

**Beverly Buchanan,
Athens, GA,
8 July 1995**

Preface

This book takes its name, *Beverly Buchanan, Athens, GA, 8 July 1995*, from an unedited two-hour video that Judith McWillie recorded with Beverly Buchanan in her home studio and garden in 1995. Thirty years after that documentary was filmed, we began shaping this hybridized tribute. The book you hold emerges from dwelling in the company of its namesake source material, with care and duration.

At the center of this undertaking is a deeply relational record between Buchanan and McWillie, one that ultimately privileges their dialogic exchange over an individuated subject. We were drawn to the video's polyphonic nature and endeavored to listen closely to its currents. We watched it over and over again—sometimes viewing it without sound, sometimes listening to it without visuals—studying it frame by frame, syllable by syllable. This prolonged attention became a form of communing, and our collaboration echoed and amplified the notes we picked up on. We were two artists listening to two artists speaking about a third artist, Mary Lou Furcron.

Guided by the work of artists using disability frameworks to multiply form, we approached the movement from video to printed book as an experiment in expanding access. We studied artworks that employ captioning, visual description, and related access tools to interrupt a single mode of entry and illuminate different textures within a work. Shifting this primary document across media similarly stretches the possibilities of experience and opens new pathways of engagement. Each medium carries time, pacing, and attention distinctly, privileging different forms of emphasis and posing particular demands.

We structured this book into several sections. At the heart is our text and image-based translation of the titular video, composed of transcription,

description, and video stills. A section of annotations—“People,” “Places,” and “Endnotes”—thickens the context surrounding the recording.

The essay “Your Eye Did What My Eye Would Like to Do: Reverence and Remembrance in the Work of Beverly Buchanan, Judith McWillie, and Mary Lou Furcron” situates the practices of the three artists represented here, articulating what’s at stake in their experimental modes of commemoration. We also brought together a selection of companion materials from Buchanan’s and McWillie’s archives, which underscore the centrality of Furcron’s impact on both artists. Finally, we invited McWillie to rewatch the titular video she recorded with Buchanan thirty years earlier and share her “Present Day Reflections.”

Our adaptation of *Beverly Buchanan, Athens, GA, 8 July 1995* is offered as a gesture of devotion. It is an effort toward carrying Buchanan and McWillie’s conversation—and Furcron’s spirit therein—into the present, where it remains enduringly relevant.

—Mo Costello and Katz Tepper

Your Eye Did What My Eye Would Like to Do

Reverence and Remembrance in the Work of
Beverly Buchanan, Judith McWillie, and Mary Lou Furcron

Katz Tepper

Early in the two-hour documentary video *Beverly Buchanan, Athens, GA, 8 July 1995*, shortly after Buchanan has invited Judith McWillie inside her home, Buchanan remarks, “I enjoyed your video *so much*. It was the best I’d ever seen, because *your eye did what my eye would like to do*—focus on *exactly* what you focused on.”¹ As the afternoon continues to unfold in the unedited recording, Buchanan repeats, “The video is so wonderful Judy. . . . Your eye is just perfect. You focused on exactly what I would have. You went to the rocks . . .”² She continues, “Your video is so poetic and so wonderful.”³

Buchanan’s affectionate sentiments refer to the video *Mary Lou Furcron, Vesta GA.*, recorded by McWillie on May 9, 1987.⁴ The video is an unedited documentary interview with the eponymous seventy-six-year-old architect, gardener, and maker Mary Lou Furcron, though it notably exceeds the bounds of the tradition.⁵ Of the seventy-nine minutes of footage, approximately forty shift away from Ms. Furcron entirely, instead framing the land she cultivated and the structures and furniture she crafted in her homemaking.⁶

1. See “Beverly Buchanan, Athens, GA, 8 July 1995” in this volume, p. 73.

2. “Beverly Buchanan, Athens, GA, 8 July 1995,” 200.

3. “Beverly Buchanan, Athens, GA, 8 July 1995,” 208.

4. The title is taken from the video’s opening image, which features digital text created in-camera at the start of the recording (see p. 243). McWillie also produced a sixty-minute edit from this footage, titled *Mary Lou Furcron: I Stay on My Ground*, drawn from a quotation by Furcron within the recording.

5. Mary Lou Furcron was born in 1912.

6. The use of the honorific title “Ms.” borrows from Buchanan’s text “Sculpture for Ms. Mary Lou Furcron,” c.1990–94, reproduced on pp. 224–25. Beverly Buchanan Papers, 1912–2017, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.

As the recorded conversation with Furcron moves in and out of audibility, *Mary Lou Furcron, Vesta, GA.* follows McWillie’s “eye” through her handheld camera as she lingers with a tender attention on the surrounding landscape, moving from the trees, verdant green plums hanging from their branches, to the swept yard, garden flora, and rocks. With the same reverential observance, she records Furcron’s indirect presence in the hand-built details of her architectures and objects, pausing on the asymmetrical posts of a bench, lovingly tracing its roughly nailed joints. In the conversation with Buchanan eight years later, McWillie refers to this haptic information as “the fervent touch.”⁷

In *Mary Lou Furcron, Vesta, GA.*, these sensuously recorded images and sounds come together to constitute a multifocal portrait, blending direct representation with a holistic rendering of landscape and built environment. As the utilitarian titles of McWillie’s videos suggest, the person and the place, and the stuff the person made from the place, are rendered inseparable. In one sequence, McWillie slowly zooms in on the ladder Furcron pieced together out of trees from the land, leaning against a tree on the land.

Furcron was already in her seventies when McWillie and Buchanan each separately befriended her—McWillie in 1983, and Buchanan around 1989. Both had been encouraged by colleagues and acquaintances familiar with their respective documentary projects to travel to the rural unincorporated community of Vesta, Georgia, and introduce themselves to Furcron. McWillie, a white Southern woman originally from Tennessee, and Buchanan, a Black Southern woman originally from North Carolina, had both developed experimental approaches to documenting and historicizing the underrecognized aesthetic canon of Black Southern vernacular architectures and yards. In McWillie’s efforts to preserve these threatened practices, her primary archival tools were video, writing, and curating, while Buchanan’s interdisciplinary approach spanned documentary photography and sculpture, text, artist books, and drawing-based

7. “Beverly Buchanan, Athens, GA, 8 July 1995,” 179.

“tributes.”⁸ When McWillie first learned that Buchanan had also been regularly making the forty-five minute drive east from Athens to visit with Furcron, she gifted Buchanan a copy of her 1987 VHS tape.

Buchanan and McWillie’s shared reverence for Furcron, and their mutual appreciation for each other’s experimental methods, form the triangulated ground from which the recording on July 8, 1995 emerges. Rooted in the specificities of lived experience and place, and textured by the recording technology itself, this profoundly relational primary document arises from the reciprocal interplay between its participants. Converging motivations and curiosities—and Furcron’s enduring impact—animate their spoken conversation, while McWillie’s sensitive eye attunes to the quiet frequencies of Buchanan’s material environment, enacting a form of nonverbal dialogue. The documentary’s oral, visual, sonic, and compositional rhythms trace a cocreated moment in time, producing a nonlinear and embodied record. Punctuated by sudden spatial shifts, in-camera jump cuts, out of focus and backlit visuals, and speech that is meandering and occasionally delirious, the video documents a situated, fragmentary poetics of relation.⁹ In doing so, it offers an alternative form of history, illuminating the work of Buchanan, McWillie, and Furcron through the social, affective space of remembrance.

At the time of the 1995 recording, Buchanan had been living in the college town of Athens for eight years. After first renting a house in the wooded suburban Forest Heights neighborhood, in 1991 she purchased the centrally located, sprawling Victorian house on Boulevard Avenue, where she lived for the remainder of the decade. This live-work house constituted her studio during a pivotal and prolific period of her career.

8. Buchanan often titled her works “Tributes,” each dedicated to a specific individual. For example, she created two sculptures called *Tribute to Mary Lou Furcron*, in 1989 and 2009, documented on pp. 222–23 and 236–39. McWillie similarly invoked the term in her 1984 video *A Tribute to Dilmus Hall—Experimental Tape 1, 1984*, echoing Buchanan’s 1990 drawing *In Honor of Dilmus Hall. From Athens, GA.*

9. The use of this term loosely draws from Édouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation*, “in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other,” and which “senses, assumes, opens, gathers, scatters, continues, and transforms.” Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 11, 94–95.



JM: God, the *beauty* of those things.

[Judy pivots the camera to face a white shack sculpture, viewed in profile, sitting on some boxes in the corner of the hallway]

BB: I'm serious! I was just so impressed. And I was just real proud of that. I thought, "Well good for her because..."

JM: *[zooming into the shack sculpture]* But you know, Beverly, it's like... I mean, those things are so beautiful that, I don't know, I'm still trying to deal with the fact that it's all...

BB: Yeah! I'm gonna sit here. You wanna sit? You can sit wherever you wanna sit! You can sit in the back. You can sit—

JM: Can I go in there and look at that thing on the—?

BB: Absolutely! The plexiglass thing?

JM: Yeah!

BB: Yeah, I've never done that before.

JM: *[gasps in admiration]*

BB: And it's, it's sort of a response to the, uh... A year ago, I was down in St. Marys. Patti [Phagan] and I went to St. Marys for the 4th, and stayed at the bed and breakfast. And that's when we tried to find Sunbury.⁸ And I'll show you one or two photos that I took. And I wanted to tell you our experience.

JM: You found it?

BB: No.

JM: Okay. I can tell you how to get there.

[There's a jump cut in the video and the conversation abruptly pauses. The video resumes inside the studio off the hallway, where Judy records closeup views of Beverly's shack sculptures. The plexiglass shack sculpture they spoke about sits on a TV-dinner table in the middle of the room, and the walls are lined with sculptures arranged on shelves and other furniture]

BB: You know, it's like—it's like having ten children, and they all go different places. And unless you have a reunion, you don't get to see them all together! You know? [laughs]

JM: That's right. That's right. But, the uh... god, I mean there's so many things on my mind from that show. But the main thing for me was that when I looked at your photos and at the stacks, they were all about *behavior*. They were all about *the people*.

BB: Yeah. [nods]

JM: *The people's touch, on everything.*

BB: That's right.

JM: Behavior. The stacked stones, for example.

BB: Yeah.

JM: The foundations.¹⁷

BB: [smiles] Yeah. I've done that a *long* time. I did that in New York, and I probably didn't know what I was doing, but I did that and made stacks. I stacked stones in New York.¹⁸ I did. [gestures verticality with hands and laughs] And it got to people. People *felt something* that wasn't New York, but they didn't know what it was. They said, "This is not New York, but it's, it really gets to me. I can't stop looking at it."

JM: Right. And the strange thing, this is hard to put into words.

BB: Yeah, it's hard! It's hard.

JM: Uh, okay. Whenever you mention something like modernism and all that, minimalism, people think that you're using it to bolster, you know, to boost vernacular art or something. I don't mean it in that sense. What I'm trying to get at is that, for me, you know... What's his name? Richard Serra, Carl Andre.

BB: Mm-hmm.

JM: Those people. They seem to me they were screwing around with the system. You know, "If I can take, uh, cheap bricks into a London museum and somebody put[s] on precious gloves to carry 'em, then I'm doing

something with the system." But, I couldn't get any further than that with that art. Now, when you see stacked stones in the photo, and then *your* sculpture, and it's all related to, uh, *a shared experience*.

BB: Mm-hmm.

JM: *That's the difference.*

BB: Yeah. Yeah. [nodding]

JM: And that's why... I think that the similarities—you know, the fancy term they use is "the syncretisms"—might be what some of the people in New York are relating to.¹⁹ You know, they're looking at that and they're saying, "Well, god, I mean, how do I relate to this? Is it like minimal sculpture? Or is it, you know, through some art lens? Some art historical lens?" But then, when you see the photos, and all these things that you looked at that led to the stuff you *did*.

BB: Mm-hmm, yeah.

JM: Or things you found, that you had *already done*.

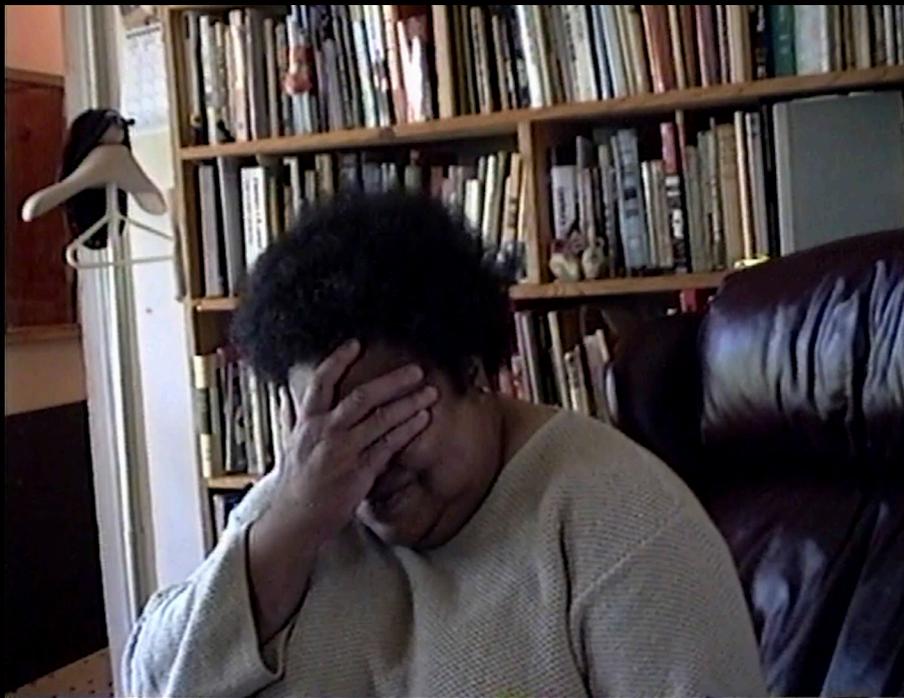
BB: Yeah!

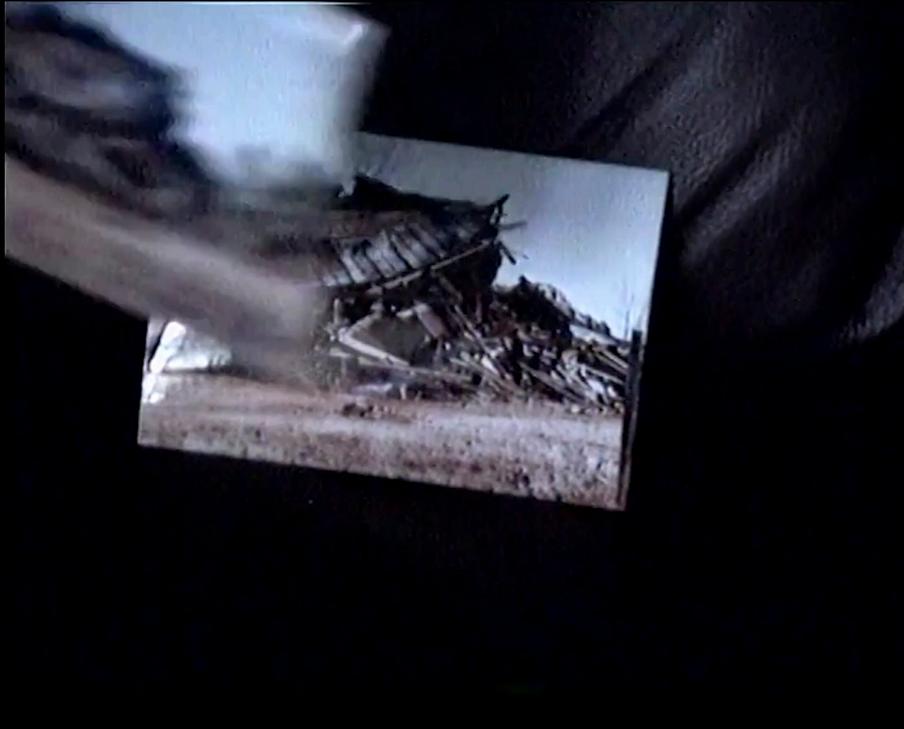
JM: That you had done in the *abstract*, and then went out and *found!*

BB: Yeah, that's right.

JM: That's it!

BB: That's right. That was scary. That was scary. [smiles] It was scary. And then I got over being scared, because I started to think about how I, what I was feeling at the time. For example, when I first started making stacked stone pieces, or, they weren't stacked. They were really meant to be, um, separate. The reason that I started cementing them together was... [sighs] an awful thing to have to admit, but it was fear of having things stolen. In other words, galleries said, "We can't show these individually this size because someone could walk in and pick up one of these, and put it in their pocket and walk out. You're gonna have to find some way to..." And so I had to try to find some way to do that, and also maintain the integrity of what I was trying to do.





[Judy places a second photograph onto the chair seat. The photograph depicts the collapsed barn from a further distance and slightly different angle]

BB: They're losing their...

JM: I don't understand the... *[places a third photograph onto the pile]* You think it's all the Olympics? Or you think people are just *dying* soon?

BB: I think it's a combination of both of them.

JM: Mm-hmm.

[There's a break in the dialogue. Judy pauses on a photograph, a closely cropped detail of the barn's split beams. She then places another photograph on top, showing a different angle of the same collapsed structure. And another]

SCULPTURE FOR MS. MARY LOU FURCRON

I was headed to Washington, Georgia, to photograph a house with blue trim because I had painted one of the shacks and had added blue trim because it felt right. Stopping off at a junk haunt on the way, I heard about an old lady who lived in a house made of sticks and twigs and that she had made her house by herself. These two good old Georgia white boys liked to tease me so I thought they kind of made it up but they were insistent that I see this so I headed toward Elberton. I drove all the way to Elberton, turned around, headed back, looking into the woods and suddenly, what I thought might be a giant animal shelter, caught my eye and I left the road and slowly drove in.

The first sight of the house was like a bolt of lightning had hit me and I could only sit and stare. Then I noticed her in part of her garden. Getting out cautiously, I said something like, "How are you today?" and told her that I just came by to see her house because I heard that she had built it. She wasn't hostile, but reserved: I am familiar with the reserve of old black women who live alone with no visible means of protection. I was scared to death. Before I could ask anything about the house, she said, "Help me with this."

A pile of twigs and sticks lay at her feet and next to them, a log of some kind. Pointing to the log, I said I would take it for her. I'll never forget her look when she said, "You can take that by yourself?" I said proudly, "NO PROBLEM." How could she know that I was a strong woman sculptor used to lifting large boulders and rocks and that my shoulders could move a car if I wanted to and so --- I bent down, properly, to tackle this object, to discover that I could not move it at all. Trying again, and mindful of her eye, I was heartsick to find out that this was impossible. I prayed. How to get God's attention was first, then the object could slowly be put upright. What now, SPORT? Somehow I got it level with my hip and side and locking my knees together in a triangle shape I said from my gurgling throat, "WHERE DO YOU WANT IT?" I let it drop in front of the house which seemed like a mile away. I was grateful to be able to be upright again. She was already in the nursing home when I learned that it usually took two men to carry one of those logs. I asked permission to photograph the house and her.

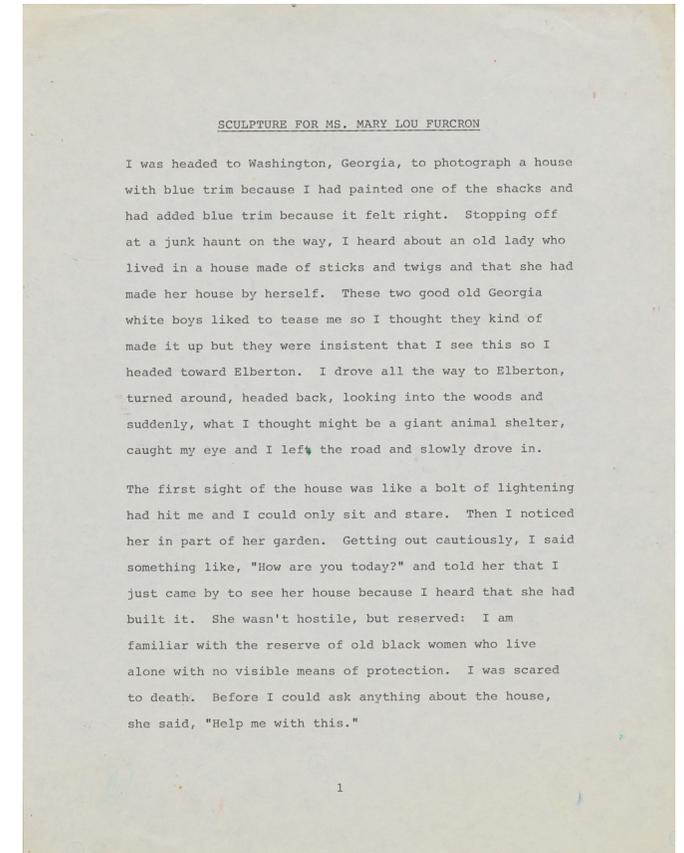
Before leaving, I asked if she wanted anything from Athens. "Yes, cotton stockings. Not silk ones." I said, "OK" this time instead of "No problem." She then informed me that the last person who told her that had never come back with the stockings. I was to find out why. She said to get them from SEARS. My Grandmother wore cotton stockings, but that was a long time ago. I tried everywhere. I even stopped people on the street. I called SEARS in Chicago. I prayed. I FOUND them. In Athens. Downtown. I took them out to her the same day I heard that my Mother had died. Ms. Furcron and her guardian were installing a new stove pipe. They had put out what had been a small fire whose smoke I captured in a photograph taken while she berated me for not taking the money for the stockings.

This woman was proud of her gardens and whether you were there for long or not, she had things to do around there and you felt intrusive. She had asked how old I was and if I was married. She said that she had never married.

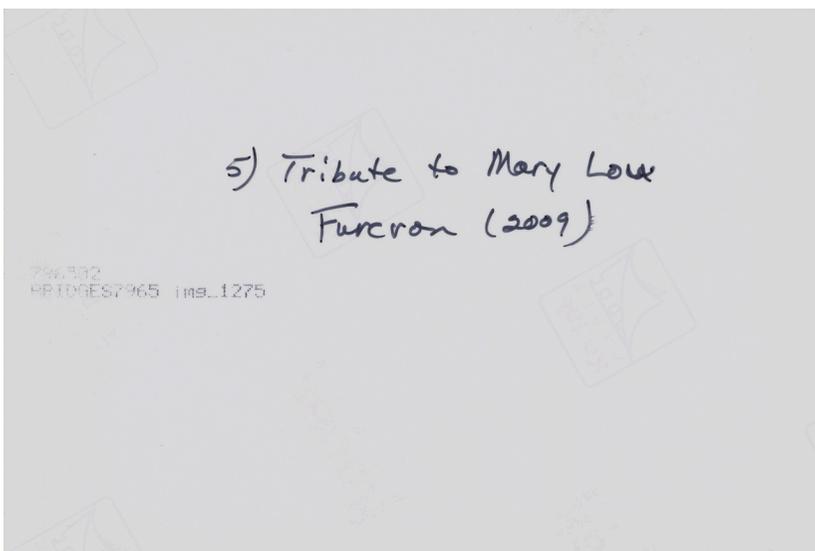
I miss her more than she knows. Her house LOOKS abandoned, as her yard and gardens show. Apparently one time she "got loose" and walked for ten miles toward home. I can hardly make it up a small hill. I made this structure the day I met her.

It is a tribute to her.

Beverly Buchanan
Athens, GA



Beverly Buchanan,
SCULPTURE FOR MS. MARY LOU FURCRON,
c. 1989-94.
Typewritten text on
paper, 3 pages total,
11 × 8.5 in. Beverly
Buchanan Papers,
1912-2017, bulk
1970s-1990s,
Archives of American
Art, Smithsonian
Institution.



Beverly Buchanan, Documentation of *Tribute to Mary Lou Furcron*, 2009. Front and back of color photograph from photo album, 4 x 6 in. Beverly Buchanan Papers, 1912–2017, bulk 1970s–1990s, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Beverly Buchanan, Documentation of *Tribute to Mary Lou Furcron*, 2009. Color photographs from photo album, 4 x 6 in. Beverly Buchanan Papers, 1912–2017, bulk 1970s–1990s, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

