HYPERALLERGIC

BOOK REVIEW

Beverly Buchanan at the Raw Edge of Art

Instead of leaving the South behind, the polymath artist carried it into her writings, zines, paintings, and "shack sculptures" that echo the architecture of her childhood.



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Beverly Buchanan, "Orangeburg County Family House" (1993), paint, sharpie, garland, necklace, wood chips, bark, buttons, bottle caps, license plate, filmcanister, thumbtacks, clay pot, glass bottle, thread, and glue on wood (© 2026 Beverly Buchanan; image courtesy Delmonico Books)

Beverly Buchanan was mentored by Norman Lewis and Romare Bearden, a contemporary of Ana Mendieta and Eva Hesse, and most recently featured

in the 61st Venice Biennale in Koyo Kouoh's *In Minor Keys*. Yet, the late artist and her oeuvre have long been understudied and underexplored.

With contributors ranging from friends, dealers, historians, curators, and contemporaries, *Beverly Buchanan: Ruination and Regeneration* (2026) seeks to amend this oversight. Above all, it is a testament to the North Carolina-born artist's complexity, intellect, and sensitivity across sculpture, photography, land art, and video work. It's also a reminder that the combined effects of racism and anti-Blackness, misogyny, and regional bias on an artist's legacy must be counteracted, as modeled by the 18 contributors' voices in this book.



An unknown photographer's image of Buchanan on a cardstock notice for her 1978 exhibition at Truman Gallery (image courtesy Estate of Beverly Buchanan)

Edited by Aurélie Bernard Wortsman, the monograph begins with an introduction by Andrew Edlin, longtime dealer and supporter of the artist's work. The essays, interviews, poems (including one by Alice Walker), and images within span Buchanan's role in Abstract Expressionism and Post-minimalism; her activity in Atlanta, Macon, and Athens, Georgia; and her eventual departure to Michigan. An extensive selection of works is included: early paintings, zines, sketches, architectural and floral works on paper, environmental installations, and sculptures.

Buchanan's practice was defined by its engagement with architecture and place, an interest nurtured in her early life as she traveled throughout South Carolina with her father, absorbing the cultures, built environments,

and landscapes of rural and urban locales. Upon moving to New Jersey in the late 1960s and beginning art classes at the Art Students League in Manhattan, Buchanan was faced with a new urban landscape, the aesthetics and materials of which would influence her earliest paintings; “Wall #75” (circa 1971–76), a plane of blues, green, and gold. Curator Jenée-Daria Strand considers the radicality of this point of view, contrasting its head-on confrontation of the ruins of society with the Afrofuturist “third spaces” of the time. The creative effects of this approach would culminate in Buchanan’s environmental installations in Macon in the late 1970s and 1980s, as well as in her celebrated shack sculptures; in “Harnett County Shack” (1988), foamcore is streaked with red acrylic paint with blue and green peeking through.



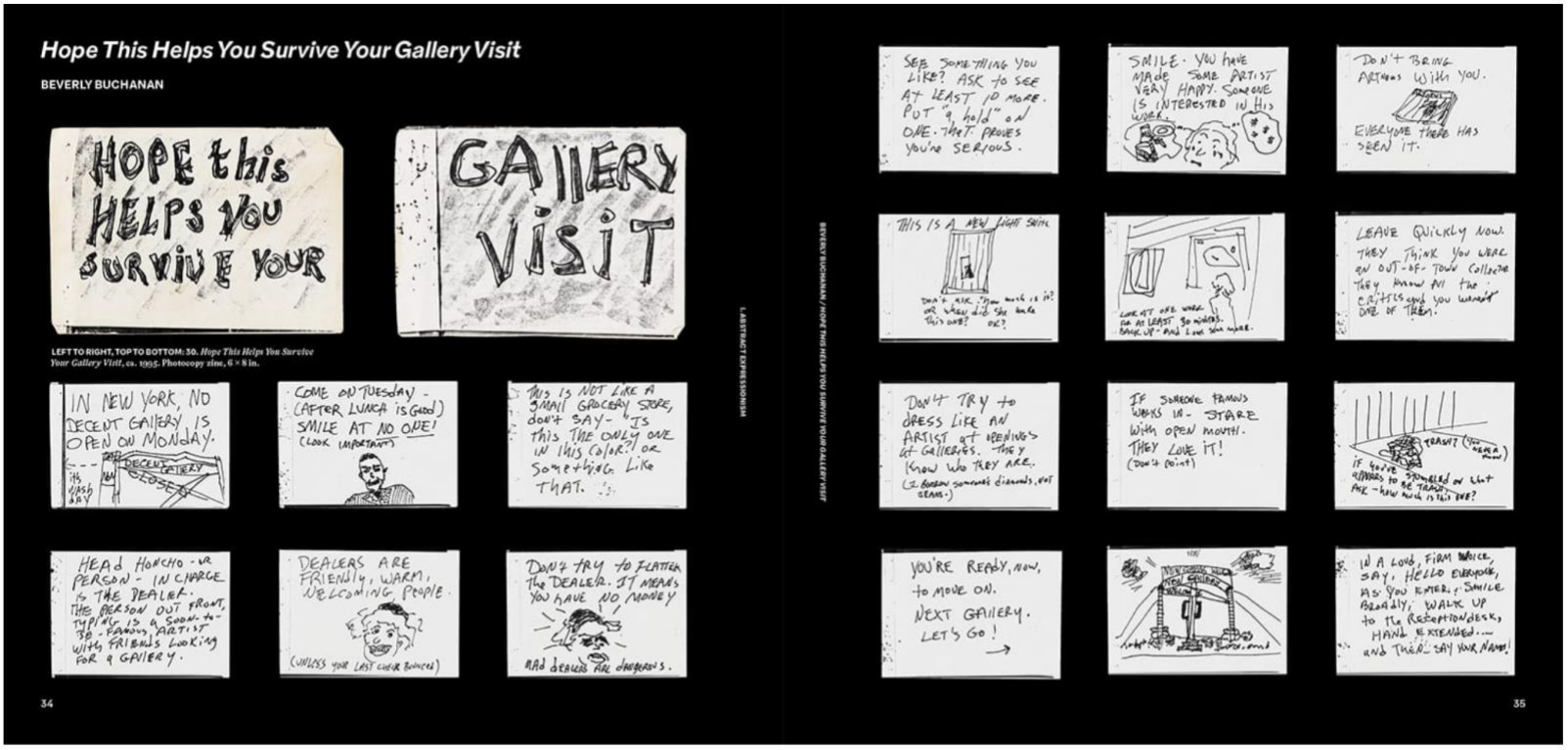
Beverly Buchanan, “To Prudence Lopp” (undated), metal, plastic, and wood (© 2026 Beverly Buchanan; image courtesy the Brooklyn Museum)



Beverly Buchanan, “Dataw Island, S.C.” (1993), oil pastel on paper (© 2026 Beverly Buchanan; image courtesy the Museum of Modern Art)

Another major strength of the book is its exploration of Buchanan’s relationship with so-called “folk art” through her admiration for and engagement with rural aesthetics — raw edges, minimal arrangements, an acceptance of nature’s influence. Her shack sculptures reference such techniques, while her tabby site-specific works feel distinctly post-minimal. Writer Rachel Simon’s interview with Buchanan’s dear friend, Prudence Lopp, recreates the experience of spending a day with the artist in Athens, visiting various homes and connecting with the people who built and lived in them. Wortsman’s “Dry Bones and Memories” offers visceral documentation of the editor’s own road trip through Georgia, transporting the reader to the original sites of Buchanan’s inspiration.

Historian Amelia Groom homes in on Buchanan's defiance of the New York art world's paternalistic racism toward Black artists, who were often limited to figurative paintings while White artists were allowed full creative range. She shares a story of Buchanan visiting galleries with her portfolio: When one gallerist told her, "We don't show black art," Buchanan replied, "Oh, good! Let me show you my slides." Buchanan's defiant humor shines through in her zine, *Hope This Helps You Survive Your Gallery Visit* (circa 1995) — one page shows a drawing of a snarling face, reading, "Don't try to flatter the dealer. It means you have no money – Mad dealers are dangerous."



Spread featuring Buchanan's zine *Hope This Helps You Survive Your Gallery Visit* (c. 1995) from *Beverly Buchanan: Ruination and Regeneration* (image courtesy Delmonico Books)

Buchanan's story as told in this monograph may offer encouragement and wisdom to artists today — to those too easily dismissed or pigeonholed by the commercial art world, those seeking balance, those who feel they must leave the South behind, and those who find themselves returning. Art

historian Andy Campbell's elegant essay praises the artist's wide-ranging mediums and reframes her flower works on paper, which were enjoyed and sold in Georgia but dismissed in New York. He considers the financial realities of being an artist, the necessity for resourcefulness and adaptability, and Buchanan's unique relationship to the garden. She was an artist who did not limit herself to one way of working, or even two or three. Documenting a lifelong mediation between polarized worlds and perspectives — North and South, urban and rural, rich and poor — *Ruination and Regeneration* affirms Buchanan's aesthetic and conceptual range. The book excels in its holistic and multi-pronged approach, modeling a layout that honors her legacy through a combination of precise research, creative expression, and rare photos and ephemera like the handwritten descriptions affixed to the bottom of her sculptures. It gathers the many elements of Buchanan's life and work into an expansive timeline, one that, like the artist herself, refuses categorization.

Beverly Buchanan: Ruination and Regeneration *(2026), edited by Aurélie Bernard Wortsman, is published by Delmonico Books. It is available on line and through independent booksellers.*