

Kids @ CAM – At Home Family Projects

Spotlight on CAM's Collection

Beverly Buchanan

About the Artist:

"My work is a logical progression of my early interest in textures and surfaces and walls. The early "walls" were lonely, freestanding, fragmented things. When I lived in New York I was looking for things that were demolished. That gave them character. I liked to imagine who might have lived in the apartment, and whose home it might have been. Each family that moved in repainted the walls their color. When a building is torn down the various layers of color are exposed. It is almost surgical--like looking through a microscope and looking at different layers of tissue and media."

Beverly Buchanan (1940 – 2015) was an artist whose works include painting, sculpture, video, and land art. Buchanan is noted for her exploration of Southern vernacular architecture through her art. In 1962, Buchanan graduated from Bennett College, in Greensboro, North Carolina, a historically black women's college, with a bachelor of science degree in medical technology. She went on to attend Columbia University, where she received a master's degree in parasitology in 1968, and a master's degree in public health in 1969. In 1971, Buchanan enrolled in a class taught by Norman Lewis at the Art Students League in New York City. Lewis, along with artist Romare Bearden, became friends and mentors to Buchanan. Buchanan decided to become a full-time artist in 1977 after exhibiting her work in a new talent show at Betty Parsons Gallery. In the same year, she moved to Macon, Georgia. Buchanan lived in Macon, Georgia, for much of her adult life, during a time when art made by minorities and those living outside of urban centers was largely overlooked by the establishment. She also resisted categorization, but Buchanan was still a charismatic and visible member of the 1970s and '80s New York art scene. Buchanan is best known for her many paintings and sculptures on the "shack," a rudimentary dwelling associated with the poor. Scholar Janet T. Marquardt argues that Buchanan treats shacks not as documentary elements but as "images of endurance and personal history"; often using bright colors and a style of childlike simplicity, the works "evoke the warmth and happiness that can be found even in the meanest dwelling, representing the faith and caring that is not reserved for privileged classes." Her art takes the form of stone pedestals, bric-a-brac assemblages, funny poems, self-portraits and sculptural shacks. Buchanan has remarked, "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!'" In 2015, Buchanan passed away at the age of seventy-four, and in the fall of 2016 a comprehensive exhibition of her work opened at the Brooklyn Museum, *Beverly Buchanan - Ruins and Rituals*.



ART AT HOME – BRIC A BRAC SHACK

What You'll Need:

- Cardboard (can be a variety of shapes and sizes)
- Craft Sticks
- Other materials and decorative pieces (sandpaper, thin wood scraps, thick paper, buttons, etc.)
- Strong Glue and Tape
- Scissors and whatever supplies you need to safely cut your materials

Beverly Buchanan made her many “shacks” using all types of materials in a myriad of creative ways. Look at images of Buchanan’s work and notice the variety in shape, size, style, and mood. Use her work as inspiration for the shack you are about to create. You can also draw inspiration from your surroundings and neighborhood. Take a walk or a drive and pay attention to old houses and structures that you may normally overlook.

- Step 1 – Gather all the materials that you will use to create a structure.
- Step 2 – Begin to build! As you make decisions in how you want your shack to look, make sure that you are able to construct it securely (you may need to gather new supplies as you go to strengthen your structure.)
- Step 3 – Clean your work area.

Tips:

- By securing each piece of material that you use to every other piece, you will make your structure more solid.
- Allow yourself to be creative and adapt as you go – your shack may help design itself as you go based on your materials and how they are fitting together.
- Have fun adding pieces to customize your shack. Think of interesting ways to indicate windows, floorboards, imperfections to the exterior, etc.

Questions for Discussion:

- Look at your finished shack and ask yourself who might have lived here? What events transpired inside? What happened to the people that used to live there?
- What were some of the challenges you encountered while building? Talk about creative ways you solved a problem. What is your favorite part of your structure?

Follow Up Project Suggestion:

- Beverly Buchanan worked in a variety of media. Expand upon your shack by creating drawings of the shack that you just created. Make your shack colorful, as many of Buchanan's works were, by painting your shack. Write a short narrative or poem about your shack.

