difficult genre to define. According to the International Folk Art

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[4] "Ebo Landing," goldenisles.com, Golden Isles Georgia, accessed January 18, 2020, https://www.goldenisles.com/discover/golden-isles/african-american-heritage/ebo-landing/.
[5] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 8.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid, 22.

Market, a resource committed to helping contemporary folk artists sell their work and expand their patronage, folk art “is rooted in traditions that come from community and culture – expressing cultural identity by conveying shared community values and aesthetics…. [encompassing] a range of utilitarian and decorative media…. made by individuals whose creative skills convey their community’s authentic cultural identity.”[8] In 1988; however, Buchanan provided scholars with her own parameters for analysing “the work of folk artists,” explaining that one must approach such art “not so much in terms of the work but of the persons and the work as being of and from the same place with the same influences.”[9] She believed that folk artists created so much more than ‘folk’ art; they created altars to their history, altars to the “food,” the “dirt,” the “sky,” and the “violence” of the South.[10]

Buchanan’s career helped set a precedent for folk artists, self taught artists, ‘outsider’ artists, working artists — any disenfranchised artist, really. There is a long history of stereotyping marginalized communities living in the rural South, no matter their profession. In her paper *Toward a Theoretical Approach to Teaching Folk Art: A Definition*, Kristin G. Congdon writes “some scholars report that folk artists are unable to verbalize about art works” when, in reality, “folk artists critique their art work differently from scholars, and academic criticism structures are not as readily recognizable to them. Others may not use terms such as ‘rhythm, harmony, or balance’ in the same way as the professional critic.”[11] In other words, because scholars have difficulty grasping the nuance and complexity of rural ‘folk’ culture, they deem the population illiterate and simple. Throughout history, there have been countless times in which isolated communities, especially Black communities, have been harmed by the stereotypes propagated by white European politicians, religious leaders, scientists, and even artists. In her paper *Hillbilly: An Image of a Culture*, Christine Ballengee-Morris explains "stereotyping [rural] culture began after the Civil War when outside developers entered the region," this pigeonholing "was a social control tactic, and was expanded and perpetuated by the mass media."[12] By defining the rural South as a place in need of moral and agricultural cultivation, colonizers felt called by God to 'save' the people of the region, thus creating the systems of shame, poverty, and general disenfranchisement that still remain in effect today.[13]

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[8] Heather Tanner, “What is Folk Art?” Folkartmarket.org, International Folk Art Market, February 1, 2014, https://folkartmarket.org/what-is-folk-art/.

[9] Arthur & Phillips, “The Spelman College Museum of Fine Art Launches its 2017 Season with a Solo Exhibition Featuring Acclaimed Artist Beverly Buchanan.”

[10] Ibid.

[11] Kristin Congdon, “Toward a Theoretical Approach to Teaching Folk Art: A Definition,” Studies in Art Education 28, no. 2 (1987): 102.

By defying definition, Buchanan simultaneously eluded the stereotypes and assumptions that are often attached to certain terminologies; Black artist, folk artist, land artist, contemporary artist — she is all, yet she is none. When the words are stripped away from the object, what remains is "food, dirt, sky, reclaimed land, development, violence, guns, [and] ghosts."[14] Following Buchanan's own interpretation of art from the rural South, I will analyze the four works listed above: *Unity Stones* (1983), *Patching Up* (2009), *Marsh Ruins* (1981), and *Macon Georgia* (2003), with an emphasis on the themes of "dirt, sky,… violence" and "ghosts."[15]

Before the analyses, though, it is important to first understand Buchanan's unique upbringing and subsequent perspective. She was raised in Orangeburg, South Carolina by her great aunt and uncle[16], Marion and Walter Buchanan.[17] Walter was the dean for the agricultural school at South Carolina State University, the significance of which I will expound upon further in *Chapter Two: Patching Up*.[18] As a child, Buchanan was interested in sculpture, though she didn't know to call it that at the time. She was also concerned with creating and maintaining spaces that were safe, or sacred, to keep her creations. The artist recalled in a 1985 interview "'My father [accidentally] ran over my first sculptures — wooden airplanes — with his car, so I started hiding them in places I thought would be safe.'"[19]

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[12] Christine Ballengee-Morris, "Hillbilly: An Image of a Culture," lecture, *Annual Conference of the Women of Appalachia: Their Heritage and Accomplishments*, Zanesville, OH, October 26-28, 2000, 1.

[13] Missionaries to the Wilderness: A History of Land, Identity, and Moral Geography in Appalachia
Jill Fraley

[14] Arthur & Phillips, "The Spelman College Museum of Fine Art Launches its 2017 Season with a Solo Exhibition Featuring Acclaimed Artist Beverly Buchanan."

[15] Ibid.

An ambitious woman even in childhood, Buchanan not only excelled in the field of art, but the medical field as well. After receiving a bachelor's degree in medical technology from Bennet College in Greensboro, North Carolina, the artist attended Columbia University in New York City where she received master's degrees in both parasitology and public health.[20] Buchanan spent several years in New York and New Jersey working as a medical professional and an artist until 1977, when she turned down an offer to pursue her doctorate degree in medicine at Harvard and instead moved to Macon, Georgia to focus on her artistic career.[21] While in New York, in addition to her scientific work, Buchanan joined the Arts Students' League where Norman Lewis and Romare Bearden were both instructors. In one interview, the artist noted "the only reason I chose the Arts Students League was, frankly, because a black artist — an abstract painter, Norman Lewis — was there…. I used to talk about how important it is to have someone who does what you think you might want to do just there."[22] Lewis and Bearden would prove to be immense influences on Buchanan's art and compelled her refusal to be constrained or deterred by stereotypes. The two artists were both deeply invested in the Civil Rights movement and the fight for equity among citizens of every race. In fact, both men helped found the Spiral group in 1963, a collective that played a key role in protesting the antagonistic 1969 exhibition *Harlem on My Mind* held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. [23] Additionally, it was Romare Bearden who "told [Buchanan] to go home — to the South — to create what she knew and felt in her heart."[24]

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[16] Buchanan's birth-parents began divorce proceedings shortly after she was born so the family chose to send her to South Carolina to live with her great aunt and uncle.

[17] Karen Klacsmann, "Beverly Buchanan (1940-2015)," Georgiaencyclopedia.org, New Georgia Encyclopedia, July 17, 2018, https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/beverly-buchanan-1940-2015.

[18] "Beverly Buchanan (1940-2017)," thejohnsoncollection.org, The Johnson Collection, accessed October 10, 2019, http://thejohnsoncollection.org/beverly-buchanan/.

[19] Wadell, "Life… Ain't Been No Crystal Stair," *Art Papers* 9, no. 6 (1985): 14.

[20] "Beverly Buchanan (1940-2017)," thejohnsoncollection.org, The Johnson Collection, accessed October 10, 2019, http://thejohnsoncollection.org/beverly-buchanan/.

[21] Tom Melick, "Beverly Buchanan," *Frieze* 185 (2017): 170.

Once in Georgia, her art began to flourish. This relocation was not a simple change in geography; it was a pilgrimage, a reclamation of land. For the artist, Georgia was a source of many conflicting emotions and artistic revelations — the place of her ancestors' agony, the place of her ancestors' triumph over persecution, the place of her ancestors' deaths. In an interview with Patricia Phagan in 1984, Buchanan explained the importance of "dirt," or land, in the creation of her sculptures;

> More of the ritual of the sculpture went into the contents of the material. In other words, at first I was using concrete, but when I came to Georgia, I used concrete mixed with clay; whereas in New York City, I did not use concrete mixed with clay. That, to me, is part of the ritual — that is, what the source of the material is and how it's treated, how I treat it, how I look at it, where it is[25]

Where it is. In order to commune with the ghosts of the past, to "[merge]... the visible and the invisible, the dead and the living, the past and the present," Buchanan had no choice but to relocate; a fact that the seasoned Bearden would have likely known.[26]

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[22] Wadell, "Life… Ain't Been No Crystal Stair," *Art Papers* 9, no. 6 (1985): 14.

[23] Bridget Cooks, "Black Artists and Activism: *Harlem on My Mind (1969)," American Studies* 48, no. 1 (2007): 22.

[24] Jefreen Hayes, "The Words Behind the Pictures," *The International Review of African American Art* 21, no. 4 (2006): 22-23.

[25] Patricia Phagan, "An Interview with Beverly Buchanan," *Art Papers* 8, no. 1 (1984): 17.

[26] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 24.

II: Unity Stones, 1983

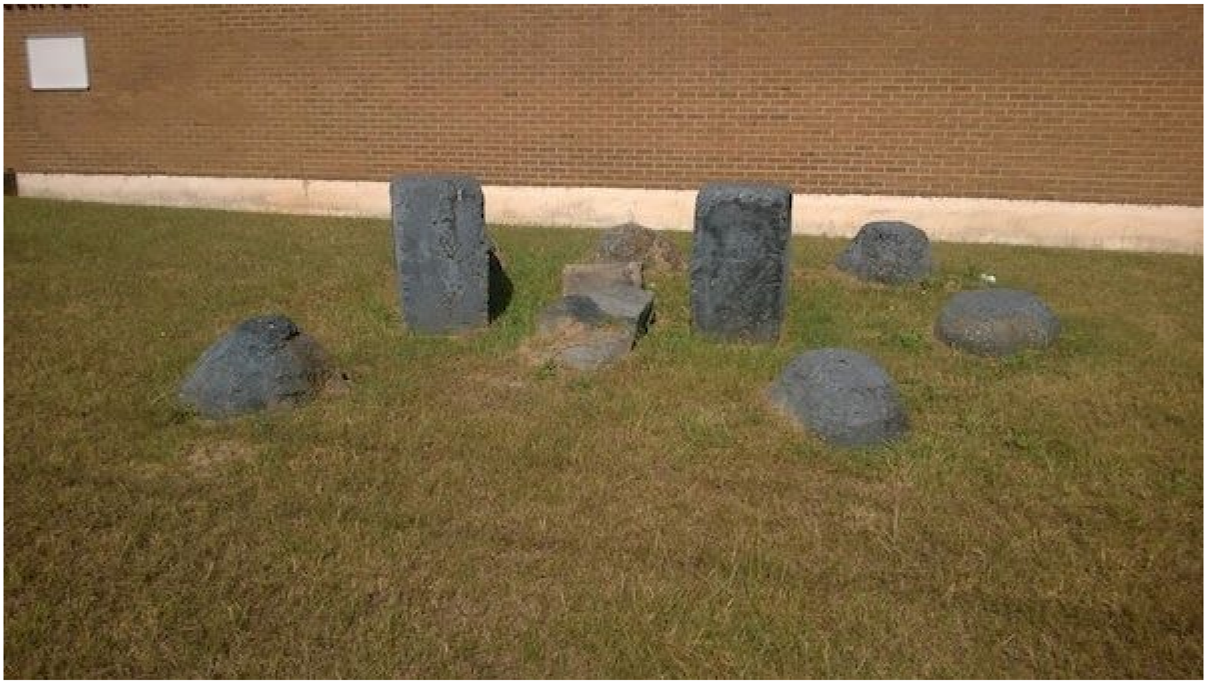

Figure 2
Beverly Buchanan, *Unity Stones*, concrete and black granite, 1983, Booker T. Washington Community Center, Macon, GA, photo courtesy of Andy Campbell.

Unity Stones (1983) is the first of Buchanan's works of art to be discussed in this paper; it is a piece that explores various facets of racism and reconciliation within the South, including Buchanan's own views on the matter. At a glance, the sculpture appears to be a nondescript gathering of rocks loosely strewn in front of the Booker T. Washington Community Center in Macon, Georgia (Figure 2). When facing the Community Center from the street, the sculpture appears on the right side of the building, enshrined upon a well-manicured lawn. The two taller stones act as a focal point and can be seen from across the street, alerting observers to the fact that there is something to be seen. Once they walk over to assess the sculpture, the six smaller rocks become more pronounced, and finally, the horizontal granite partition appears. Upon further inspection, one can infer the intentional organization of the elements, making obvious to those close enough to the work that it is, in fact, a sculpture. Surrounded by six, squat, mounds of concrete, granite, and Georgia clay, two formidable rectangles stand erect.[27] While the taller stones seem forbidding, in multiple interviews and written statements, Buchanan emphasised the fact that they were meant for "the public to use and sit on."[28] Between the austere pillars lies another long, jagged granite stone. The supine slab creates a dividing line between the other eight 'seats,' carving the space into separate camps — four on one side, four on the other.

While the title *Unity Stones* suggests a sense of goodwill, Buchanan explained to Patricia Phagan in 1984 that the name refers to the sculpture's elements, not its intent.[29]

> Phagan: Why did you call your latest sculpture '*Unity Stones*?'
> Buchanan: Because I think they're all related in terms of the material I used. The black concrete is uniform. It's the same mixture all the way through. The little mounds surrounding the piece and the larger interior pieces are that same color all the way through. That unifies it. I also had to consider that this was going in front of a community center named for a black man who wanted black people in this country to achieve a unity. But, the element that unites the piece is the same on the outside as it is on the inside.[30]

Booker T. Washington, the "black man" to whom Buchanan refers, was a civil rights activist whose political and social beliefs were, and have grown even more, controversial. Adolph Reed Junior, professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania, explains in his paper, *Managing Race Relations from Above*, how "Bookerism…. focused on the accumulation of property and wealth within the boundaries imposed by the regime of white supremacy."[31] According to Reed and many others who have dedicated their research to understanding activist strategies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Washington acted as "a self-empowered advocate of strategic compromise seeking to sacrifice blacks' citizenship rights in the name of one definition or another of 'racial peace.'"[32] Many Black inhabitants of the United States, particularly within the Southeastern regions, found Washington's approach to racial equality to be both "presumptuous" and "racialist."[33]

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[27] Andy Campbell, "We're Going to See Blood on Them Next:' Beverly Buchanan's Georgia Ruins and Black Negativity." *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* no. 29 (2016): 22.
[28] Ibid, 1.
[29] Phagan, "An Interview with Beverly Buchanan," *Art Papers* 8, no. 1 (1984): 17.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Adolph Reed Jr, "Bookerism and the Black Elite," *New Republic* 251, no. 3 (2020): 10.

With this in mind, we must turn to an anecdote recounted by Buchanan in a symposium in Tryon, North Carolina, 1985. In regards to *Unity Stones*, Buchanan notes

> Response to this piece has been tremendous. It serves as a kind of meeting ground. One time I was driving by and three men were sitting on the stones arguing with one another. I thought, 'We're going to see blood on them next.' The piece serves as a communal place to sit and talk, and do the other things that we do.[34]

Communal, but not necessarily peaceful. Buchanan was familiar with violence that could arise from "[sitting] and [talking]," and did not shy away from, but rather encouraged it. On a New York public access show titled *Women in Art*, hosted by Marcia Yerman, Buchanan remembers a moment from the Civil Rights Movement; "'[On] one of the picket lines in front of Woolworth's [...] a group amassed and attacked us, and I jumped one man and tried to choke him. And that was an extremely embarrassing situation. I was asked to leave the line and not return, because we were non-violent. I was never proud of that."[35] Her use of the word 'one' in this recollection allows us to assume that this was not the only protest she took part in. More importantly, though, this anecdote reveals the depth of Buchanan's pain and the vicious, justified rage beneath this pain. The artist understood that violence is inherent to the fight for one's equity, but she hoped to hold space for such difficult and often confrontational conversations.

While there is no documentation of Buchanan's opinions on Booker T. Washington, we may understand her stance towards the activist through a careful analysis of *Unity Stones* and its treatment of dirt and violence. In an essay written for the *Macon Telegraph and News*, a source close to the artist explained that "'Buchanan chose black Georgia granite for… her nine stones because she wanted different textures in her work. These different textures also represented the different sides of Booker T. Washington.'"[36] It is prudent to assume that these *different sides* refer to the activist's tendency to "[play] too eagerly into the assumptions of white power brokers" while simultaneously calling for equality.[37] Buchanan's decision to make the "black concrete… uniform,…. the same mixture all the way through," provides a dichotomous lens through which we may view Washington's "'different sides.'"[38] On one hand, she created an entirely black composition; referencing the Jim Crow declaration of 'separate but equal' as well as Booker T. Washington's similarly worded "[vow]" that Black and white citizens of the nation would work "separate as the fingers… one as the hand."[39] She tells Patricia Phagan, "the element that unites the piece is the same on the outside as it is on the inside," this "element" being color. [40] Buchanan recognized African American identity as being directly linked with appearance; something that, no matter how much Washington hoped, could not be erased by money, fame, or glory.

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[32] Ibid, 11.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Wadell, "Life… Ain't Been No Crystal Stair," *Art Papers* 9, no. 6 (1985): 15.

[35] Campbell, "'We're Going to See Blood on Them Next:,'" *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* no. 29 (2016): 10-11.

The coloration of *Unity Stones* reflect this notion; despite the artist's incorporation of Georgia clay into the sculpture's materials, no hues of red bleed through — black concrete and granite are all that meets the eye. The sculpture recognizes Washington's desire to rise within the social stratum while simultaneously revealing the impossibility of 'separate but equal.' In order to establish equity, we must *all* understand, unequivocally, the history of violence within our nation and how that violence robbed generations of social, economic, political, and cultural equality. Buchanan attempts to share this history of violence with the observers of her art by creating environments where ghosts are apt to appear. *Unity Stones*, for example, was placed at "a boundary between a middle/upper class white population and a working class black population" in Macon, Georgia — a liminal space.[41] Some may recognize the significance of the piece's location while others may not; and perhaps that was Buchanan's intention. By creating a sense of uneasiness and uncertainty, the artist also created an environment where one may ask questions. An environment in which an observer might allow ghosts to reside in the space where answers are absent. A "terrain situated between our ability to conclusively describe the logic of Capitalism or State Terror… and the various experiences of this logic, experiences that are more often than not partial, coded, symptomatic, contradictory," and "ambiguous," as Gordon puts it.[42]

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[36] Campbell, "'We're Going to See Blood on Them Next:,'" *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* no. 29 (2016): 22.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Adolph Reed Jr, "Bookerism and the Black Elite," *New Republic* 251, no. 3 (2020): 10.
[40] Phagan, "An Interview with Beverly Buchanan," *Art Papers* 8, no. 1 (1984): 17.

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[41] Campbell, "'We're Going to See Blood on Them Next:,'" *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* no. 29 (2016): 26-27.

[42] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 24.

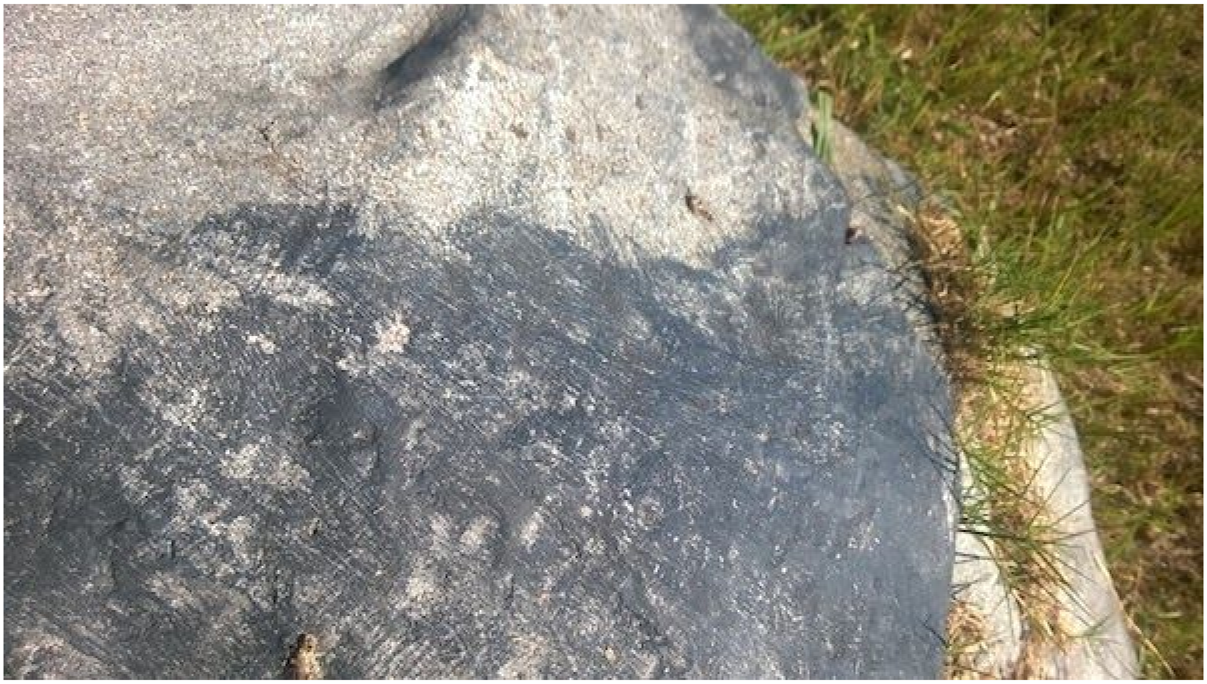

Figure 3
Beverly Buchanan, *Unity Stones* [detail showing grinder marks], concrete and black granite, 1983, Booker T. Washington Community Center, Macon, GA, photo courtesy of Andy Campbell.

Additionally, by repeating the intensive labor forced upon her ancestors, Buchanan imparted her presence onto the Southern landscape — blood and sweat; anguish and pain. She returned to the racialized terrors perpetrated against Black citizens — she embraced the violence, anchoring the ghosts of slaves murdered in the name of progress to the dirt in front of the Booker T. Washington Memorial Center. Her “material process” consisted of “cheap and ubiquitous materials” and “a labor-intensive process” that “[forged] a link between historical black labor in the South” and Buchanan’s physical exertion.[43] *Unity Stones*, before being worn down by weather and time, bore “grinder marks” from the artist’s shaping of the hardened slurry (Figure 3).[44] Buchanan’s choices in materials and process could be physically taxing, especially since she was “[living] with asthma and with the side effects of the prednisone[45] she had to take to manage it.”[46] Yet she took this risk, choosing to remember and honor her ancestors by working with Georgia’s dirt and clay — dirt and clay that was once tilled by slaves whose blood and sweat once soaked the ground. Perhaps her experience lingers still, adding another ghost to the site; another “enchantment in a disenchanted world.”[47]

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[43] Campbell, “‘We’re Going to See Blood on Them Next:,’” *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* no. 29 (2016): 26-27.
[44] Ibid.

Buchanan once described her sculptures as a celebration of existence; a reminder that history can never be fully erased. In a 1982 interview with *Essence* magazine, she explained “‘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!’”[48] *Unity Stones* gives voice to the spirits lingering in the south-eastern landscape, spirits who want their histories to be heard. But it also acts as a memorial, or shrine of sorts, to the slaves and sharecroppers who toiled under the Georgia sun, to the brave citizens fighting for equity, to the Black citizens of the South who were persecuted simply for being alive. Their ghosts survive in the dirt and clay and granite, in “those forces that… [make] its mark by being there and not there at the same time,” in the liminal space between equality and equity.[49] Gordon writes that “the dialectics of visibility and invisibility involve a constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows;” Buchanan coaxes her audience to step into the shadows, to explore the unknown, to dream that folklore and ghost stories could be true, and to always question what we accept to be fact.[50]

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[45] Prednisone, for those who aren’t familiar with the steroid, includes a list of side effects ranging from swelling and rapid weight gain, severe depression and seizures, to pancreatitis and high blood pressure.
[46] Rhea Anastas, “Beverly Buchanan,” *Artforum International* 55, no. 5 (2017): 204.
[47] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 8.
[48] Karen Rosenberg, “Haunting ‘Ruins and Rituals’ Begins ‘A Year of Yes’ at Brooklyn Museum,” nytimes.com, The New York Times, November 10, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/ 11/11/arts/design/beverly-buchanan-ruins-and-rituals-brooklyn-museum.html.
[49] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 6.

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[50] Ibid, 17.

III: Patching Up, 2009

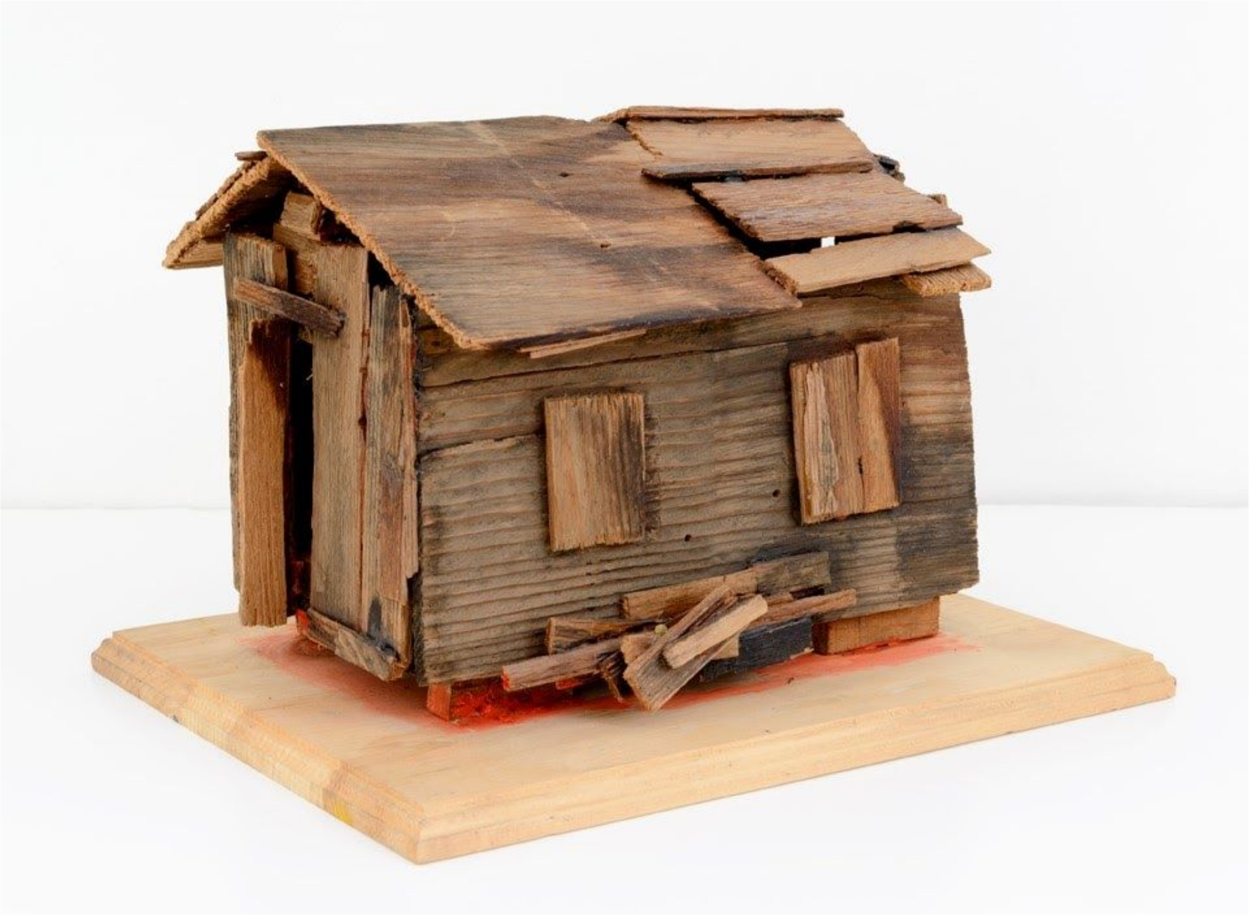

Figure 4
Beverly Buchanan, *Patching Up*, cedar, acrylic paint, and glue, 8 1/2 x 8 x 11 7/8 inches, 2009, The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg SC, photo courtesy of The Johnson Collection.

Made from scraps of cedar wood, acrylic paint, and glue, *Patching Up* (2009) is one of many iterations of the shack motif that Beverly Buchanan created throughout her lifetime (Figure 4). It is an incredibly delicate construction, the pieces of wood are mere centimeters thick, stained from the elements and age. The miniature, rickety homestead sits atop a wooden plank, removed from any geographical setting — but one might imagine it is reminiscent of the homes from her childhood in Orangeburg, South Carolina. While the shack's windows remain shuttered, Buchanan left the front door slightly ajar, allowing observers to glimpse the interior if they position themselves correctly. Buchanan has admitted to ‘spying’ on observers of her works: “There are all sorts of interesting kinds of rituals that people project all the time in the work. I’m not sure that people think about it or would call it a ritual, but the act of walking close, the distance that people get to or from it when they look around to see what the ground is like that it’s sitting [on]… are all types of rituals.”[51] The artist was not only concerned with the *reaction* of observers to the wooden construction, but how they *interacted* with the work as well. The small, seemingly innocuous details of the shack’s construction are, in fact, quite intentional. Every misshapen shingle on the roof, the cluster of twigs glued to the side of the home, even the neon reddish-orange splatter of acrylic paint beneath the shack’s foundation correspond to specific design choices made by the artist to draw observers in. Buchanan understood these structures to be “‘paintings in the round,’” three-dimensional “‘abstract portraits’” commemorating members of her community.[52]

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[51] Phagan, “An Interview with Beverly Buchanan,” *Art Papers* 8, no. 1 (1984): 17.

[52] Courtney Fiske, “Beverly Buchanan, Thornton Dial, and the Gee’s Bend Quiltmakers: Andrew Edlin Gallery,” *Artforum International* 57, no. 2 (2018): 228.

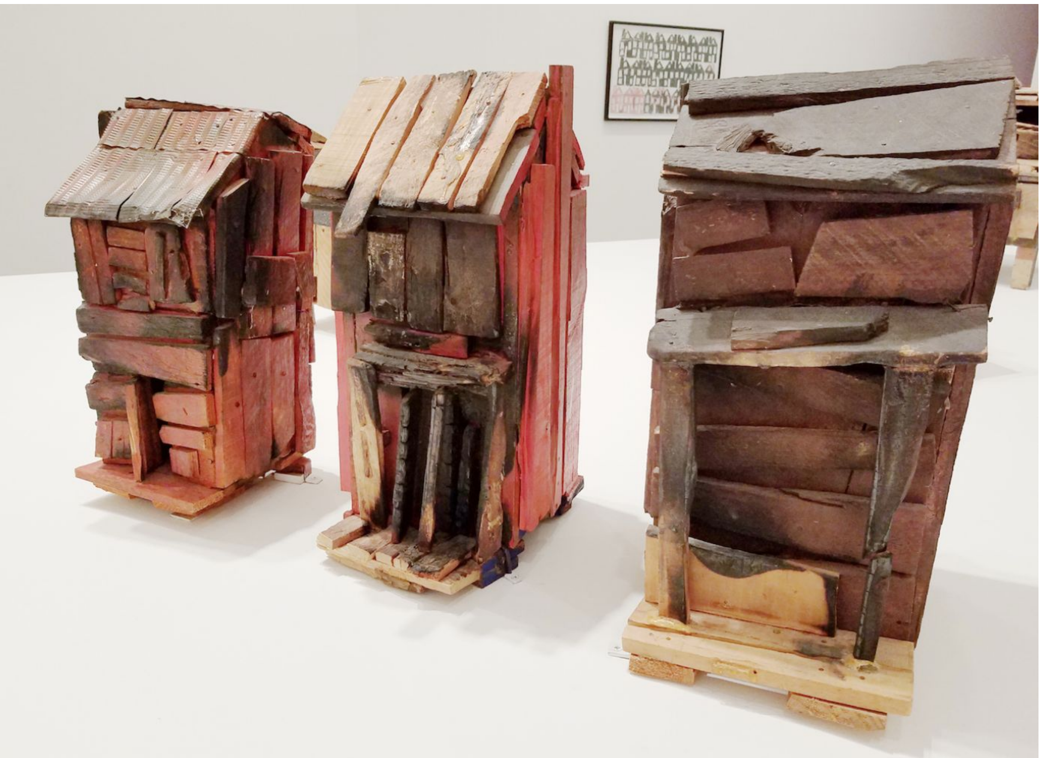

Figure 5
Beverly Buchanan, *Three Families (A Memorial Piece with Scars)*, wood with paint, charcoal, and metal, 1989, photo courtesy of Stephen Maine.

The details on *Patching Up* and the other shacks Buchanan created throughout her life are linked to the artist's personal history; each construction is indexed with a memory of ghosts from her past. *Three Burnt Shacks* (1990, Figure 5) records an instant the artist remembers well: Roderick Jenkins, a man who lived near Buchanan in Macon, "'was home drinking and chain smoking when he fell asleep. He did that a lot.'"[53] She also recalls "'Mrs. Ella Jenkins [running] out first, stark naked, followed… by a large white chicken.'"[54] While comical, this scene also bears truth to the ephemerality of home in the rural South; an ephemerality that Buchanan attempted to solve through documentation and artistry. As highlighted through the 'legends'

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[53] Linda McGreevy, "Beverly Buchanan," *Art Papers* 16, no. 6 (1992): 61.
[54] Ibid.

(memories about the person or people living in these shacks) attached to many of her constructions, the shacks represented specific homes and people which, without the artist's documentation, would have most likely been forgotten over time.[55] Unfortunately, I was informed by the Johnson Collection, the caretakers of *Patching Up*, that this construction did not come with a legend.

There is a member of Buchanan's Macon cohort; however, with whom the artist spent a great deal of time: Ms. Mary Lou Furcron. She was an elderly woman whose self-constructed home provided inspiration for Buchanan's miniature shacks, as well as a role model to the artist. With mud and logs sourced from the Georgia topography, Furcron built her own shelter from the ground up, permanently enshrining herself within the dirt of her landscape — an antemortem tomb of sorts.[56] Buchanan documented Furcron within her home in large, color-printed photographs (Figure 6).[57] The craftsmanship of the cabin is spectacular; rudimentary in the most inventive ways. Each log is stacked perfectly and each shingle seamlessly fitted to the house's frame, like a three dimensional puzzle, a barrier between Furcron and the elements of the outdoors. Buchanan's shrunken shack constructions pale in comparison to Ms. Mary Lou's resourceful, full-size, habitable home, and the artist recognized this fact.[58] While Furcron's home is now an abandoned cabin in the Macon woods, Buchanan's art sustains, and acts as a shrine to, her "physically and spiritually indomitable" character.[59] Her art is concerned with preserving the architectural vernacular of farmworkers in Georgia and South Carolina, but I think more importantly, it is concerned with documenting the ways each individual from her community survived and thrived within the confines of racially instituted poverty.

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[55] Fiske, "Beverly Buchanan, Thornton Dial, and the Gee's Bend Quiltmakers: Andrew Edlin Gallery," *Artforum International* 57, no. 2 (2018): 228.

[56] McGreevy, "Beverly Buchanan," *Art Papers* 16, no. 6 (1992): 61.

[57] Beverly Buchanan, "Ms. Mary Lou Furcron," whitney.org, Whitney Museum of American Art: Accessed December 28, 2019, https://whitney.org/collection/works/16801.

[58] McGreevy, "Beverly Buchanan," *Art Papers* 16, no. 6 (1992): 61.

[59] Ibid.

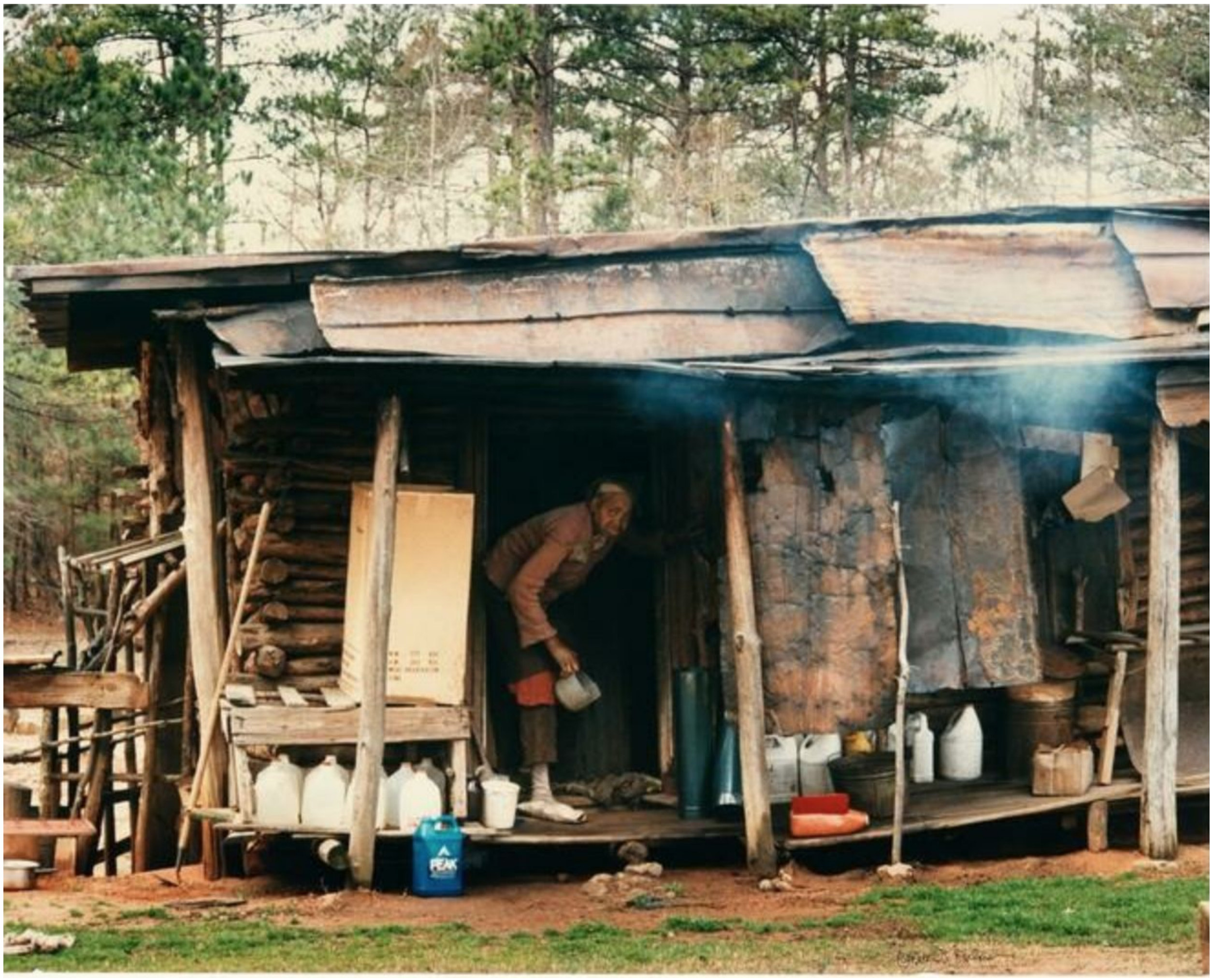

Figure 6
Beverly Buchanan, *Ms. Mary Lou Furcron*, chromogenic print, 24 × 29 15/16 inches, 1989, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City.

Another woman who inspired Buchanan was Alice Walker, author of the acclaimed novel *The Color Purple* (1982) which won a Pulitzer Prize the year after its publication.[60] Walker was born and raised in Eatonton, Georgia, about an hour outside of Macon.[61] The landscape of

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[60] "Alice Walker," britannica.com, The Encyclopedia Britannica, February 5, 2020. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alice-Walker.
[61] Ibid.

Walker's childhood, like Buchanan's, was sprinkled with shacks cobbled together by tenant farmers, whose time was spent producing crops for their white overseers. In fact, Walker lived in one of these shacks during the earliest years of her life.[62] There is not a great deal of documentation of a relationship between the two women, but a moving poem Walker wrote to honor Buchanan after her death shows that they were more than colleagues. *Beverly's Dancing Shack for Alice* remembers the artist's ability to make noble the rustic and poverty-riddled South. Accompanying the poem on Walker's official website is a photo of the brightly colored miniature home made by Buchanan (Figure 7). Towards the conclusion of *Beverly's Dancing Shack for Alice*, Walker tells the reader exactly why she wrote the elegy:

> This poem is to say how glad I am
> To have the shack
> You made for me. Red as a strawberry!
> I would never have thought of that; yet
> How right it has turned out to be.[63]

This poem is perhaps the best description of Buchanan's exceptional capacity to preserve and transform history through art. Because the two shared a similar upbringing, Walker is uniquely able to understand the significance of Buchanan's altars to the architecture of poverty in the rural South. The poem begins:

> Someone who knew me well
> And that I'd lived
> In many a gray shack
> My mother transformed
> With flowers
> Took me to your house
> To meet you:
> To see the shacks
> You rescued from our shame
> And transformed with your wit,
> Small nails, old boards,

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[62] Ibid.

[63] Alice Walker, "Beverly's Dancing Shack for Alice," alicewalkersgarden.com, Alice Walker, 2015, https://alicewalkersgarden.com/2015/08/beverly-buchanan-artist-1940-2015/.

And paint.[64]

The ninth line of the poem, "You rescued from our shame," bears such power; Buchanan, at least in Alice Walker's mind, saved a significant aspect of Southern cultural history, making beautiful a once ignominious aspect of life for many citizens of the region. She neither erased the harsh realities of rural poverty with her constructions, nor did she focus on them; instead she celebrated what residents of these regions were able to accomplish in spite of these realities. Buchanan was able to make clear "that even those who live in the most dire circumstances possess a complex and oftentimes contradictory humanity and subjectivity that is never adequately glimpsed by viewing them as victims or, on the other hand, as superhuman agents," as Avery Gordon explains in *Ghostly Matters*.[65] The artist instilled human energies — love, grief, joy, sorrow — into a Southern vernacular that was only looked upon through a lens of poverty and disdain; in a way, personifying these shacks with the character of various individuals from her communities.

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[64] Ibid.

[65] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 4.

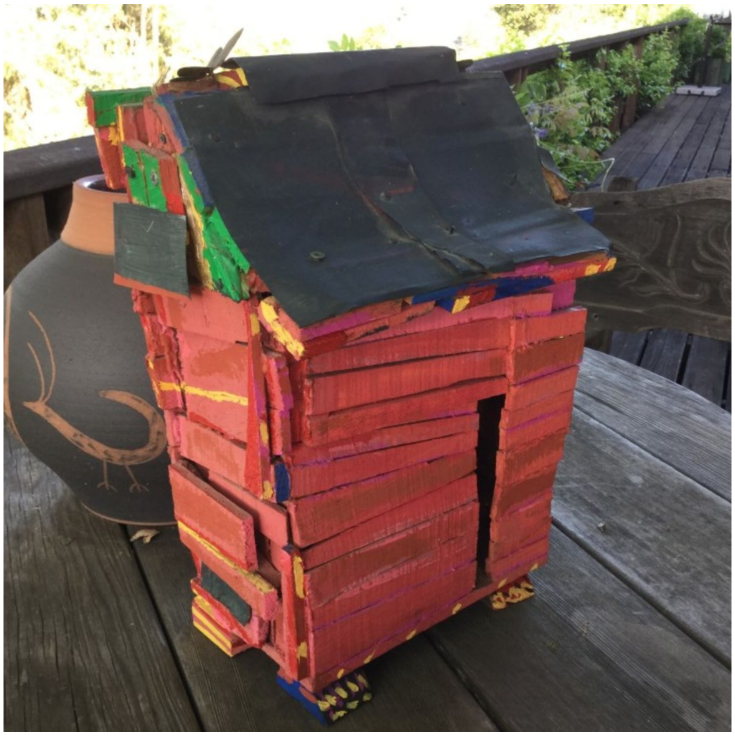

Figure 7
Beverly Buchanan, *Dancing Shack for Alice*, 2015, cedar, acrylic paint and glue, dimensions unknown, from the personal collection of Alice Walker, photo courtesy of Alice Walker.

Another way in which Buchanan "[made] new / And restorative of soul / The old pain" and "[learned] / To carry with grace and humor / All that has happened" to Black citizens of the South, was to instill moments of childhood joy within her works of art.[66] In an interview with Patricia Phagan for *Art Papers* in 1984, when asked how long she had been making sculptures, Buchanan responded "I've always constructed things, so it's very hard for me to put a date on what time I actually, consciously, called them sculptures. Ever since I can remember I've been constructing things, I've considered myself a professional artist for twenty years now, so I would say I've been making sculptures the last twenty years."[67] *Patching Up* is a culmination of years of practice constructing what Buchanan would only come to call 'sculptures' at the age of twenty-six.[68] By reenacting a form of play from her youth, Buchanan imparted a sense of whimsy on structures built for necessity, not want.

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[66] Alice Walker, "Beverly's Dancing Shack for Alice," alicewalkersgarden.com, Alice Walker, 2015, https://alicewalkersgarden.com/2015/08/beverly-buchanan-artist-1940-2015/.
[67] Phagan, "An Interview with Beverly Buchanan," *Art Papers* 8, no. 1 (1984): 17.

The shacks of the rural South were not emblematic of folksy charm or simple living, but a deep history of physical and economic violence against Black citizens of the region who worked in the dirt of South Carolina and Georgia, developing the land and breaking their bodies without compensation. Avery Gordon asserts that "the way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening;" Buchanan's shacks do both things. They look towards her past, her childhood for artistic inspiration — "what has happened" — while simultaneously drawing insight from the people of her (then) present-day community — what "is happening." [69]As a child, Buchanan lived with her great aunt and uncle in Orangeburg, South Carolina, where her uncle acted as dean for the agricultural school at South Carolina State University.[70] In the same interview, Buchanan explains that, because of her proximity to the university, she was able to begin her sculptural work at an age when art is also play; "I had access, as a kid, to a lot of cast-off pieces of wood. I lived near a program for college students where they had to construct mock houses. Their instructors and other faculty would take the houses home for their children as doll-houses, and of course I never got one. But that was all right — there were a lot of cast-off wood chips and pieces left over, and I was certainly free to take them. I would drag them home and make things."[71]

It is important to note that during her uncle's tenure as dean, the university where he worked was known by a different name. The Colored Normal Industrial Agricultural and

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 8.
[70] "Beverly Buchanan (1940-2017)," thejohnsoncollection.org, The Johnson Collection, accessed October 10, 2019, http://thejohnsoncollection.org/beverly-buchanan/.
[71] Phagan, "An Interview with Beverly Buchanan," *Art Papers* 8, no. 1 (1984): 17.

Mechanical College of South Carolina, founded in 1896, was described as "a normal, industrial, agricultural, and mechanical college for the higher education of the colored youth of the state."[72] "'Under the management of a separate board of trustees and a 'separate corps of professors... [with] representation given to men and women of the negro race….' the school was an immediate implementation of the separate but equal doctrine, as the school was established the very same year as Plessy v. Ferguson.".[73] The school retained its original title until 1954, fourteen years after Buchanan's birth, when it was changed to South Carolina State College. It is also significant that for the first twenty five years of the artist's life, until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Jim Crow remained in effect. Beverly Buchanan's early experiences perfectly embody the dichotomy of a Southern upbringing — pastoral and serene; cruel and uninviting.

The shacks that Buchanan began to create after moving to Macon, Georgia in 1977 are grown-up versions of the 'things' the artist made from scraps during her childhood that are instilled with the harsh truths she came to terms with during adulthood and the complex histories of her community.[74] These representations of the "indigenous architecture of rural poverty" bear a distinct resemblance to Romare Bearden's collage work from the mid-twentieth century, joining methods of contemporary art to traditional forms. In his article *The Political Abstractions of Beverly Buchanan*, Stephen Maine, a New York-based painter and sculptor, reinforces the necessity of a contemporary arts-based understanding of the Appalachian artist's works. Maine asserts that "in its concern with geological processes, indeterminacy, artistic labor, and the nature of art's relationship to audience, [Buchanan's] work is in tune with the period's avant-garde."[75] Because of her status as a Black, Appalachian woman, Buchanan's innovations were not fully recognized until 2017 when the Brooklyn Museum launched their posthumous exhibition *Beverly Buchanan — Ruins and Rituals*. Rather than simply focusing on materials or methods, the typical rubric for analysis of 'craft' or 'folk art' similar to Buchanan's, this exhibition, like Stephen Maine's article, emphasized the complexity of Buchanan's identity and upbringing alongside the intentionality of ritual and material within an historical context. Rhea Anastas, professor of art and art history at the University of California, Irvine notes in an essay for *Artforum*, "her objects do not simply 'refer to' or 'comment on' the materialism and history of American southeastern rural daily life, they fully inhabit it."[76]

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[72] Campbell, "'We're Going to See Blood on Them Next:,'" *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* no. 29 (2016): 8.
[73] "South Carolina State University," greenbookofsc.com, The Green Book of South Carolina, accessed January 18, 2019, https://greenbookofsc.com/locations/south-carolina-state-university/.
[74] Phagan, "An Interview with Beverly Buchanan," *Art Papers* 8, no. 1 (1984): 16.

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[75] Stephen Maine, "The Political Abstractions of Beverly Buchanan," hyperallergic.com, Hyperallergic, October 29, 2016, https://hyperallergic.com/333331/the-political-abstractions-of-beverly-buchanan/.

[76] Rhea Anastas, "Beverly Buchanan," *Artforum International* 55, no. 5 (2017): 204.

IV: Marsh Ruins, 1981

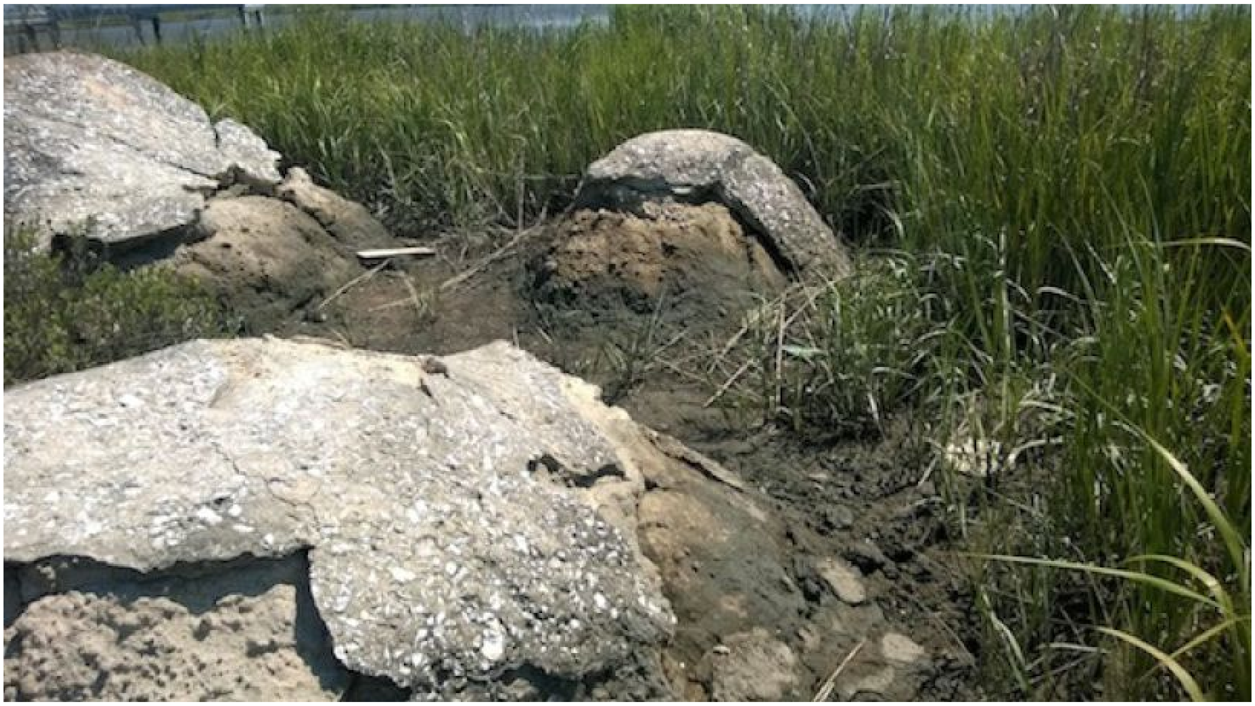

Figure 8
Beverly Buchanan, *Marsh Ruins* (2016), concrete and tabby, 1981, Marshes of Glynn, Brunswick, GA, photo courtesy of Andy Campbell.

Marsh Ruins, created in 1981, is perhaps the most haunting of Buchanan's works. Placed near the tideline in the Marshes of Glynn on the coastal Mackay River in Brunswick, Georgia, this particular land-based sculpture appears almost natural — "unbeautiful and thick" — as Andy Campbell describes them (Figure 8).[77] The sculpture consists of three lumpen boulders, a blown-up version of *Unity Stone's* squat, concrete seats. Unlike *Unity Stones*; however, *Marsh Ruins* is made from tabby, "a mixture made from crushed oyster shells, heated over a fire and dissolved in water and sand…. Once... hardened, the whole shell tabby [is] covered with a protective coat of lime putty, making the [mixture] smooth."[78] This was one of the earliest forms of cement and because of its main ingredient of oyster shells, was predominantly used in coastal regions.[79] Because of the abundance of materials required to create the rudimentary cement, as well as the durability of the mixture, tabby became a main component of construction during the Antebellum period, chiefly made by slaves of the Southeast coastal regions.[80] "[Tabby] is a cheap, yet labour-intensive, material and was therefore used widely in colonial America for building slave cabins and other structures (with slave labour).[81] By creating a work through a material process directly linked to slavery, Buchanan once again realizes her art through acts of remembrance, "reinstating a material history into the present as a means of accessing the politics of the past."[82] Yet, in its construction, Buchanan chose to break the tradition of cultivating Southern land through uncompensated physical exertion. Rather than contribute further to the violence of the past with harsh labor as she did with *Unity Stones*, Buchanan hired outside help to assist with construction. She was equipped with "contractors,… parks professionals, environmental clearances," and "hefty [pools] of cash."[83]

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[77] Campbell, "'We're Going to See Blood on Them Next:,'" *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* no. 29 (2016): 16.

The project was supported by the Guggenheim and National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships that were conferred to the artist in 1980.[84] In addition to hired labor, Buchanan was able to afford a studio assistant to help develop *Marsh Ruins* into a meaningful sculptural work along the Georgia shoreline. The research behind this artistic endeavor proved to be just as significant as its final rendering. The Marshes of Glynn contained ghosts of a violent past long before the artist touched its banks, and in order to properly memorialize these marginalized inhabitants of the Georgia coast, the artist had to uncover graves, sift through dirt, and relive violence. On trips to find a location to begin *Marsh Ruins'* construction, Virginia Pickard, Buchanan's assistant, and the artist "would often stop beside small, sometimes abandoned, black churches, setting out looking for slave graveyards."[85] Under years worth of kudzu and grass, the two explorers discovered many sites that produced "evidence of a slave graveyard (a few pieces of wood or stones placed in a particular alignment)."[86] Buchanan would then leave small concrete grave markers she sculpted at the sites, extending the permanence of these particular slaves' histories.

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[78] Pam James, Mary Mott. & Dawn Baker, "Investigating a Tabby Slave Cabin," projectarchaeology.org, Project Archaeology, 2015. https://projectarchaeology.org/product/investigating-a-tabby-slave-cabin/, 3.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Melick, "Beverly Buchanan," *Frieze* 185 (2017): 171.
[83] Campbell, "'We're Going to See Blood on Them Next:,'" *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* no. 29 (2016): 16.
[84] "Beverly Buchanan," gf.org, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, accessed January 17, 2020. https://www.gf.org/fellows/all-fellows/beverly-buchanan/.

We may infer, then, that *Marsh Ruins* is a larger iteration of the small sculptures the artist left behind at these unmarked gravesites. The three enormous tabby rocks create a gargantuan gravestone, preserving the memory of slaves from the region who were denied a proper burial. While we don't know the specific stories of the African men and women whose gravesites Buchanan visited, we *do* know stories that circulated throughout the Georgia slave community. Stories that were a scripture of sorts, providing guidance, courage, and fortitude to the communities who were ripped from their homes, forced to cultivate a land that was not their own. One such story is the true legend of Igbo Landing.[87] In 1803, a group of captive Africans from the tribe known as 'Igbo,' located in the present-day region of Nigeria, "rose in rebellion" on the slave ship *York*.[88] They drowned the men who brought them across the ocean to a cruel and uninviting 'new world' and ran the boat ashore Dunbar Creek. While the group managed to free themselves of their enemies, they could not loose their chains, nor could they force white inhabitants of Georgia to view them as anything other than a vessel for labor. The Igbo people knew that their escape would not last while slavery was still extant in America, so rather than return to the cruelty and inhumanity of their captors, the tribe emancipated themselves in death (Figure 9).[89]

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[85] Campbell, "'We're Going to See Blood on Them Next:,'" *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* no. 29 (2016): 16.
[86] Ibid.
[87] The spelling of the location varies from author to author, but all are correct. It can be reffered to as 'Ibo Landing,' 'Ebo Landing,' or 'Ebos Landing,' in addition to 'Igbo Landing.'

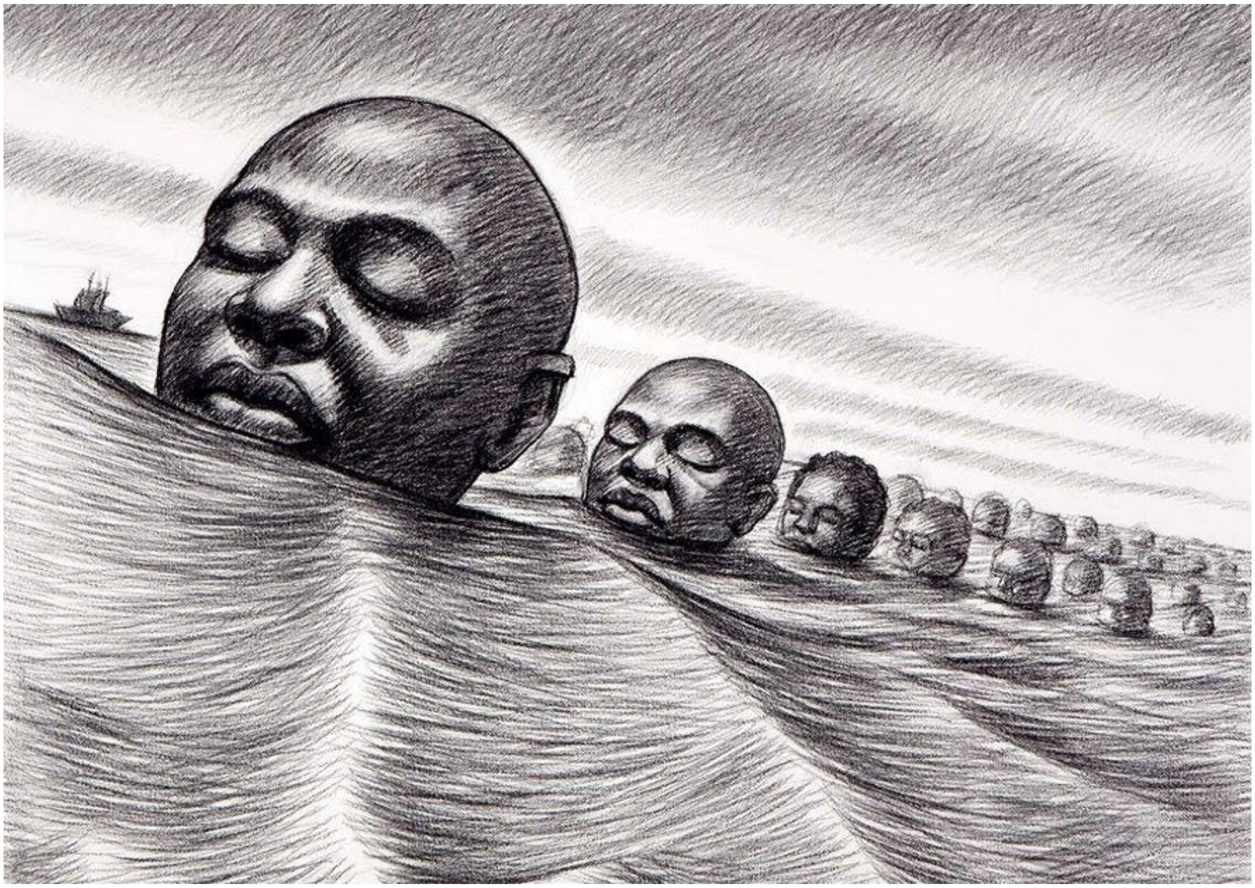

Figure 9

Donovan Nelson, *Ibo Landing*, charcoal and paper, date unknown, featured on https://face2faceafrica.com/ "The tragic yet resilient story of Igbo slaves who committed mass suicide off U.S. coast in 1803," image courtesy of Donovan Nelson.

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[88] Bridget Boakye, "The Tragic Yet Resilient Story of Igbo Slaves Who Committed Mass Suicide of U.S. Coast in 1803," face2faceafrica.com, Face 2 Face Africa, June 12, 2018. https://face2faceafrica. com/article/the-Tragic-yet-resilient-story-of-igbo-slaves-who-committed-mass-suicide-off-u-s-coast-in-1803.

[89] Ibid.

Slaves in Georgia and other Southeastern regions communicated their legends, traditions and stories of the past orally, so the tale of Igbo has many different iterations in the vernacular of Black history. Each adaptation; however, views the suicide of these seventy-five men and women not as a tragedy, but as a triumph, an act of brave defiance. For example, here is a version of the event retold by Wallace Quarterman in the 1930s:

> Well, at that time Mr. Blue he was the overseer and . . . Mr. Blue he go down one morning with a long whip for to whip them good. . . . Anyway, he whipped them good and they got together and stuck that hoe in the field and then . . . rose up in the sky and turned themselves into buzzards and flew right back to Africa. . . . Everybody knows about them.[90]

The "legend of the flying African" originated with the death of the Igbo slaves in 1803 but has maintained immortality in the minds of older generations such as Quarterman's and through creations of Black artists, many of whom were women, such as Toni Morrison (*Song of Solomon,* 1977), Virginia Hamilton (*The People Could Fly,* 1985), and now Beverly Buchanan (*Marsh Ruins*, 1981).[91] While there is no documentation of this fact, it is very likely that Buchanan would have been familiar with the works of Toni Morrison whose novels focused a critical eye towards racism perpetrated in the United States after the Civil Rights Movement. Like Buchanan, Morrison looked to stories of the past, stories from Black oral history rooted in violence and slavery, as a mode through which to communicate the potential, and *need*, for a different future. *Song of Solomon* begins:

> The North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance agent promised to fly from Mercy to the other side of Lake Superior at three o'clock. Two days before the event was to take place he tacked a note on the door of his little yellow house:
>
> > At 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday the 18th of February, 1931, I will take off from Mercy and fly away on my own wings. Please forgive me. I loved you all.
> >
> > (signed) Robert Smith,

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[90] Timothy Powell, "Ebos Landing," georgiaencyclopedia.org, New Georgia Encyclopedia, February 28, 2017, https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/ebos-landing.

[91] Sophia Nahli Allison, "Revisiting the Legend of Flying Africans." Newyorker.com. The New Yorker, March 7, 2019. https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/revisiting-the-legend-of-flying-africans.

Ins. agent[92]

By referencing the Igbo Slave legend in the first lines of her novel, Morrison acknowledges the significance of history within modern contexts. Just like Buchanan, the author engaged in psychological excavations of her own mind and the minds of her ancestors, artistically memorializing their victories and their pain with futuristic works that are rooted in the past. They "[track] through time… that which makes its mark by being there and not there at the same time;" the emotional imprints from people of the past, the stories they told, the hardships they endured, their unassailable spirits.[93]

The marshes of Georgia have ties to numerous literary works of art; during the late nineteenth century, Macon-born confederate soldier Sidney Lanier wrote a poem titled *Marshes of Glynn*. The Marshes of Glynn are located in Brunswick Georgia, about 10 miles from Dunbar Creek on St. Simons Island where the Igbo slaves "flew away" to freedom. The poem titled after the reed-filled, pluff mud covered Georgia shores, according to Andy Campbell, was mandatory reading "in the 20th century;" "most Georgians… would have memorized part or all of… [the] Romantic poem."[94] It is a significant piece of the state's cultural history. This ode to the coastal Georgia landscape comprises eleven stanzas, each full of flowery, expressive phrases wrought with transcendental Christian allusions.[95] Lanier paints a beautiful scene out of beautiful language, ignorant of the violence rooted in the dirt he wrote about so tenderly. In fact, in the eighth stanza, the poet blindly inscribes the "legend of the flying African" into his white-washed perspective of Southern topography:

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[92] Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, New York: Knopf, 1977, 1.
[93] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 6.
[94] Campbell, "'We're Going to See Blood on Them Next:,'" *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* no. 29 (2016): 15.
[95] "The Marshes of Glynn." Encyclopedia.com. Encyclopedia.com, February 1, 2020. https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/culture-magazines/marshes-glynn.

> As the marsh-hen secretly builds on the watery sod,
> Behold I will build me a nest on the greatness of God:
> I will fly in the greatness of God as the marsh-hen flies
> In the freedom that fills all the space 'twixt the marsh and the skies…[96]

While we do not know if this was an intentional reference to the legends of Africans flying to freedom, it is quite possible Lanier would have encountered the tale during his life in the South. With her knowledge of the history surrounding Igbo Landing and familiarity with *Marshes of Glynn*, Buchanan would have made a connection between the eighth stanza and the "legend of the flying African."[97] With glaringly cruel irony, Lanier lauds a freedom he actively fought to withhold from certain citizens of his country; in fact, he gave his life to the cause. Following his capture in 1864 near Richmond, Virginia where he was a prisoner for five months, Lanier developed tuberculosis on the journey home to Georgia. Complications from the disease lead to his eventual death in 1881.[98] It seems appropriate, then, that a Black woman from the South would reclaim this land; Buchanan most likely chose to erect *Marsh Ruins* in this exact spot *because* of its relationship to the locally renowned confederate soldier and his most famous work. By creating a grave marker upon the land historically connected to Lanier, Buchanan imparts the history of her own people into the poem; one can not separate *Marshes of Glynn* from the violent deaths commemorated by *Marsh Ruins*.

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[96] Sidney Lanier, "The Marshes of Glynn," poets.org, poets.org, accessed February 8, 2020, https://poets.org/poem/marshes-glynn.

[97] Allison, "Revisiting the Legend of Flying Africans." Newyorker.com. The New Yorker, March 7, 2019. https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/revisiting-the-legend-of-flying-africans.

[98] "Sidney Lanier," poets.org, poets.org, accessed February 8, 2020, https://poets.org/poet/sidney-lanier.

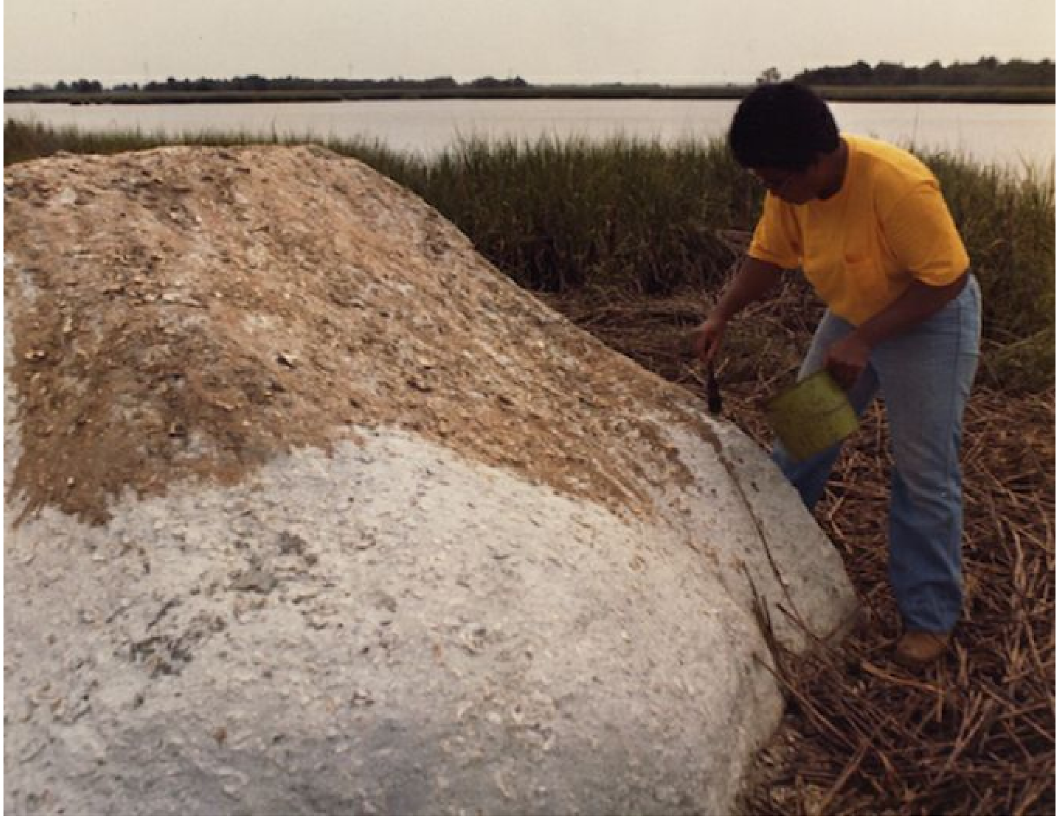

Figure 10
Beverly Buchanan, installing and staining *Marsh Ruins*, concrete and tabby, 1981, Marshes of Glynn, Brunswick GA, photo courtesy of the Museum of Arts and Sciences, Macon, GA.

While the sculpture may act as a gravesite for slaves of the region, it, just like any other headstone, will eventually be washed away by the elements. It's inexorable destruction relates to Buchanan's altered definition of "permanence" which she explained in a 1984 interview:

> Landmarks, in this country, can last from anywhere from a day to 200 years. I think I'm almost entirely American about that. I really see that we have a heritage of 'if this is in the way, then let's tear it down.' We grow up with landmarks that are familiar to us, and when we become adults, those landmarks either do not exist anymore or something has happened to them…. I don't have the feeling that something should be there forever…. I really want the sculptures to be enjoyed by people now…. They… carry the weight of permanence, but in carrying that weight of permanence, I also realize that they may not be there permanently. What is permanent could be twelve years; if that is our permanence, then they'll be there twelve years.[99]

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[99] Phagan, "An Interview with Beverly Buchanan," *Art Papers* 8, no. 1 (1984): 17.

Though the creation of *Marsh Ruins* predated this quotation, the sculpture manages to impart a sense of transience upon its form; the same sense of transience that is often attached to history and memory. The markers of culture we believe to be permanent, inerasable, will eventually be remembered in the same way that we remember the ancient Greeks or Romans — with significant moments and monuments — leaving most individuals to be forgotten over time. By placing the memorial along the edge of an ebbing, salty body of water, Buchanan forged a direct link between nature and memory, emphasizing the ephemerality of both. *Marsh Ruins* will eventually wash away with the tide, eroded by saline and wind and waves (Figure 10). It is a work destined for ruination and eventual erasure from history, just as the stories and oral histories of American slaves are subject to deterioration over time.

Permanence is impermanent; we can not predict how long structures, or works of art, or history, or governments, or society, or anything in this world might last. *Beverly's Dancing Shack For Alice* touches upon a type of impermanence that is especially vivid within Black American communities; that of identity. In the fifth stanza, Walker ponders:

> Buchanan, for instance. Whose name
> Was that before it was slapped across
> The memory of the enslaved?
> Your ancestors
> In Africa were not Buchanans
> And may have been esteemed artists
> Every one of them,
> For all we know.[100]

When Africans were forced to enter slavery in America, they were also forced to yield their idenities — to be called by their captors name, making it especially difficult for Black Americans to discover their genealogy. Despite innovations in modern technology that allow internet-users to trace their family histories such as digitized census information, Ancestry.com, et cetera, uncovering the identities of enslaved Africans in America is quite difficult. Not only is it burdensome in the sense that it takes a great deal of time and energy, it is an emotionally taxing task: one must often uncover information about their relatives' "owners" in order to trace their family tree, thrusting the researcher into a traumatic atmosphere.[101] The family's history and the history of their captors are forever intertwined. Luckily; however, as Avery Gorden asserts "we have rethought the relationship between knowledge and power, between text and context, highlighting the relationship between authorization and modes of authority. And we have made considerable representational reparations for past exclusions and silencings, making the previously unknown known, telling new stories, correcting the official records."[102] "*Telling new stories*;" Buchanan, like Walker and Morrison, reclaimed moments of Black history through her works of art, chronicling the experiences of her communities; and in doing so, each artist made anew the names that were "slapped across / The memory of the enslaved."[103]

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[100] Alice Walker, "Beverly's Dancing Shack for Alice," alicewalkersgarden.com, Alice Walker, 2015, https://alicewalkersgarden.com/2015/08/beverly-buchanan-artist-1940-2015/.

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[101] Rebecca Onion, "How Do Descendants of Slaves Find Their Ancestors?" Slate.com, Slate, September 2, 2016, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2016/09/how-do-descendants-of-slaves-find-their-ancestors.html.

[102] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 20.

[103] Alice Walker, "Beverly's Dancing Shack for Alice," alicewalkersgarden.com, Alice Walker, 2015, https://alicewalkersgarden.com/2015/08/beverly-buchanan-artist-1940-2015/.

V: Conclusion

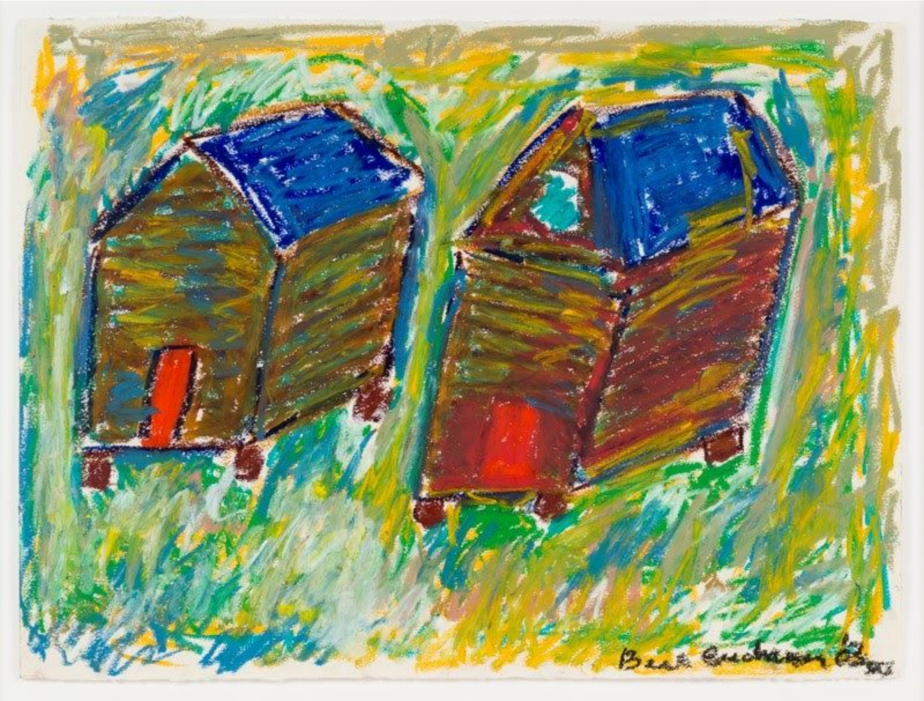

Figure 11
Beverly Buchanan, *Macon Georgia*, oil pastel on paper, 22 5/8 x 30 inches, 2003, The Johnson Collection, Spartanburg, SC, photo courtesy of The Johnson Collection.

While Buchanan's works of art refer to the darker themes of dirt, violence, and ghosts, *Macon Georgia* (2003, Figure 11) emphasizes the beauty of the heavens in the Southeast, shedding a positive light over the region's dark history — sun through the cracks of a log cabin. The impressionistic oil pastel is an idyllic depiction of the verdant, pastoral Southern landscape that was once dotted with these rustic homes. With sprightly, child-like scribbles, Buchanan blends the rich colors of the sky and the earth into a single field, borrowing tints of pink, blue, and white from the heavens and green, yellow, and ecru hues from the earth. She once again employs her famed shack motif, drawing twin log structures side by side. The house on the left appears sturdy and secure while the house on the right seems to collapse towards the edge of the paper. The roofs on both renderings of the shacks mirror the blue of the sky rather than the reddish brown color of rusted metal that covered many of the rural homes in Macon such as Mary Lou Furcron's (Figure 6). Buchanan infused elements of beauty into the rustic cabins that were not always visible to the naked eye — the grace of a sloping wall held up by carefully carved wooden logs, the freedom of a window tilted upwards towards the heavens, drawing light and air into the structure, the convergence of dirt and sky as the sun recedes behind the western horizon.

Drawing was Buchanan's first foray into art; during *Contemporary Issues for Black Artists*, a symposium held at The Upstairs Gallery in Tryon, North Carolina, 1985, she told moderator Laura Lieberman, "I always drew. I won a contest in school because we had coloring every day. We had to color people and other things in our book. Well, the only unbroken crayon in my box one day was brown, so I colored the people brown. Nobody used that color for people, I got a gold star by my name in art, and that's how it all began."[104] Similar to the small sculptures Buchanan made from scraps of wood throughout her childhood, drawing allowed the artist to explore her environment with an eye towards beauty and potential. She used the materials that were at her disposal to render what her youthful eye understood to be worthy of documentation. It is not insignificant that the motifs and methods Buchanan applied to her art during her formative childhood years remained a steady force throughout the artist's career up until her death. The shacks of her past haunted the artist's creations, allowing her to bring attention to the hardships and triumphs of Black communities in the rural south — to "[put] life back in where only a vague memory or bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look."[105]

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[104] Wadell, "Life… Ain't Been No Crystal Stair," *Art Papers* 9, no. 6 (1985): 14.
[105] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 22.

Despite the heavy historical topics Buchanan sought to commemorate, she continuously created works of art laden with "childlike yet realist-tinged expressivity."[106] In addition to childish wonder, the artist also imparted humor into even her most serious of works such as *Three Families (A Memorial Piece with Scars)* (1990, Figure 5) memorializing Ella Jenkins sprinting naked through the Georgia fields with a traumatized chicken in hot pursuit as her home and two others burned in her wake.[107] The artist's particular adeptness at instilling positivity into even the darkest of works is perhaps what makes her art so haunting; she reminds her audiences that humanity creates history — that behind every news story or chapter in a textbook are people who were forgotten. She brought light through the cracks of shack walls, illuminating the ghosts who had always been there, but that we never saw. Perhaps Alice Walker explained the phenomena best in the conclusion of her poem, which is also an appropriate conclusion for this essay:

> For I do not wallow in sadness
> Though it visits more often these days
> Than I would like;
> The world is dying
> In so many ugly ways
> And humans with it.
> And yet, against all odds
> I realize
> There will always be a Beverly Buchanan
> Arising from a virtual "nowhere"
> To cobble together the broken pieces
> -Left over from the beauty
> That is destroyed-
> And paint them red
> For dancing.[108]

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[106] Pg. 61 Beverly Buchanan, Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia, July 19 - September 20 Linda McGreevy

[107] Pg. 61 Linda McGreevy Buchanan for Chrysler Museum

[108] Alice Walker, "Beverly's Dancing Shack for Alice," alicewalkersgarden.com, Alice Walker, 2015, https://alicewalkersgarden.com/2015/08/beverly-buchanan-artist-1940-2015/.

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