

Ruins and Remains: Performative Sculpture and the Politics of Touch in the 1970s

Molly Superfine

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
under the Executive Committee
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2023

ABSTRACT

Ruins and Remains: Performative Sculpture and the Politics of Touch in the 1970s

Molly Superfine

This dissertation investigates the materiality of performative sculpture in the Americas during the long 1970s through artists Beverly Buchanan (1940-2015) and Senga Nengudi (1943). United in their disenchantment with second-wave feminism, Buchanan and Nengudi are situated art-historically in the expanded fields of (post)minimalism, conceptualism, and the Black Arts Movement. These artists realized their objects by sourcing non-traditional artmaking materials within what this dissertation conjures as a haptic imaginary—an intervening corrective to both the second-wave feminist and postmodern art imaginaries of the 1970s. Their materials expose the limitations of the visual and offer alternate models of knowing. For Buchanan's *frustulum* series (1978-81), poured concrete, and later, tabby concrete, memorializes the textures of architectural sites to honor experiences of labor and displacement. Tabby concrete, a compound binding agent made of sand and lime, is a localized, inexpensive material that was often used by enslaved people in the southern United States, especially in coastal states like Georgia, which provide access to massive deposits of lime-rich oyster shells. Nengudi's *R.S.V.P.* series (1977) of pliable pantyhose and sand are anthropomorphic objects originally meant to be activated; they mimic bodily expansion, endurance, and fatigue. Pantyhose, made mostly of nylon, the world's first fully synthetic fiber, are the product of decades of scientific and economic development, whose intertwined history with World War II offers a springboard to understand the potency of Nengudi's experiments with the garment. The artists' materials become sites of investigation into memory, place, body, erotics, and precarity. By offering new epistemological methods of engagement that retaliate against the hegemony of the visual through their twinned interests in *ruins* for Buchanan, and *remains* for Nengudi, the artists realize a new *womanist* politic.

Buchanan and Nengudi deploy, respectively, tabby concrete and pantyhose with sand to transmit historical and embodied knowledge. It is precisely through the activated sensorium of touch—imagined and physical—that the past is transmitted and materialized.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | viii |
| DEDICATION | xi |
| INTRODUCTION: ABSTRACTION AND THE SENSORY APPARATUS | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1. (RE)CASTING HISTORY: RUINATION AND REMEMBRANCE IN THE EARLY WORKS OF BEVERLY BUCHANAN, 1972-1981 | 15 |
| From Paint to Concrete: 1972-1977 | 24 |
| <i>Frustulum</i> , or Fragments: 1977-1981 | 31 |
| <i>Ruins</i> | 44 |
| Conclusion | 68 |
| CHAPTER 2. MATERIALITY & THE “SENSUAL SELF”: SENG NENGUDI’S USE OF <i>REMAINS</i>, 1975-1981 | 72 |
| The Development of Nylon | 93 |
| <i>Contextures</i> | 102 |
| <i>Afro-American Abstraction</i> | 119 |
| Conclusion | 131 |
| CHAPTER 3. MATERIALIZING COMMUNITY: <i>DIALECTICS OF ISOLATION</i> (1980) AND THE MAKING OF A NEW “WOMANIST” IMAGINARY | 133 |
| Heresies | 142 |
| <i>Dialectics of Isolation</i> | 148 |
| Critical Response to <i>Dialectics</i> | 160 |
| Beyond <i>Dialectics</i> | 161 |
| Conclusion | 167 |
| CODA: RUINS, OR THAT WHICH REMAINS | 169 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 175 |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Introduction

- Figure 0.1 *Eccentric Abstraction* announcement. *Art International*, 10, 9 (November 1966). Fischbach Gallery records, 1937-2015. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 0.2 *Eccentric Abstraction* announcement. *Art International*, 10, 9 (November 1966). Fischbach Gallery records, 1937-2015. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 0.3 Installation view of *Eccentric Abstraction* (1966). Handwritten note on verso identifies creators of artworks seen in this view: Eva Hesse, Frank Viner, Keith Sonnier, and Don Potts. Fischbach Gallery records, 1937-2015. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 0.4 Buchanan in studio with cast frustula network, ca. 1977. Photographer unknown. Box 6, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 0.5 Buchanan at table with small cast frustula, ca. 1977. Photographer unknown. Box 6, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 0.6 Nengudi, Sketch for *R.S.V.P. I*, 1977.
- Figure 0.7 Nengudi, *R.S.V.P. I*, 1977/2003.

Chapter One

- Figure 1.1 Exhibition installation view of Buchanan, *Wall Fragments—Series Cast in Cement* (1978) at Truman Gallery, New York. Photograph by Martin Kane.
- Figure 1.2 Buchanan, Untitled work on paper, 1976-7. Box 5, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.3 Buchanan, Untitled work on paper, 1976-7. Box 5, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.4 Buchanan, Untitled work on paper, 1976-7. Box 5, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.5 Buchanan, Untitled work on paper, 1976-7. Box 5, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.6 Buchanan with acrylic painting at Cinque Gallery, 1972. Photographer unknown. Box 17, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian

Institution, Washington, D.C.

- Figure 1.7 Exhibition installation view of Buchanan's *frustula* at Kornblee Gallery, New York (1981). Photographer unknown.
- Figure 1.8 Exhibition installation view of Buchanan, *Wall Fragments—Series Cast in Cement* (1978) at Truman Gallery, New York. Photographer unknown.
- Figure 1.9 Exhibition installation view of Buchanan, *Wall Fragments—Series Cast in Cement* (1978) at Truman Gallery, New York. Photographer unknown.
- Figure 1.10 Double portrait of Buchanan with *frustula*, ca. 1979. Photographer unknown.
- Figures 1.11 Buchanan, photograph of supporting stones, foundation of homes, undated. Box 10, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figures 1.12 Buchanan, photograph of supporting stones, foundation of homes, undated. Box 10, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figures 1.13 Buchanan, photograph of supporting stones, foundation of homes, undated. Box 10, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.14 Buchanan, *Sentinel*, 1981.
- Figures 1.15 Buchanan, photograph of *Marsh Ruins* in situ, July 1981. Box 15 Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.17 Buchanan, photograph of the tabby surfaces of *Marsh Ruins* (1981). Box 15, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.18 Photograph of Buchanan installing and staining her *Marsh Ruins*, 1981. Photographer unknown. Box 1, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.19 Page from Buchanan booklet "Making Tabby Sculpture," 1982. Box 11, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.20 Page from Buchanan booklet "Making Tabby Sculpture," 1982. Box 11, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

- Figure 1.21 Page from Buchanan booklet “Making Tabby Sculpture,” 1982. Box 11, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.22 Page from Buchanan booklet “Making Tabby Sculpture,” 1982. Box 11, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.23 Page from Buchanan booklet “Making Tabby Sculpture,” 1982. Box 11, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.24 Page from Buchanan booklet “Making Tabby Sculpture,” 1982. Box 11, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.25 Page from Buchanan booklet “Making Tabby Sculpture,” 1982. Box 11, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.26 Page from Buchanan booklet “Making Tabby Sculpture,” 1982. Box 11, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.27 Buchanan, *Ruins and Rituals* (1979), installed at the Museum of Art and Sciences in Macon, GA.
- Figure 1.28 Buchanan, *Garden Ruins* (1984), installed in the Contemporary Sculpture Garden at Winston-Salem State University, N.C.
- Figure 1.29 Buchanan, Untitled cast concrete sculpture, now at the bottom of the Ocmulgee River, Macon, GA, October 1979. Photograph by Martin Kane. Box 7, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 1.30 Buchanan, photograph depicting viewability of *Marsh Ruins* (1981) at high tide, submerged ten feet during the morning of November 12, 1981.
- Figure 1.31 Buchanan, photograph depicting viewability of *Marsh Ruins* (1981) at low tide, during the afternoon of the November 12, 1981.
- Figure 1.32 Mendieta, Untitled, from *Siluetas* series, Mexico, 1976.
- Figure 1.33 Mendieta, *Guanaroca & Iyaré*, 1981.
- Figure 1.34 Buchanan, photograph of *Marsh Ruins* (1981) in situ with water in the

background, and signed Buchanan stone in the foreground, undated.

Figure 1.35 Buchanan, photograph of artist's signature inscribed into surface of *Marsh Ruins* (1981), undated.

Figure 1.36 Photograph taken by Andy Campbell of a photograph of Buchanan with *Marsh Ruins* (1981) affixed to the wall above the artist's bed, 2016.

Chapter Two

Figure 2.1 Nengudi, *Water Compositions*, 1970.

Figure 2.2 Nengudi, *Water Composition II*, 1970. Photographer unknown. Printed in Ghent (1971).

Figure 2.3 Nengudi, *Water Composition III*, 1970/2019.

Figure 2.4 Nengudi with *Water Composition*, ca. 1970. Photograph by Frank J. Thomas. Printed in Weber and Mühling (2020).

Figure 2.5 Nengudi with *Water Composition III*, ca. 1970. Photographer unknown. Printed in Weber and Mühling (2020).

Figure 2.6 Detail of Nengudi, *Water Composition III*, 1970/2018, Photograph by John McKenzie. Printed in Weber and Mühling (2020).

Figure 2.7 Nengudi, *Environment for Dance*, performance at the Pasadena Art Museum, CA, 1969.

Figure 2.8 Just Above Midtown Gallery artist questionnaire with Nengudi's responses, ca. 1977. Box 9, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Figure 2.9 Irons (Nengudi), Untitled charcoal drawing (woman in chair), ca. early 1960s. Art & Paper, Flat File 1, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

Figure 2.10 Irons (Nengudi), Untitled charcoal drawing (woman's back with outstretched arms), ca. early 1960s. Art & Paper, Flat File 1, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

Figure 2.11 Irons (Nengudi) with her sculpture *Trust Me (white, soul)*, 1972. Photographer unknown. Box 5, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

Figure 2.12 Irons (Nengudi) with her sculpture *Trust Me (white, soul)*, 1972. Photographer unknown. Box 5, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane

University, New Orleans, LA.

- Figure 2.13 Diagram of the process of creating nylon. *Fortune Magazine* 22 (July 1940).
- Figure 2.14 Nengudi, *I*, 1977. Printed in Bryant and Philips (1978).
- Figure 2.15 Nengudi, Statement on art as motion, ca. 1966. Box 8, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 2.16 Nengudi, *Hanging On*, 1977.
- Figure 2.17 Exhibition installation view of Nengudi, *Christopher Columbus* (1981) at Just Above Midtown Gallery, New York. Photographer unknown.
- Figure 2.18 Nengudi activating an *R.S.V.P.* sculpture (1977) at Just Above Midtown Gallery, New York, 1977. Photograph by Harmon Outlaw. Printed in Perreault (1977).
- Figure 2.19 Nengudi, *Maybe a Hamburger Will Soak Up the Tears*, 1980. Photographer unknown. Printed in *Afro-American Abstraction* (1982) exhibition catalogue. Box 3, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.
- Figure 2.20 Nengudi, *Nukey Nukey*, 1980. Photographer unknown. Printed in *Afro-American Abstraction* (1982) exhibition catalogue. Box 3, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.
- Figure 2.21 Bamana peoples, *Headdress in Form of Male Antelope (Ci Wara)*, 19th–early 20th century.

Chapter Three

- Figure 3.1 Irons (Nengudi), Untitled drawing, 1976. Box 12, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 3.2 Irons (Nengudi), Untitled drawing, 1976. Box 12, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 3.3 Irons (Nengudi), Untitled drawing, 1976. Box 12, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 3.4 Irons (Nengudi), Untitled drawing, 1976. Box 12, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- Figure 3.5 Buchanan, *Wall Fragment/Ga (Revised Arrangement)*, 1979. Photographer unknown. Printed in “Third World Women—The Politics of Being Other,” *Heresies* 2, 4 (1979): 48.

- Figure 3.6 Buchanan, *Wall Column*, 1980.
- Figure 3.7 Nengudi, *Swing Low*, 1977. Photograph by Ken Peterson. Reprinted in *Dialectics of Isolation* (1980) exhibition catalogue.
- Figure 3.8 Cheryl Banks performing Nengudi's *Air Propo* (1981) at Just Above Midtown Gallery, New York, 1981. Photographer unknown. Box 5, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.
- Figure 3.9 Maren Hassinger activating a Nengudi *R.S.V.P.* sculpture (1977) in Los Angeles, CA, 1977. Photograph by Harmon Outlaw.
- Coda**
- Figure 4.1 Performance photograph of Nengudi in *Rapunzel*, 1981. Photograph by Barbara McCollough.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I could not have undertaken this project without the invaluable feedback, support, guidance, and enthusiasm of my advisor Kellie Jones. My gratitude to you extends beyond our time working together to your scholarship and curatorial projects which have made a dissertation like this one possible. My defense committee was incredibly generous with their time and attention; their feedback has set this project on course to continue beyond the dissertation stage. Thank you to Alex Alberro, Erika Doss, Elizabeth Hutchinson, and Branden Joseph for your scholarship, mentorship, and support. Thank you to Tina Campt who first encouraged my interest in dissecting the politics of the archive.

This project would not have been possible without the generous support of fellowships and grant funding. I thank the Stillman-Lack Foundation and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Columbia University for financial support in the early stages of my graduate career and for research trip funding. Thank you to the Henry Luce Foundation for the resources to sustain my first full year of research for this project as a Luce/ACLS Dissertation Fellow in American Art. As a Tyson Scholar of American Art at the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, I had the immense fortune to meet dear friends, mentors, and thinkers who have impacted this project and offered early rounds of critiques. To my friends, colleagues, and mentors at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, especially in the Department of Media & Performance, to the Jonas team comprised of Ana Janevski, Lilia Rocio Taboada, and Gee Wesley, to Jason Dubs, and to our cohort of Mellon-Marron Research Consortium Fellows, Samuel Allen, Guillermo Sanchez Arsuaga, Caroline House, and Sarah Rapoport, thank you for carrying me through the very end of this project while also nourishing me with deep laughter, travels, conversations, and lessons. Casting towards the future, thank you

to the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., especially Kaira Cabañas, for supporting my postdoctoral research associateship.

To the staff, faculty, and graduate colleagues in the Department of Art History & Archaeology at Columbia University, my deepest thanks for your support throughout the past eight years. To my former students of Columbia University and Barnard College, thank you for your passion and curiosities which have buoyed my own enthusiasm.

For their intrepid archival assistance, I thank the staff at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art in Washington, D.C. and at the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans, especially Lisa Moore, Phillip Cunningham, Jasmaine Talley, and Felicia Render. To Julián Sánchez González, thank you for the rigorous research assistance and friendship. My endless gratitude extends to Jaime Paulido at el Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá for sharing stories, archives, and enthusiasm about this dissertation. Thank you to Manuela Ochoa, Camilo Leyva, and Gina McDaniel Tarver for their encouragement and guidance. To Stephanie Weber at the Lenbachhaus in Munich, I extend my gratitude for sharing documents and archival footage that greatly aided my research. To Zak Rouse and the team at Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library at Columbia University, thank you for your patience and help over the eight years of my graduate degree. I also thank John Bowles for sharing research with me when accessing archives proved challenging during certain moments of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thank you to Jaime Schwartz at David Zwirner and Kate Long at Smith Special Collections for archival and research assistance.

To my dearest friends who have had patience with me, and have provided laughter, hugs, sustenance, encouragement, and critiques, I am indebted to you all. I owe a special note of thanks

to fellow art historian Caitlin Miller, an intellectual comrade and fierce advocate whose friendship has carried me through many years of doubts and possibilities.

Our Medearis and Superfine families have held me strong through it all; thank you to my Bubbe and Zayde, my aunts and uncles, and my cousins for your limitless love and support. To the Reck crew, thank you for welcoming me into your family with such joy and warmth. To my parents, Ellen and Rich, to whom this project is dedicated, thank you for your relentless feminism, your unwavering love, and your encouragement of my curiosities from the beginning. Clara, thank you for all that you continue to teach me about the beauty of the world and for your keen research assistance on this project; our sisterhood grounds me. And finally, to my Nickolas, your love and partnership—emotional, intellectual, and otherwise—have sustained and shaped me; I am endlessly grateful.

For my parents

INTRODUCTION:
ABSTRACTION AND THE SENSORY APPARATUS

“Eccentric means off-center, idiosyncratic, perverse.”¹ These are Lucy Lippard’s opening words to her quasi-manifesto for her 1966 exhibition *Eccentric Abstraction* [figures 0.1 and 0.2]. On view at Fischbach Gallery in New York from September 20 through October 3, 1966, *Eccentric Abstraction* was Lippard’s challenge to the “structural art world,” the term the curator-critic used to define the swell of artists working in the Minimalist canon of industrial techniques and fabricated materials. The first independent curatorial endeavor of Lippard’s, *Eccentric Abstraction* represented her proposition of sensuality as a kind of material-methodology, evidenced here through the works of artists Alice Adams (b. 1930, New York, NY); Louise Bourgeois (b. 1911 Paris, France – d. 2010 New York, NY); Eva Hesse (b. 1936 Hamburg, Germany – d. 1970 New York, NY); Gary Kuehn (b. 1939 Plainfield, NJ); Bruce Nauman (b. 1941 Fort Wayne, IN); Don Potts (b. 1936 San Francisco, CA – d. 2011 San Francisco, CA); Keith Sonnier (b. 1941 Mamou, LA – d. 2020 Southampton, NY); and Frank Lincoln Viner (b. 1937 Worcester, MA). Lippard continues, “These artists are eccentric because they refuse to forego imagination and the expansion of sensuous experience while they also refuse to sacrifice the solid formal basis demanded of the best in current non-objective art.”² Lippard schematized the approach her selection of artists take to materials, which maintains abstraction, but importantly introduces sensuality as a critical methodology of making *and* response. Sensuality engaged the “body ego,” and for Lippard “can be experienced in two ways: first, through appeal,

¹ Lippard, “Eccentric Abstraction,” *Art International* 10, 9 (November 1996).

² Ibid.

the desire to caress and to be caught up in the feels and rhythms of a work; second, through repulsion, the reaction against certain forms and surfaces which take longer to comprehend.”³

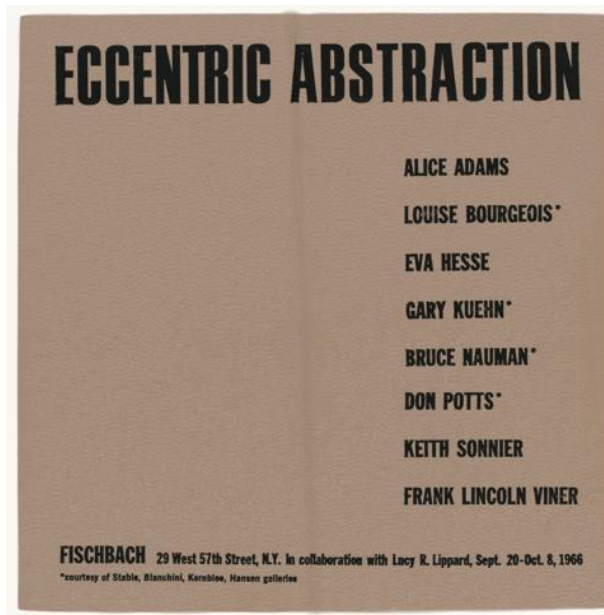


Figure 0.1

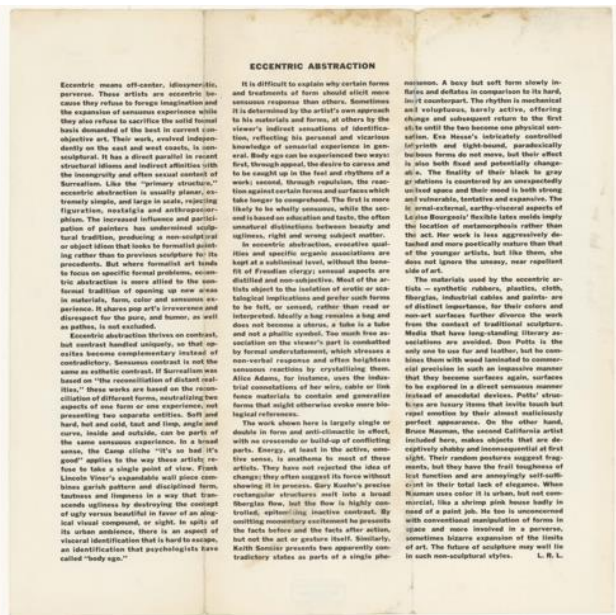


Figure 0.2

Lippard’s proposition of eccentricity, which would become the foundation of what is today called postminimalism and process art, came off the heels of Kynaston McShine’s edifying exhibition at the Jewish Museum between April and June 1966, *Primary Structures: Younger American and British Sculptures*, which showcased the works of forty-two artists, including those Minimalist stalwarts Dan Flavin and Donald Judd, as well as Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Anne Truitt, and Robert Smithson, amongst others.⁴ McShine called the work of this group of

³ Ibid.

⁴ While *Primary Structures* was the first major United States exhibition to carefully articulate what we now call minimal art, a smaller group exhibition of artists who would come to be known as minimalists preceded the 1966 Jewish Museum show. This was the January 9 through February 9, 1964 exhibition *Black, White and Grey: Contemporary Painting and Sculpture*, held in Hartford, Connecticut at the Wadsworth Atheneum and organized by Samuel Wagstaff. It is critical to note that the term “minimalism” was not mentioned in McShine’s writings for the

artists “New Art,” which morphed into “ABC Art,” “Object Art,” and eventually “Minimalism,” the moniker deployed today. Both exhibitions not only challenged the primacy of painting in the landscape of modern art, but also proposed frameworks for interpreting contemporary sculptural practices. In his 1966 Artforum review of *Eccentric Abstraction*, poet and critic David Antin suggested that some of the sculptures in Lippard’s show, namely Gary Kuehn’s works made of plywood and fiberglass, might have found a more appropriate home in McShine’s exhibition earlier that same year. What united McShine’s artists, according to John Ashbery’s May 1966 ARTnews review of *Primary Structures*, was their “drastic simplicity of means and frequent use of vivid color.” Lippard’s artists were not invested in the same “simplicity of means,” instead opting for materials that beckoned embodied and sensual responses. Crucially for this project, Lippard centered the sensuality of the artists’ chosen materials as both an antidote to academic, “primary structure,” sculpture, and also as sites of erotic unknowability and excess. “The materials used by the eccentric artists—synthetic rubbers, plastics, cloth, fiberglass, industrial cables and paints—are of distinct importance, for their colors and non-art surfaces further divorce the work from the context of traditional sculpture.” The breadth of materials used by the exhibiting artists is evident in archival installation photos of *Eccentric Abstraction*, as in the image below which includes works by Eva Hesse, Frank Viner, Keith Sonnier, and Don Potts [figure 0.3].

exhibition. My deployment of “minimalism,” anachronistic as it may be, is in an effort to set up a clear distinction between the work of the artists in McShine’s exhibition, and those in Lippard’s exhibition, and to set up Lippard’s challenge to this group of artists.



Figure 0.3

To be clear, Lippard’s proposition of “eccentric abstraction” does not fully explicate the terms of the artists in this dissertation, nor are Lippard’s investments fully shared herein.⁵ Lippard clarified that the artists who fell under this category “[reject] figuration, nostalgia, and anthropomorphism,”⁶ which is not exactly true for Senga Nengudi, most specifically, who, as it will be argued, intentionally engages anthropomorphism as a corollary to abstraction.⁷ However, the charge of eccentricity in abstraction supplies a fruitful backdrop to the artists of this project in that Lippard set out to identify something at once sensuous and abstract that *exceeded* the

⁵ Lippard sets up a material distinction between hard structure and soft sensuality. Though superficially the artists of this project mimic this structure—as Beverly Buchanan’s sculptures are made of versions of concrete while Senga Nengudi’s are made of pliable pantyhose and sand—this is not a binary in which this project is invested.

⁶ Lippard, “Eccentric Abstraction,” *Art International* 10, 9 (November 1996).

⁷ Lippard specifically writes in this 1966 text that for the artists of her terms, “[i]deally a bag remains a bag and does not become a uterus, a tube is a tube and not a phallic symbol.” The reader will encounter the anachronistic irony of this specific sentence in the second and third chapters of this dissertation where Nengudi’s anthropomorphic structures are emphatically explored as relating to breasts, stomachs, and scrotums.

material conditions of minimalism. *Excess*, too, is a critical political maneuver that pushes the objects of this study beyond visual consumption towards other sensorial modalities, especially towards haptics, or the experience of touch. Art history's disciplinary framework historically centers the eye as the primary vehicle and site of consumption of artworks. This monosensorial approach inhibits the body's ability to have a complete encounter, just as it maintains certain hierarchies of information-accumulation and limits the art object itself to being purely optical, a challenge to which this introduction will soon return. These artists engage with materials as a direct challenge to what scholars call the "regime of the visual." As Nicole Fleetwood would frame it, the artists of this study *exceed* the visual—a visual encounter with the works is not sufficient alone.⁸ Beverly Buchanan (b. 1940 Fuquay, North Carolina – d. 2015 Ann Arbor, Michigan) and Senga Nengudi (b. 1943 Chicago, Illinois), the artists of focus of this dissertation, at once dispute and hold accountable this regime for its privileges and shortcomings. These artists exemplify the possibilities of a re-materialized conceptualism that emphasizes non-traditional materials as pathways towards a haptic imaginary inclusive of desires absent from the conceptualist and feminist imaginaries of the 1960s and early 1970s. This sensorial excess pushes the materials explored in this dissertation beyond their immediately perceptible positions. Lippard's idea of sensuality also aids in this project's close attention to the materials used by the artists studied herein. Materials signal the vast histories and networks from which the artists are working, and their resulting objects are indelibly *of* the chosen materials. The objects, vis a vis their materiality, are at once sites of political excavation and propositions, just as they are sites of sensorial excess. Their full understanding requires engagement beyond the optical. As Jennifer L. Roberts asserts, working through the proposition of Tim Ingold, objects are "geo-eco-political

⁸ Fleetwood (2010).

events,”⁹ and therefore attending to them fully requires a comprehensive understanding of their material and sensorial properties.¹⁰

This project, rooted in what Bruce Schulman deems the “long-seventies,”¹¹ bracketed by the years 1968 and 1984,¹² arrives at the intersection of postminimalism, by Lippard’s figuration, and what would soon become conceptualist art, in the 1970s. After *Eccentric Abstraction*, Lippard would become an early theorist of idea-driven conceptualism. However, contrary to much of canonized scholarship on conceptualism in the United States, it was Argentine critic Oscar Masotta, not Lucy Lippard, who first introduced the term “dematerialization” to describe

⁹ Roberts, 67.

¹⁰ In paying close attention to the materials used by Buchanan and Nengudi, this dissertation relies upon and evokes a body of scholarship from material and cultural studies. See especially Latour (2005), Bennett (2010), Appadurai (2010), Yonan (2011), and Ingold (2012).

¹¹ Schulman, 254.

¹² The goal of Schulman’s argument in defining the decade of the 1970s is to recuperate this “lost decade” that the author argues is often forgotten or overlooked, sandwiched between the mythologized 1960s and the Reagan-turn of the 1980s. Schulman locates the beginning of the 1970s in the year 1968 at the outset of Nixon’s presidency and concludes the decade in 1984, a year in which the economy had recovered, and Reagan’s “boosterism and patriotic exuberance” was in full effect (254). He argues that Nixon’s presidency and its marring Watergate scandal actually aided the Republican party’s surge to popularity as the it fostered a general distrust of government power and reinscribed the power of the market. This was emphasized during Carter’s presidency from 1977 to 1981, in the dominating political culture was marked by ambivalence and distrust of the authority of government. Counterculture prevailed in the 1970s as the idea of alternate institutions and alternate family formations flourished. Schulman also described a cultural fracturing that occurs in this decade in which there is a distinct shift from the racial integrationist ideals of the 1960s that give way to an increased emphasis on multiculturalism, a rise of ethnic identity politics, and a shift away from the communal to the individual. The historiography of this shift, as Schulman charts, is anchored in the post-war period wherein a liberal universalism, or a “belief in the fundamental unity and sameness of all humanity” (56) dominated. This was activated through a politics of integration in the 1960s, but turned to a focus on cultural nationalism, and a rejection of integrationist politics in the 1970s. Schulman’s culminating argument is that “[t]he long, gaudy, depressing Seventies reinvented America.” He concludes: “[w]e live in their shadows” (257).

the radical approach artists took to object-making in the 1960s.¹³ A few years later, in 1972, Simón Marchán Fiz published *Del arte objectual al arte de concepto (From Object Art to Concept Art)*, which examined ideological, peripheral, and antagonistic conceptualism in Argentina and Spain, and anticipated conceptualism's relationship to institutional critique. Marchán Fiz's ideological conceptualism was distinct from conceptualism in the United States and Europe, which he claimed had reached an ideological impasse, because of the critical role that sociopolitics and geographic specificity play in artmaking. He expounded the possibilities of global conceptual art, which by some accounts had failed by the 1970s,¹⁴ by looking to artists who were "political-conceptual," a descriptive term subsequently coined by Mari Carmen Ramírez in 1993.

Following the charge of scholars like Marchán Fiz, as well as Alexander Alberro, Helen Molesworth, and others who contest the supposed failure of conceptualism, this dissertation looks broadly at the movement's multifaceted and nuanced legacies and proposes the maneuver of *re-materializing*—which stands in direct opposition to the dematerialization exemplified by the conceptual artists of Seth Siegelaub's cadre.¹⁵ Specifically, this dissertation investigates the material practice of women sculptors in the United States in the 1970s who were united in their both their conceptualist artistic proclivities and disenchantment with second-wave feminism. The

¹³ The term "dematerialization" was popularized after the publication of Lucy Lippard and John Chandler's 1968 article "The Dematerialization of Art," published in *Art International* (the authors note that they wrote the article in 1967).

¹⁴ For a compendium on essays that challenge the notion of conceptualism's "failure," I point the reader to Alberro and Buchmann (2006).

¹⁵ Often ascribed the paternal figure of conceptual art, Siegelaub often exhibited artists who today remain some of the most well-known conceptual artists like Daniel Buren, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Weiner.

artists of focus herein, Beverly Buchanan and Senga Nengudi, materialize their ideas by sourcing non-traditional artmaking materials within what this dissertation develops as a *haptic imaginary*, an intervening corrective to both the second-wave feminist *and* conceptualist art imaginaries. Buchanan and Nengudi deploy specific materials to transmit historical and embodied knowledge; it is precisely through the activated sensorium of touch—imagined and physical—that the past is transmitted and materialized.¹⁶

First a field of study in the sciences, *haptics* has become integral to the disciplines of the humanities.¹⁷ Haptics involves the study of the body’s somatosensory system through a number of submodalities which include touch, temperature, pain, and itch.¹⁸ Haptic perceptual experience, mostly engaged through the human’s largest organ, the skin, is the process by which bodies acquire and accrue information received through the somatosensory system. The introduction of haptics to the humanities is attributed to art historians Aloïs Riegl and Wilhelm Wörringer. Riegl, a textile curator, examined visuality through the two modes of *haptisch* and *optisch*. He introduced the notion of tactile or haptic vision and set up a distinction between “tactile connection” and “optical isolation.”¹⁹ Riegl described how the spectator, in front of a

¹⁶ In his research on the Late Renaissance artist Benvenuto Cellini, Michael Cole posits the “technical turn” and explores the ontological status of materials as opposed to the epistemological value of making. It is within the aims of this dissertation to signal that these are in fact twinned exercises, and to extend to the third operating principle of spectatorship and its iterant processes that also produce knowledge (Cole, 2006).

¹⁷ Though I will summarize very briefly scholarship on haptics, for a more capacious scaffolding of *haptics* and haptic perception in art history, I point the reader to Riegl (1927, translated 1985), Deleuze and Guattari (1980), Deleuze (1981, translated 2017), Fisher (1997), Marks (2002), and Barker (2009).

¹⁸ Jones (2018).

¹⁹ Riegl (1927).

Late Roman object such as a mosaic, would attempt to cohere the optical representation of illusionistic space with the haptic sense of that space, which was more routinely becoming suppressed given the rise of representational and figurative space (consider the later centrality of perspective in Renaissance academic painting). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari later expanded on the possibilities of haptic perception in their descriptions of “nomad art” and insisted on the intertwining nature of the haptic and the optic as sensoriums that slide into one another.²⁰ The more recent work of scholar Laura Marks elucidates the *feeling* of haptics in regard to spectatorship:

In a haptic relationship our self rushes up to the surface to interact with another surface. When this happens there is a concomitant loss of depth—we become amoebalike, lacking a center, changing as the surface to which we cling changes. We cannot help but to be changed in the process of interacting.²¹

Critically, Marks postures that haptic visuality does not necessarily mean the option to literally touch is present. Rather, it is an ethical relationship, a way of being attuned to the world that is an alternative, in Marks’ formulation, to the “mastering, optical visuality that vision is more commonly understood to be.”²² Marks offers haptic reading and haptic criticality as modes of performing the stakes of this ethical relationship. Similarly, this project relies on Amber Jamilla Musser’s framework of “empathetic reading,” which she develops through Deleuze’s notions of “intensive reading.”²³ This form of learning requires “deciphering the structures of sensation that subtend various objects,” but Musser pushes the French philosopher further by insisting on a

²⁰ See Deleuze and Guattari (1980) and Deleuze (1981).

²¹ Marks, xvi.

²² Ibid., xvii.

²³ Musser (2014).

specific attunement to corporeality in tandem with sensation.²⁴ Heeding this charge, the artists of this study demonstrate an innate understanding of the ethical stakes of artmaking that accounts for non-visual modes of knowing, thus producing their own haptic imaginary that relies on a specific relationship between the body of the viewer and the body of the object.

The feminist imaginary of the 1960s and early 1970s was based on an emancipatory promise achieved through a structural critique of society, especially the fight for equal wages. For scholars like Nancy Fraser, this imaginary was fundamental in the avant of neoliberalist capitalism in its emphasis on monetized labor.²⁵ These efforts, though productive in certain ways, were exclusive, narrowly focused, and assumed a White, middle-class, heteronormative base. As artist Nengudi described in an interview, the second-wave feminist movement was about equal access for women to work but this was not always a relatable goal as “Black women have always had to work.”²⁶ The conceptualist imaginary, especially its work against traditional systems of representation and its hopes of a decentered art world that would operate outside of the capitalist and patriarchal confines of the dealer-gallery-collector circuit in New York City, accrued meaning for the artists discussed in this project in the 1970s, as chapter three will demonstrate. Bruce Schulman notes that, following the counterculture of the 1960s, the 1970s were marked by the proliferation of alternative institutions to the mainstream, including

²⁴ Though corporeality and embodiment often get inflated, there is critical difference: corporeality refers to the physical form itself, whereas embodiment is the relational network formed between the physical form and the feelings and sensations of that form.

²⁵ Fraser (2009).

²⁶ Taormina, 33-34.

alternative family structures. This figures into this project's notion of *imaginary* at this specific moment in time: non-normative communities built to support and nourish their members.²⁷

Operating in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement from 1954 to 1968, and against the backdrop of the Black Arts Movement between 1965 and 1976, Buchanan and Nengudi engaged abstraction as a political language freed from the strictures of representation, a complicated relationship to which this dissertation returns most explicitly in chapter two. Their specific language of abstraction, however, was not akin to the “academic” abstraction of mid-century modernist painting. Rather, Buchanan and Nengudi harnessed the possibilities of abstraction as a route back towards the body, engaging the body's ability to acquire, produce, and transmit knowledge through multiple sensorial regimes. Invested in the body's ability to endure as well as its eventual undoing, the artists' works process contemporary and historical conditions of bodily labor, trauma, and endurance. By evading the “march toward figuration,”²⁸ Buchanan and Nengudi disentangle the surface legibility of representation, which Musser configures as a “wound,” from the productive embodied knowledge of the figure, whether implied or literal.²⁹ Both artists intuitively harnessed the possibilities of haptics to engage this embodied abstraction, thus producing a new epistemological order that prioritizes marginalized histories. This project relies on theorizations of “counter-memory” to explain and contextualize the political stakes of the artists' material and formal experimentations. Counter-memory offers a framework to understand Buchanan's devotion to *ruination* and Nengudi's use of *remains*, twinned concepts that will be explored further in the coming chapters.

²⁷ Schulman, 16-17.

²⁸ This evocative term is deployed by Uri McMillan (2018).

²⁹ Musser, 160.



Figure 0.4



Figure 0.5

Chapter one investigates the work of Beverly Buchanan, an artist who worked between the United States South, especially Georgia, and the U.S. Northeast, especially New York and New Jersey. Buchanan engaged the tradition of Southern vernacular architecture and other historical sites. Her early *frustulum* series (1978-1981) is of main concern for this chapter [figure 0.4].

These works are small concrete castings in the shape of rectangular slabs and natural boulders.

The artist took surface imprints of dilapidated architectural sites in various states of ruination and transferred the textures to her sculptures [figure 0.5]. Soon after these early casting experiments, the artist began to use tabby concrete, the resulting product bound by a compound agent made of mud and lime derives from oyster shells. Tabby was a localized, inexpensive material that was often used by enslaved people in the Southern U.S. Buchanan's concrete cast objects were placed

either in institutions or in nature only to be subsumed by grass and moss. Specifically interested in the legacy of Black laborers in the south post-slavery, Buchanan's work memorialized their labor, physical and otherwise, and legacy. She explored materiality as a conduit of memory, excavating memory's shortcomings, proclivity towards fragmentation, and nostalgia, as well as its power to connect bodies cross-temporally.

Chapter two centers on the work of Senga Nengudi, an artist who was, during the majority of the 1970s, based in Los Angeles. Nengudi created performative objects inspired by the choreographies of the body. These objects were made with used and worn materials, which Linda Goode Bryant and Marcy Philips theorized as *remains* in their 1978 publication *Contextures*. Their notion of remains becomes the critical framework for this chapter. The works of Nengudi's *R.S.V.P.* series (1977) are soft, malleable sculptures made from pantyhose filled with sand and sutured to the wall [*figures 0.6 and 0.7*]. Portions of the structures sag with the weight of sand which makes the sculpture at once fight against and succumb to gravity, mirroring the experience of bodily changes. Pantyhose mimics the fragility and flexibility of skin and flesh. The soft, pliable objects of Nengudi's *R.S.V.P.* series lend themselves to the possibility of puncture and fatigue. The ubiquity of pantyhose as an affordable, accessible commodity was critical for Nengudi. Viewers immediately recognize the fashion item and understand the material evocation of the corporeal. The artist activated many of her earliest *R.S.V.P.* works with friend and collaborator Maren Hassinger, as the works were initially made to be performed, a practice closely studied in chapter three. Trained dancers, both Nengudi and Hassinger created a space for communal intimacy and vulnerability in the process of bodily expansion and lethargy.

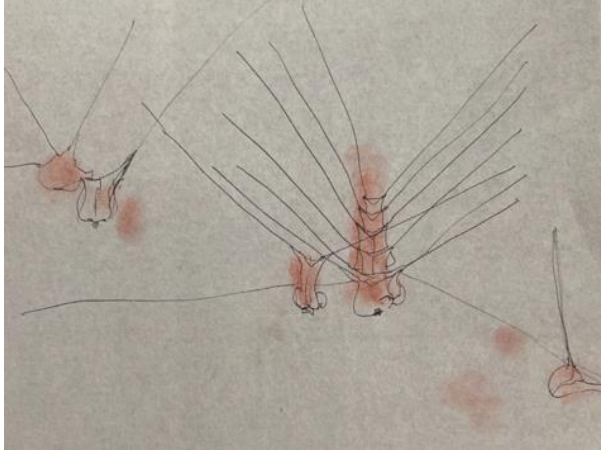


Figure 0.6

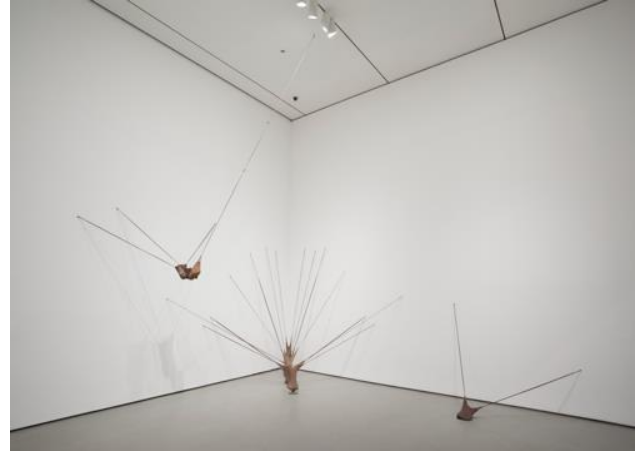


Figure 0.7

Nearly fourteen years after *Eccentric Abstraction* at Fischbach Gallery was on view, the now-legendary exhibition *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States* took place in 1980 at Artists in Residence, Inc. (A.I.R. Gallery) also in New York. This exhibition and its surrounding publications and resulting conversations are explored through the exhibited works of Buchanan and Nengudi in the third chapter. Though Buchanan and Nengudi may have met earlier New York City sometime in the 1970s, as they both exhibited in group shows at Cinque Gallery during the decade and were in the New York arts scene of the time, the focus on the *Dialectics of Isolation* exhibition allows for a close examination of each artist's own interrogations of feminism amidst the predominantly White and middle-class landscape of second-wave feminism. This chapter performs a haptic reading, to return to the scholarship of Marks, of the two artists within the network of "Third World Feminism," and proffers that it is through their choices in materials, and the materials' abilities to exceed the visual regime, that Buchanan and Nengudi explore a more fitting woman-centric politic.

CHAPTER ONE
(RE)CASTING HISTORY: RUINATION AND REMEMBRANCE
IN THE EARLY WORKS OF BEVERLY BUCHANAN, 1972-1981

On September 8, 1978, Beverly Buchanan (b. 1940, Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina; d. 2015, Ann Arbor, Michigan) opened her solo exhibition *Wall Fragments—Series Cast in Cement* at Truman Gallery in New York City.³⁰ This show presented together for the first time her revolutionary *frustulum* series of cast concrete, floor-bound sculptures [figure 1.1].³¹



Figure 1.1

The series is called *frustulum*, or fragments, and each sculpture is called a frustula. The frustula are assemblages comprised of several cast concrete pieces in the shape of cubical boulders and rectangular slabs. The frustula are usually low to the ground such that the viewer towers over the

³⁰ This exhibition would subsequently travel to The Soter Gallery in Macon, Georgia for October 1-14, 1978.

³¹ Many of Buchanan's sculptures from this series are now lost or no longer exist. Information regarding titles, sizes, and locations of the sculptures is rarely consistent in Buchanan's archives. To reconstruct a full understanding of the individual frustula, this analysis relies on gallery records, the few installation photographs that are available, as well as writings and documentations by the artist and her associates.

structures and must maneuver to both meet the sculptures at their own level, and to take in each vantage point. Sometimes stacked, solitary on the floor, or leaning on companion slabs, the various moments of contact and support of the iterant concrete fragments shifts from sculpture to sculpture. The works present at once as organized rubble and as small monuments. The artist described in her statement for the exhibition how the unique cast concrete fragments were grouped into free-standing sculptures, and what she intended to provoke in their arrangements:

Each piece is meant to stand alone and at the same time maintain its integrity; each one must support itself esthetically. My interest in walls involves the concept of urban walls when they are in various stages of decay; walls as part of a landscape. Often, when buildings are in a state of demolition, one or two structural pieces (*frustula*) stand out that otherwise never would have been “created.” This state of demolition presents a new type of “artificial” structural system piece that by itself (its undemolished state) would not exist. These “discards” or piles of rubble can be pulled together to form new systems. These new systems are very personal statements to me. They are inspired by urban ruins but are created, “in my own image,” by me, in concrete and painted with dark paint. Deceptively, they appear to be black.³²

Buchanan’s artist statement about the *frustulum* exposes her Conceptualist inclination towards artistic processes and systems, though she never disavowed the resulting object. She gestured towards her investment in the generative possibilities of entropic sites, and the histories contained within, just as she revealed both her investigation into blackness as a painterly strategy, and Blackness, as a defining feature of her lived experience. Though the statement claims that all of the sculptures were covered with black paint, installation images from the exhibition reveal that some of the *frustula* were not painted and remained bare, dark gray concrete. In later installations of the *frustulum*, Buchanan would paint some structures black, but others would be covered in earthy pigmentation created by the artist, which resulted in reddish tints. Buchanan offered that her *frustula* in the Truman Gallery exhibition were painted to

³² Box 15, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

“deceptively” “appear” black: at once these words cue the viewers into both a certain aesthetic and pique curiosity about blackness as it relates to the artist’s written effort to connect the color with creating “in [her] own image.” The frustula are collected moments of the artist’s experiences, just as they supersede their original context, and exist as fragmented monuments in their own right. Buchanan, fully aware of this maneuver, insisted upon the capaciousness and ambiguity of the term “blackness.”

The works first seem intuitive; some of the objects that rest on the floor before the audience are concrete blocks painted black. However, this apparent formal simplicity, an artistic and art historical strategy that necessitates sustained audience engagement with the sculptures, belies the nuances of the frustula’s surface textures and historical contexts.³³ Light hits the shiny black surfaces differently depending on placement in the gallery, internal logic of sculptural assemblages, and time of day which results in constant changing tensions and interplay between the individual slabs, sculptural arrangements, and viewer. Though not formally trained in art making or in art history, Buchanan was a voracious reader and through her robust studies was invested in learning art history, political theory, and art making on her own terms. Buchanan was not alone in her fascination with blackness and subsequent experimentation with black as painted color and metaphor.³⁴

By the time that Buchanan wrote her *frustulum* statement in 1978, the artist had, through authored texts and interviews, foregrounded her various identificatory intersections as a Black

³³ These is an extant trove of literature about the use of the paint color black in modern art and how this aesthetic history coincides and contends with Blackness as identificatory and lived experience.

³⁴ An important biographical connection: Norman Lewis is a mentor to Buchanan at this time and is working on his series *Black Paintings* made between 1946-1977.

woman from the U.S. South as inextricable from her artistic animating principles.³⁵ Though this statement accompanied her first foray into sculpture, Buchanan had been thinking about her relationship and interest in black surfaces for years. A 1976 text by Buchanan called “Black walls” revealed the artist developing an obsession with imagined city walls. This would become the title of a series [figures 1.2-1.5] of works from the same year: she used black paint to create many small, abstract works on paper in various personal diaries and on loose leaves of heavy paper.



Figures 1.2-1.5³⁶

³⁵ Archival evidence also shows that Buchanan was romantically interested in women. Buchanan’s sexuality is routinely hidden or absent in literature on the artist. She was known to have long-term relationships with women, and in her diaries, alludes to several possible partners. However, Buchanan never explicitly identified as lesbian, and never discussed her sexuality in tandem with her practice. She was also part of the queer community in Macon, Georgia and had a close circle of friends, mostly gay men. See Campbell (2016).

³⁶ This is a selection of four works on paper chosen by the author from Buchanan’s *Black walls* series; these pieces are in a diary from 1976 and 1977. The 1976 works were partially executed in experimentation and preparation for the artist’s two-artist exhibition called *City Walls: Symbol of Human Effort and Design* (1976) to which this chapter will return. The majority of these works are untitled. Box 5, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Exploring her “concern with urban ruins,” Buchanan created this series to expose the tension between what she called the inner and outer lives of decaying sites, a notion she would further develop.³⁷ She began creating these works with a paint roller, which achieved an all-around blackness. Buchanan turned to brushes to achieve the desired variety in textures and gradations. In her own words, she “couldn’t stop painting [black walls].”³⁸ Interestingly, Buchanan wrote that though she can see these walls in her mind, she cannot figure out the texture or imagine what they must feel like until she puts her visions to paper. To understand the wall’s interiority and how this results in its specific textures, or what Buchanan would call the wall’s “essence,” she had to materialize the wall for herself. The unmaterialized image failed Buchanan; she had to physically realize the wall for it to exist. Then, the surface would come alive. She described that though these walls exist fervently in her imagination, she had yet to come across one in person until September 11, 1976 while traversing West Broadway in SoHo in downtown New York City to arrive at the Women in the Arts Foundation³⁹ gallery space which was then located at 435

Broome Street:

I saw it! The real thing. A Black wall just like the ones I had been painting [...] I knew that that Black Wall though I didn’t know where it was or if I’d ever for sure see one, but

³⁷ Box 13, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

³⁸ Box 5, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

³⁹ The Women in the Arts Foundation was established in 1971 and was incorporated as a national organization in 1973 and became known as WIA, Inc. The group organized the famed 1973 show *Women Choose Women* which included a catalogue with a text by Lucy Lippard. Laura Adler, Mario Amaya, Elizabeth C. Baker, Linda Nochlin, Pat Passlof, Ce Roser, and Sylvia Sleigh juried the exhibition. Early actions organized by WIA include picketing museum exhibitions (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York in 1971 and 1977; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1972 and 1984) for lack of inclusion of women artists. WIA had a gallery space devoted to the exhibition of professional women artists, but eventually shifted focus to advocacy.

there it was in all its strong, soft splendor. It was not garish or frightening. It just was there. Being unnoticed. It had all the appropriate gradations in surface: different textures, darker areas, lighter areas, soft and hard areas. The feel of it, the essence of it was immediately perceivable and I sat unable to move because of the rapid interchange or transmittal of this essence from the wall to me. I will go back to see and feel it again and again but I knew when I saw it. Its inner self or core was noble and black and haunting and strong and intelligent and magnificent!⁴⁰

Later in this text, and throughout other writings, Buchanan deployed the terms “presence” and “essence” to understand her own relationship and positioning within the world and to theorize her attraction to fragments of architectural sites. These walls, once imagined and once real, encapsulate the artist’s theorization of “presence” as distinct from “essence,” which she explicated:

Presence is the way [the wall] confronts you. The stone envisioned at a given moment. If that stance seen remains relatively constant, then what you are seeing is that wall’s presence. Essence is the life of that wall. Not as a structure but as millions of living molecules of matter formed into brick and millions of particles of pigment. The essence never changes and only accrues over time. The essence is harder to detect and describe.⁴¹

The clarification provided in the quotation immediately above illuminates Buchanan’s brief elision of presence and essence in the prior “Black walls” text. She wrote that the “feel” of the wall was instantaneously perceptible for her. The use of “feel” would seem to indicate presence, as in a perceptible fact about the wall. But here, Buchanan used “feel” to suggest the haptic possibilities of knowing and the notion of feeling, as in emotional responses, as an interior and private process. Essence, for Buchanan, was immutable, contained and defined from within.

Buchanan’s “essence” is distinct from Michel Foucault’s formulations of the impossibility of essence in a historiographic sense. Through Nietzsche, Foucault contended that

⁴⁰ Box 5, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

there is no single objective truth or essence, and to pursue this false line of inquiry would be fruitless and counterproductive. Buchanan, alternatively, never suggested essence as a singular, knowable fact. Instead, it is the interiority of object or person—that which can be alternatively obscured and revealed as per autonomous decision processes.⁴² Foucault theorized that attention to detail and specificity require an understanding of the multiplicity of identities; this construction of historiography is what he called “effective history.” Buchanan’s works perform effective history in that her definition of “essence” rested in the atomic structure of sites, inclusive of the hands that built the systems that eventually were neglected or morphed through ruination. Buchanan’s “essence” is unlike presence which is fluctuating and shifting; presence adapts and takes on unique valences depending on the context of experience and audience. Presence suggests a required relationship between viewer and object; essence exists without viewer. Essence is contained within the object; its materials and ontological history. Presence is subjective, an outward-facing encounter over which the individual object in question has less power. Buchanan’s theorizations of presence and essence, though perhaps incomplete, guided much of her methodology and practice. This essay argues that Buchanan’s works hinge on this distinction and attempt to pull out and memorialize the “essence” of those sites of ruination.

The following details Buchanan’s painterly and subsequent sculptural practice, compelled by her curiosity about ruination, from 1976 through 1982, with a particular focus on her *frustulum* series made from 1978 through 1981.⁴³ This body of sculpture is the inflection point of the artist’s engagement with surface, material, legacy, entropy, and site. Her *Wall Series*

⁴² See Foucault (1977) 9; and Nietzsche (1887).

⁴³ I use 1978 as the starting point for her *frustulum* works, though she engages in experiments with casting as early as 1977. All of her *frustulum* are dated 1978 and later.

paintings made mostly in 1976 predate the *frustulum*. These works on paper and canvas are an early exploration of Buchanan's interest in texture and geographic location; the paintings serve as a catalyst for her later sculptures. The frustula, or wall fragments, represent the artist's foray into three-dimensionality which she would continue to explore in her *ruins*, her later outdoor installation works. In another description written in 1978 by the artist about her *frustulum*, she incidentally anticipated her next series, what she would call her *ruins*: "One of My Dreams: To place fragments in tall grass where a house once stood by now, only the chimney bricks remain."⁴⁴ These *ruins*, which the artist would begin in 1979, are logical progressions of the preceding bodies of work. The majority of the works of this series are tabby concrete structures that are placed outdoors in various locations across Georgia and North Carolina. The ruins often disappear or are subsumed into their space in nature where the artist situated them. Made from local materials specific to their installation sites, Buchanan's ruins are intimate engagements with place and history.

This essay proceeds chronologically to track Buchanan's interrogation of materials over time and investigate how her specific materials, especially the eventual shift from Portland concrete to tabby and other localized materials in the early 1980s, reflect a specific methodology that at once attends to the Conceptualist tenets of idea-forward decentralization and deskilling while also calling into question the efficacy of dematerialization. Dually invested in process *and* object, Buchanan memorialized the legacy and labor, physical and otherwise, of Black people, especially women, in the U.S. South post-slavery. Further, Buchanan was a rigorous archivist of her own practice. She always carried her Polaroid camera (later, a digital camera), and her papers

⁴⁴ The author has maintained the capitalization and punctuation from Buchanan's original text. Box 15, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

are replete with documentation of her processes, in photographs—some with specific notations and others blank—miscellaneous notes, diary entries, homemade flip books, self-published texts, and more.

Buchanan's project was compelled by what historian of visual culture T.J. Demos, through Foucault's original formulation, calls "counter-memory"⁴⁵ which is collective⁴⁶ and personal memory constituted against institutional memory: counter-memory is borne of specificity and locality in social and political contexts, and attends to those marginalized histories quieted, silenced, and erased. This also recalls Michel-Rolph Trouillot's assertions that the production of history is less a historical narrative and more of a "bundle of silences" that require sustained critique and deconstruction to understand the very production of these silences.⁴⁷ These silences, as Sharon Holland writes, are usually bound up in the marginalized and the dead, or the very conditions of marginalization that produced death.⁴⁸ Buchanan worked with an acute awareness of death's inevitability to produce space and narrative that accounted for these silences. Counter-memory also works to foreground what Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally call "decentered microhistories."⁴⁹ Engaged equally with the power of memory and its proclivity towards fragmentation, Buchanan's artistic practice negotiated between positive and

⁴⁵ Demos (2012).

⁴⁶ "Collective memory" was first proposed and studied by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the early 20th century. Collective memory is the constituted knowledge of a particular group of people based off of past and lived experiences. This kind of memory allows for localization and specificity, as opposed to the homogenizing efforts of institutional memory.

⁴⁷ Trouillot (1995): 27. Trouillot also works through Foucault's writing on counter-memory and the viability of truth.

⁴⁸ Holland (2000).

⁴⁹ Fabre and O'Meally (1994): 7.

negative space, as well as the fraught relationship between nature, site, and laboring bodies.

Buchanan's artworks and concurrent and rigorous auto-archival practice stand as a testament to and an archive of counter-memory through which she asserted a politics of localized site and materiality.

From Paint to Concrete: 1972-1977

Beverly Buchanan was always an artist. She started drawing when she was a child—mostly drawing cartoon characters. The artist said she became an “abstract watercolorist” after her father died when she was around 11 years old in 1951.⁵⁰ Buchanan began experimenting with oil pigments on paper by the mid-1950s. The artist also had early obsession with collecting rocks, and drawing with sticks in sand and dirt, inclinations which would affect her later practice. Buchanan recounted that her mother told her that she always saw things in the rocks and in nature that other people could not see or did not want to see. The artist often cited this early hobby while creating her *frustulum*, and later, her *ruins*.

Buchanan graduated with a Bachelor of Science in medical technology from Bennett College, an historically Black women's college in Greensboro, North Carolina. By the early 1970s, Buchanan started working in acrylics. While exploring her creative inclinations, Buchanan also cultivated her educational and professional life. On June 3, 1969, she graduated from Columbia University with two master's degrees: one in Public Health and the other in Parasitology. After graduation, though she had long planned to pursue medical school, Buchanan instead pursued her artistic practice in tandem with her career. Buchanan took a job in the Bronx at the Veterans Administration where she was a medical technologist, and she began to take

⁵⁰ Box 15, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

classes with Norman Lewis at the Art Students League in New York City in 1972. She identified Lewis as an early influence, particularly because he was the first Black artist working in abstraction with whom Buchanan came in contact. With the encouragement of Lewis and Romare Bearden, who had by then become mentors for Buchanan, she pursued her painting practice through the mid-late 1970s.

The artist's first exhibition⁵¹ in New York was in a group show at Cinque Gallery that ran from May 22 to June 24, 1972. The Gallery was founded in 1969 by Bearden, Ernest Crichlow, and Lewis. Devoted to exhibiting and promoting the work of "young minority artists,"⁵² Cinque Gallery was named after Joseph Cinqué, an enslaved man from Sierra Leone who led a successful revolt aboard the slave ship *Amistad* on July 2, 1839. In *Group Show '72*, Buchanan exhibited at least one acrylic abstract painting alongside works by Kenneth Anderson, Kenneth Jordan, Louise Parks, Frank Sharpe, Fern Stanford, and Jamal Thompson. In the same year, Buchanan established a friendship with artist and then-curator at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Howardena Pindell (b. 1943, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) with whom Buchanan would later exhibit in the famous 1980 exhibition *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States* at A.I.R. Gallery, an examination of which occupies the third chapter of this dissertation. Through the extended network of Cinque Gallery, where she eventually met Charles White and other established artists, Buchanan was encouraged to devote

⁵¹ In the announcement of *Group Show '72*, there is reference to Buchanan having exhibited in an earlier show at Cinque Gallery devoted to women artists. However, at the time of writing, no records about the exhibition have been located. *Group Show '72* is usually identified by curators and scholars alike as Buchanan's first inclusion in a New York exhibition. Box 15, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

⁵² Box 17, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

her time to art, and in doing so, to interrogate her lived experience as a Black woman from the South working in the greater Northeast metropolitan area.



Figure 1.6

Later that same year, Bearden and Lewis offered Buchanan her first New York solo exhibition which was on view from December 16, 1972 through January 10, 1973 [*figure 1.6*]. The circulated announcement for the show included text written by Buchanan that read,

My own approach to the concept of color and space as form, is to feel and see special relationships which reveal my interpretation of a life experience. This experience, at least for me, embraces many variables such as: lifestyle, age, race, sex, and heritage. My approach also involves the continuing problem of resolving the flat painting surface. I suppose I can be called a “color impressionist.” Communicating color images is indeed fascinating and I continue exploring that direction.

The same year, in an interview with Patricia C. Gloster, then-program coordinator at Cinque Gallery, Buchanan detailed her wish for Black artists to “expose each other. Black artists writing

about art. Black journalists writing about Black artists and so on.”⁵³ But perhaps the most detailed Buchanan gets about her own sociopolitical positioning is in response to Gloster’s queries about the effect the women’s liberation movement had on women painters, especially Black women artists. In Buchanan’s words, the concurrent Second Wave of feminism was partially successful insofar as it “helped to highlight the difficulties that women artists face as a group.”⁵⁴ She expressed concern about the longevity of the movement, its ability to effect and sustain progress, as well as its assumed white-middle class audience. Buchanan told Gloster:

I am not sure the women’s movement is really ready for the Black woman artist. Black women artists are emerging as a dynamic force on their own, and I don’t think that they need the women’s liberation movement. Black women artists, I think, share a general suspicion that once the ‘hurrah’ has died down, the Black woman artist will still be at the back door and what we will have is the white woman artist who has gotten her work shown and that is about it. We can agree on the basic principles of the women’s movement, but as far as Black women artists are concerned, it is my impression that most are a little skeptical.⁵⁵

These sentences expose Buchanan’s nuanced view of Second Wave feminism: the basic tenet that women are equal to men is obvious and agreeable, but the movement was never intended for women of color. In another 1972 text, the artist wrote, “If I could only not think so much about these doomed young Black women I see every day.”⁵⁶ Buchanan concluded her thought to Gloster with a line that dually exposed exhaustion and survival by means distinct from those tenets of Second Wave feminism: “When the battle is over, we’ll have been left out anyway.”

⁵³ Box 15, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Box 16, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

The artist's own words, as well as her artistic communities and processes, reveal her wariness about Second Wave feminism and predominantly white art institutional spaces and authoritative voices. Her wariness recalls Foucault's charge to effective histories as necessarily reflective of counter memories and multiplicities of identities.

After her formal introduction to the New York gallery circuit through Cinque Gallery in 1972, Buchanan continued to exhibit her abstract paintings in the Tri-State area through the late 1970s. She had a solo exhibition at Upsala College in East Orange, New Jersey in 1974, and was included in a group exhibition at Cinque Gallery in 1975, as well as the *New Jersey Women Artists* exhibition at Mabel Smith Douglass Library, Douglass College, at Rutgers University in New Jersey in 1976.

In the artist's aforementioned statement from her 1978 solo exhibition of sculptures at Truman Gallery, Buchanan noted her long-standing interest in decaying walls as part of the urban landscape, an interest that comes to compel her practice by the mid-1970s. Exploring the textures and residual surfaces of sites of ruin through sketches, paintings, and imprints, Buchanan devoted her practice to interrogating surface textures of both imagined and existing in *Wall Series*.⁵⁷ In these works on paper, Buchanan experimented with various paint

⁵⁷ In 1976, Buchanan exhibited part of her *Wall Series* in a two-artist show alongside sculptor Mary Ann Reppa. Formally announced in the Sunday, April 18, 1976 edition of the *New York Times*, the exhibition *City Walls: Symbol of Human Effort and Design* was presented at the Montclair Art Museum in Montclair, New Jersey and was up from April through mid-June. The announcement card for the exhibition showed Buchanan's acrylic painting *North*, a piece marked by fantastic reds and yellows and punctuated in the middle by a swatch of blue. Other paintings in this exhibition include "Two Poles," dated from the early 1970s, "Sheroda," "Brick Church," dated 1975-1976, "Cinnamon," and "Westwind." In the artist's archives, there are formal photographs of these works. There is not complete archival documentation of these works or of this exhibition, and much information is missing or lost. Reppa's contribution to the exhibition was her sculpture *Cityscape U.S.A.—Scheduled for Demolition* made in 1976. Made of artificial bricks, sawed, sanded and repainted, with incorporated rubble from local demolition sites, this piece loomed large in the exhibition space at sixteen feet wide and eight feet tall. Demonstrating

applications—paint rollers, brushes, and strings—to achieve distinct textures and traces on the paper.⁵⁸ During this same time, Buchanan also explored latex as a painterly material that could achieve a nuanced transfer of surface textures. Some of these latex and acrylic works were exhibited in 1976 in various group exhibitions, but there is no extant documentation.⁵⁹ As the

attraction to urban ruins, Reppa's work amounted to a literal wall, as opposed to Buchanan's painted wall textures which were re-positionings of those surfaces. Deconstruction and reconstruction mark Reppa's practice as demonstrated in *Cityscape U.S.A.* Though the rubble was collected from local sites, the title of the piece signals anonymity and ubiquity, suggesting a similar fate of other spaces. Her sculpted wall, a symbol of the result of long-term entropy and reconstitution, stands in for the site of the city itself. Dissimilarly, Buchanan's paintings do not function as metaphors for entropy, but rather respond to the cycle of entropy and enter into this process.

⁵⁸ Around 1975, when Buchanan begins her painted works of wall textures, the artist meets fellow painter from the South Alma Thomas (b. 1891, Columbus, Georgia; d. 1978, Washington, D.C.). Thomas is at this time working on her most well-known colorful abstract paintings constituted by legibly discrete brush strokes. It is possible that Thomas's exuberant and distinct brush work affected Buchanan's decision to stop applying paint with a roller, and instead to investigate those possibilities of brushwork.

⁵⁹ Of Buchanan's works in the exhibition *City Walls*, eight paintings were acrylic on canvas, including *North*, but one particular piece of interest is her latex and acrylic painting *Afterglow*. *Afterglow* is one of two documented paintings that Buchanan made with latex and acrylic, the other being *Grey Wave Crossover*, a sixteen-by-twenty-inch canvas that is not dated, but was included in a 1976 group exhibition hosted by the Women in the Arts Foundation. Buchanan's sudden engagement with latex is curious, as there is not much evidence or notation of these material experiments in her diaries. Contemporaneous artistic explorations into the physical properties and possibilities of latex include such artists as Eva Hesse (b. 1936, Hamburg, Germany; d. 1970, New York, New York) and Heidi Bucher (b. 1926, Winterthur, Switzerland; d. 1993, Brunnen, Switzerland), whose works explore embodied and architectural space, as well as the politics of erotics and absurdity. Buchanan and Bucher were both included posthumously in the 2017 exhibition *Rooms* presented at Sadie Coles HQ in London, England and Mead Gallery in Warwick, England. Buchanan's experiments with latex and texture transfers would be better served, however, presented in tandem with Robert Overby (b. 1935, Harvey, Illinois; d. 1993, Los Angeles, California). Overby demonstrates a similar interest in material sites and their tactile properties as Buchanan but executes his artistic interrogations in latex in the early 1970s. He casts latex over flat surfaces, and once the material sets, lifts the latex to reveal the texture but in its inverse. Overby's sites include his studio floor and other familiar and identifiable surfaces important to him. Where Buchanan's frustulum are hard, sculptural, low to the ground, heavy, relatively small, and demand a specific bodily encounter—that is, the viewer must produce a form of labor to bend and see the work—Overby's latex transfers are generally hung vertically,

introduction to this chapter described, Buchanan approached surfaces of interest with a keen eye towards the object's "presence" and "essence." Where presence was temporary and faced outside of itself, and depended on the subject, essence, for Buchanan, was an interiorly constituted ontology of material and experiential residue, an atomic constitution. The artist's scientific interest in walls and their processes of decay might have derived from Buchanan's training in parasitology which conditioned her practice of close looking and understanding of organisms' natural processes of entropy.⁶⁰ By the late 1970s, Buchanan fatigued of painterly experimentation, and transitioned into a period of prolific sculptural production during the period of "urban renewal" that marked the decade.⁶¹

shifting their horizontal orientation to the more art historical orientation of verticality. The surfaces of both Overby's latexes and Buchanan's frustula are subtly and sensuously textured, daring viewers to skim their fingers over them. Similarly, a future project should attend to the generative possibilities of examining Buchanan's process alongside Houston Conwill's "juju bags," which he made beginning in the late 1970s and are the products of experimentations in cast latex. Like many of Buchanan's earliest works, much of Conwill's juju bags are now lost.

⁶⁰ The final section of this chapter returns to Buchanan's interrogations of natural entropic processes through analysis of Buchanan's *ruins* series, which the artist begins making in 1979, several years after her *Wall series*.

⁶¹ See Ansfield (2020) and Lipsitz (2007).

Frustulum, or Fragments: 1977-1981



Figure 1.7

Buchanan became fully devoted to her career as an artist in 1977 at 37 years old. In the same year, perhaps due to financial concerns,⁶² Buchanan moved to Macon, Georgia. She left behind her career as a public health educator for the City of East Orange, New Jersey where she had focused on women's and children's health, including child vaccination, breastfeeding, and birth control, to return to the U.S. South where she was raised. The decision to become a professional artist was precipitated and encouraged by Jock Truman, then-director of Betty Parson's Gallery, a gallery sympathetic to Black artists, who accepted Buchanan's work to the gallery's summer

⁶² The artist's archive reveals consistent financial anxieties for Buchanan; the artist made attempts to keep track of spending on art supplies and described regular stress about money. She applied to fellowships and grants with regularity, and rightfully lamented her various galleries' lack of timely or consistent payments. Pay stubs, receipts, tax forms, insurance forms, miscellaneous mentions in correspondences with family and friends, and diary entries support this claim. Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. For further information about Buchanan's alternative economic structures, including bartering, see Campbell (2016): 11. Buchanan also suffered from several serious medical conditions and was often concerned about medical bills. Moving to the South would have been a prudent financial decision, not to mention a homecoming.

group exhibition *New Talent Show* in 1977. After this exhibition, Truman would take Buchanan on as a gallery artist in his new eponymous space. In 1978, Truman Gallery devoted a solo exhibition entirely to her *frustulum*, the first thorough presentation of this series.⁶³ Some of the frustula were painted in black acrylic paint, while others were covered in earthy pigments or left as bare and untreated concrete. Installation images of the exhibition [*figures 1.8 and 1.9*] reveal structures, which the gallerist referred to as *slab works* but never named individually, that were oriented vertically, as opposed to horizontally. The two sculptures figured below are each constituted of three individual pieces, with the central slab leaning on one of its partnered fragments. The surface textures appear slightly jagged, but overall smooth and flat. The *slab work* on the left includes a single fragment ostracized by the leaning central piece which tends against its counterpart. The result is a mysterious network of support and fragmentation. In the *slab work* on the right, all three constitutive fragments touch, and are brought together formally through their arrangement. Curated by the gallerist, the exhibition *Wall Fragments—Series Cast in Cement* was well-received and reviewed locally.⁶⁴

⁶³ The *frustulum* series was also the subject of two solo exhibitions in 1981 which were presented at Kornblee Gallery in New York City (Jill Kornblee was Buchanan's second New York gallerist after Jock Truman) [*figure 1.7*] and at Heath Gallery in Atlanta, Georgia.

⁶⁴ It is not clear how much financial success this exhibition generated for the artist; from the available gallery records, there was only one receipt for a sale of an untitled "Sculpture" to Eric Swan in 1978 for the amount of \$400.00.



Figure 1.8



Figure 1.9

In his review of the exhibition, Josh Ashbery described Buchanan's sculptures as "comfortably old, the relaxed survivors of millennia."⁶⁵ Ashbery read the frustula as allegories of isolation; the irregular alignment of the concrete pieces results in random, stark voids between them. In fact, these physical lacunae were the result of Buchanan's interest in spatial and communal networks. Worn and humble, the frustula are less about individual isolation than they are about collective, experiential memory; the pieces on their own are constituents of a greater community, an assemblage. Buchanan planned the frustula by sketching out possible arrangements and mutations, and noted when certain pairings of concrete parts did not work together. She was attracted to irregularity and unpredictability: the fragments should never stand flush with one another and there was always a little piece out of place. Every position was deliberate; the frustula's own internal logic was a result of artistic deliberation.

⁶⁵ Ashbery, John. *Review of Beverly Buchanan at Truman Gallery*. New York Magazine, October 2, 1977.

Buchanan's interrogation of ruination or a "state of demolition" was realized through both the creation of molds that deploy found bricks and other materials, like milk cartons, and also the process of casting the concrete. The structure of taller frustula recall cairns [figure 1.10] while the shorter ones are less assuming—totemic yet quiet, embodying what Buchanan called a "delicate strength." She pondered, "[the frustula are] strong-fragile-dark-light-but not weak. Not weak in the sense of an instant falling apart at the seams. Rather—it is made to eventually crumble. How fast or slow it becomes a 'ruin' is unknown."⁶⁶ This kind of language anticipates her eventual outdoor sculpture series of *ruins* or what she sometimes referred to as *runes*. In several texts from the artist from 1977, it is made clear that she eventually wanted to place her frustula outdoors to become a part of a natural course of ruination.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Box 5, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Throughout this essay, quotations reproduce the artist's original text including grammar, punctuation, and emphasis.

⁶⁷ Artist's diary entry reads: "July 10, 1977 Site 1 East Orange, NJ: I would like to place these fragments at an urban site, to 'make' or 'set up' my own ruin at the site of an existing natural urban ruin. 1) Site of a building being torn down 2) site where a building was just town down 3) in tall grass where a house once stood but where only the chimney is left 4) better still, [into] the old woods where my great grandfather's congregational log cabin in N.C. was (Cedar Creek) and place three pieces there and photograph them. Then, make three pieces of natural rock how the area, and leave them there. Painted, of course, with [???] gray. I'd love it!" Buchanan diary entry (1977) Box 5, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



Figure 1.10

Buchanan doubled down on materiality in the creation of distinct fragments to become a whole. Unlike the use of found objects that Kellie Jones chronicles in her scholarship about African American artists working in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s, Buchanan's pieces of accrued concrete fragments were not found or locally sourced. Buchanan's assemblages are of constituent pieces of concrete, deliberately cast and created with full knowledge they would come together to create a single frustula. Los Angeles-based artists like Noah Purifoy and John Outterbridge (who, like Buchanan, was born in North Carolina) were also invested in site; but their practices were more focused on collecting found objects, junk, and other discarded materials for assemblages. Buchanan's aesthetic strategy was also different from what Jones calls the "specter of the shoddy,"⁶⁸ which Purifoy would become famous for exploiting, but

⁶⁸ Jones (2017): 69.

Buchanan's logistical process of choosing materials was similar. This choice was based less on aesthetic motivation than it was spurred by material access and availability in relationship to geographic sites of personal interest. The U.S. South was the place to which Buchanan turned. For Purifoy and Outterbridge, it was South Los Angeles.

Jones describes assemblage as "linkage and connection;" herein lies the mirrored impetuses for Buchanan, Purifoy, and Outterbridge.⁶⁹ Buchanan's concrete, once cast in brick molds, becomes reinscribed with traces of essence of the specific site important to the artist; so too do those iterant objects that make up the assemblages of Purifoy and Outterbridge. It is important to recall that *frustula* means fragment, and that no matter the stage of production, whether in individual cast pieces, the collection of pieces or *frustula*, or the entire series of *frustulum*, Buchanan was always invested in the eventuality of fragmentation and ruination. This is not to say her work is driven by death; instead, her process is marked by critical vitality, achieved through localized and collective memory. *Frustulum* are not about a mournful, nostalgic, or forgotten end, but are instead about those entropic and cyclical processes of life that affirm cultural sustenance.

Superficially, the *frustula*, especially those with concrete slabs, might recall the lead structures of Richard Serra or the serial brick works of Carl Andre from the late 1960s. However, to suture Buchanan to the legacy of the predominantly white and male progenitors of Minimalism is to misread her interest in materials. It is true that concrete satisfies the Minimalist tenet of using materials that are industrial, familiar, and unspecific to the historical production of art. Distinctly, Buchanan's choice of concrete was more localized and specific than these canonical minimalist examples, which further evinces Conceptualism as the more proper art

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

historical context for the artist's practice. Uninterested in seriality, Buchanan's concrete represented urban sites of decay that wither unsanctimoniously.

The driving interest behind the *frustulum* was surface textures of architectural sites in states of ruination. For Buchanan, those places most significant to her range from dilapidated walls in the U.S. Northeast, such as those she encountered while living and teaching in New Jersey and New York, to the tattered, worn, and resilient vernacular and domestic architectures in the U.S. South, especially in the artist's home states of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia.

Various geographies are embedded in the concrete faces of Buchanan's frustula. The textural intricacies are transferred from site to site in the moments of physical interfacing between surfaces: from the Northeast where Buchanan worked in adulthood, to the South where Buchanan was born, and where she eventually returned. Her earliest frustula were made upon the artist's arrival in Macon, Georgia in 1977. She had collected bricks and rocks from dilapidated sites in New Jersey and New York and brought them on her journey back south; these would constitute the molds for the frustula. She then used dirt and concrete from the South in her concrete mixtures which were poured into the molds, and then left alone to dry, or were painted with pigments the artist found *in situ*. The two-part process of accruing surface textures from nature and then casting to reproduce the very same textures, albeit with the positive/negative space reversed, memorialized the history of the sites and those who once labored there. This transference between the positive and negative spaces of surface planes becomes a critical site of inquiry. Of particular interest is the transient and dynamic relationship between the original object of textural inspiration, the land or site in which it rested, the mold these objects are crafted into, the process of casting, the assembling of the individual fragments, and the resulting frustula.

This action suggests a transferal of memory from the found material itself to the new concrete casting. In this way, the original site and its iterant fragments are always implied but can never be present, but its essence can be transferred such that the imprint of the original is a spur to a new original.

Buchanan's work performs the inevitable process of decay and ruin over time; in doing so, the artist proffered that memory and its iterant objects are critical in mapping futures, just as it illuminated the past. Further, the artist's rigorous archiving throughout her project reveals a doubly layered concern with remembrance: Buchanan avidly documented her projects with her Polaroid camera and accompanied the images with extensive journal entries and annotations. The cast sculptures she made serve as conduits to the physical past, as does her documentation process. Buchanan made monuments to memory, but they do not demand reverence as would a monument that is massive and literally raised on a pedestal. In contrast, Buchanan's castings do not spectacularize memory, but instead honor those daily and quiet acts of confronting the past and ensuring posterity through relational connections and experiences.

The quotidian acts of survival that spurred Buchanan's practice included the construction and maintenance of domestic Southern architectures. Buchanan developed an early fascination with the relationship between site and memory, and the aesthetic and logic of vernacular architectures. These very structures informed the arrangements of her *frustulum*.

The artist was born in Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina in 1940, and grew up in Orangeburg, South Carolina with her great aunt and uncle who become her adoptive parents. Accompanying her father, Walter May Buchanan who was Dean of the School of Agriculture at South Carolina State University, Buchanan visited many farms and former plantation sites in her

childhood. Her father was also a photographer who documented the lives of Black farmers in the South.

Gaston Bachelard describes the structure of a home as the place where “an entire past comes to dwell.”⁷⁰ Buchanan was attracted to the mysticism of the elision between this lingering past and the present. She became interested in domestic structures—some of which were enslaved people’s cabins, and others which were built and maintained by families of formerly enslaved African American people—and how these structures functioned contemporaneously as testimonies to Black survivalist strategies.⁷¹

Buchanan studied and documented Southern vernacular architecture as a child through drawings and notes, and later through her personal photographic practice.⁷² There are several types of homes Buchanan would have encountered in her travels, some of which she wrote about in her archives: single pen refers to a one room wide, one or two room deep structure with a gable roof and no hallway; double pen is a home of two attached single pens with two entry

⁷⁰ Bachelard (1994): 5.

⁷¹ In 1981, Buchanan documented a trip to visit the ruins of an old slave hospital. In 2001, the artist documented a trip throughout Georgia, which began in her hometown of Macon. She photographed former slave cabins, which were built in various vernacular architecture formations. Box 12, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

⁷² From the 1990s through her death in 2015, Buchanan devoted almost all of her practice to explicit depictions of these architectures. Her *Shackwork* series consisting of colorful works on paper and small, table-bound sculptures of the vernacular architectures she grew up seeing and studying throughout her adulthood. The sculptures are made of wood fragments and are oftentimes painted in exuberant colors. She turned to this art process in part because the physical demands were less burdensome on the artist’s aging body than casting concrete. Her *Shackworks* have been widely exhibited in galleries and museums in the United States; this series rests outside of the scope of this chapter. She also self-published two small spiral bound photography books called *Survivors* and *Survivors 2* of the artist’s images of homes she came across in travels.

doors and end chimneys. Distinctly, saddlebag homes with one or two entrances have two rooms with a central chimney; dogtrots are two room-houses with a central artery, and shotgun⁷³ homes are one room wide and several rooms deep with doors at the front and back of the house. All of these structures were made of wood and usually gable-roofed, a common roof shape formed by two sloped panels angled towards the ground in opposite directions, joining in a horizontal zenith to form the roof ridge. These homes were usually quickly assembled with the limited available materials. Of these seemingly haphazard yet sturdy structures of Southern vernacular architecture, artist David Hammons described to Kellie Jones, “nothing fits, but everything works.”⁷⁴ Hammons called the cunning logistics, assembly, and dedication of this process, “Negritude architecture.”⁷⁵

The artist chronicled one particular shotgun home of interest that was singlehandedly built by a woman who was then in her 60s. Buchanan discovered the structure, which was standing tall and sturdy, some 40 years after its construction. The builder and tenant was Mary Lou Furcron who was over a 100 years old when Buchanan met her. Furcron lived at the end of a street Buchanan once lived on, and by happy accident, was outside mowing her lawn one day

⁷³ Buchanan’s long-time friend and partner later in life, Jane Bridges, authored a text in 2003 titled “Southern Vernacular Architecture in Beverly Buchanan’s Art.” Bridges cautions the reader with the reminder that Buchanan works from memory and imagination, so none of her *Shackworks* should be seen as truthful or to-scale resemblances of real homes. Bridges summarizes possible histories of the name “shotgun:” some speculate that the name comes from one’s hypothetical ability to shoot a shotgun straight through the two mirrored entrances of the home without hitting the structure or anything (or anyone) else. Others, most notably the artist John Biggers (b. 1924 Gastonia, North Carolina; d. 2001), contend that the term “shotgun” is a bastardization of the Yoruba word “shogun” meaning “God’s house.” Biggers grew up in a shotgun home and would depict this style of vernacular architecture regularly in his painted works.

⁷⁴ Jones (1986; reprinted 2011): 256.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

when Buchanan came to take pictures of where she used to live.⁷⁶ Upon meeting Furcron, Buchanan wrote of her “attraction to ‘enclosed’ black women.” Buchanan’s earlier-discussed ruminations on essence and presence are applicable here in the artist’s identification of the state of being “enclosed,” as in, living a life for oneself, without submission to constant outside shaping. The artist continued, “This, I think, is part of my attraction to the ‘Isolation of Surviving Structures and Inhabitants of Present-Day Southern Landscapes in Georgia.’ Isn’t that a great title? Forget it—I have enough degrees.”⁷⁷ Her humor comes through here, as does her sincerity. Buchanan recounted to longtime interlocutor and friend Lucy Lippard that as a child alongside her father, Buchanan visited and slept over in houses like those of Furcron; critical to the artist was the sense of life both literal and lost in the shacks and their embodied resiliency.⁷⁸

Buchanan’s frustula resemble the form of the collection of supporting stones that constitute the structural foundation of the homes she studies [*figures 1.11-1.13*]. Stacked on top of each other and filled in with various binding agents, these supports are critical for the endurance of the home. Buchanan devoted much of her photographic practice to documenting not only the houses, but specifically their supporting mechanisms. The rock and brick supporting columns that hold up the homes match the haphazard yet sturdy quality of the homes themselves. The *frustulum* perform similar relational mechanics to those of the domestic supports, further evincing that these sculptures are not about individual isolation or alienation and instead offer a model of communal labor and memory.

⁷⁶ A photograph by Buchanan of Mary Lou Furcron and her home from 1989 is in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

⁷⁷ Box 15, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁸ Lippard (1997): 70.



Figures 1.11-1.13

Lowery Stokes Sims read Buchanan's sculptures as relating to continuity in environmental uncertainty.⁷⁹ Sims's essay, first published on the occasion of the artist's solo exhibition of *frustulum* at Heath Gallery in Atlanta, Georgia in 1981 [figure 1.14], positioned the *frustula* as emblematic of endurance and survival. However, Buchanan's sculptures are also gestures of refusal—refusal to be externally determined and refusal to be forgotten. Memory is inextricable, if not adamant, to Buchanan's works and is no longer a passive occurrence, but instead an active construction. She explored the mechanism of memory: its shortcomings, proclivity towards fragmentation, and nostalgia, as well as its power. Buchanan participated in the realization of counter memory for those sites important to her. The *frustulum* as objects of Foucault's "effective history," serve as a corrective to institutional memory which has failed the people to whom her work attends and satirizes the failure of engorged monuments to a purported history that left these people out.

⁷⁹ Sims (1981).



Figure 1.14

The process of casting these sculptures was physically demanding for the artist—especially so for Buchanan who suffered myriad and consistent health issues throughout her life ranging from severe and sometimes crippling asthma to digestive problems to diabetes.⁸⁰ She searched for the bricks and rocks, and then bound these objects together to create molds. To pour concrete into molds was a labor- and time-intensive process, which proved more strenuous when the artist moved to the outdoors in her later *Ruins* series. The physical endurance of this casting process was deliberate and became ritualistic for the artist. This process allowed her sustained time in land that she deemed critical to her family and her “heritage.”⁸¹ The intimate and physical time in nature, coupled with the artist’s proximity and control over the process of casting her sculptural objects amounted to an arduous, meditative, and ritualistic process of paying homage to those who labored before her. Buchanan’s sculptures also command a certain physical

⁸⁰ Various diary entries, correspondence from doctors, receipts from health insurance companies, and correspondences with friends and family pay testimony to Buchanan’s many ailments. Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

⁸¹ “Heritage” is a term Buchanan uses regularly to reference her upbringing in the U.S. South in predominantly African American communities.

approach from audiences: viewers bend and stoop to be on level with sculptures. The bodily demands on these works on artist and viewer alike are purposeful: Buchanan gestured towards and honored the emotional and physical labors of enslaved people and their surviving families in the U.S. South.

Ruins

From 1979 through 1986, Buchanan installed her *Ruins* series at various sites across the United States South. Sometimes written as “runes,” these pieces begin with a formal structure akin to her *frustulum*: low to the ground cement and concrete cast groupings of blocks. However, two critical maneuvers distinguish *ruins* from the *frustulum*. First, Buchanan placed the now-*ruins* in nature; they were no longer gallery-bound structures and instead became indexes of an always-changing natural environment. Second, the artist devoted her practice to using more localized and less ubiquitous materials that were specific to the region in which she cast her sculptures. Specifically, by the end of the 1970s Buchanan moved away from ordinary Portland cement (OPC), which was the type of concrete she regularly used in the early *frustula* and began to experiment with tabby concrete for her sculptural and environmental installation practice. The logical culmination of the *frustulum*, the *ruins* series continued Buchanan’s enduring interrogation of labor, decay, and demolition in the American South.

Buchanan’s *Ruins* series were installed on seven sites across Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida. The first was her outdoor exhibition *Ruins and Rituals* outside of the Museum of Art and Sciences in Macon, Georgia in 1979. In 1981, the artist installed her *ruins* in Atlanta at the Botanical Gardens and at the High Museum of Children’s Art, and installed her *Marsh Ruins*, made of tabby, in Brunswick, Georgia. In 1983, the artist installed *Unity Stones*, made of tabby and black granite, in Macon at the Booker T. Washington Community Center. Next, in 1984,

Buchanan's *Garden Ruins*, which was sponsored by the Hanes Corporation and made of local Pink Salisbury Stone, appeared at the contemporary sculpture garden at Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina. Finally, in Miami, Florida in 1986, Buchanan installed a grouping called *Blue Station Stones* at the Earlington Heights Metro-Rail Station.

In contrast to *frustulum*, which were housed in the insular and sanitized space of the museum or gallery, Buchanan's *ruins* were exposed to the cycle of nature. It is not within the scope of this essay to analyze all of Buchanan's *ruins*, for each of these works require their own thorough investigation.⁸² This essay focuses on the artist's *Marsh Ruins*, which serve as the prime example of how the *frustulum* gave way to the *ruins*, and how the *ruins* are a logical culmination of Buchanan's sustained interest in geography, materials, and the history of embodied labor.



Figure 1.15



Figure 1.16

Perhaps the most notable of these outdoor installations, and the body of work on which this portion of the essay will hinge, is the artist's *Marsh Ruins* [figures 1.15-1.16] located in the marshes of Glynn State Park in Brunswick, Georgia from 1981. A tripartite installation, *Marsh*

⁸² See Campbell (2016).

Ruins is made of concrete mounds covered in tabby and consists of mounds and boulders tucked into the tall grasses and lapping waters of its installation site on Georgia's southeast coastline. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the artist anticipated her *ruins* in the description for her 1978 solo exhibition at Truman Gallery where she wrote of her dream to "place fragments in tall grass."⁸³ *Marsh Ruins* realized this dream.

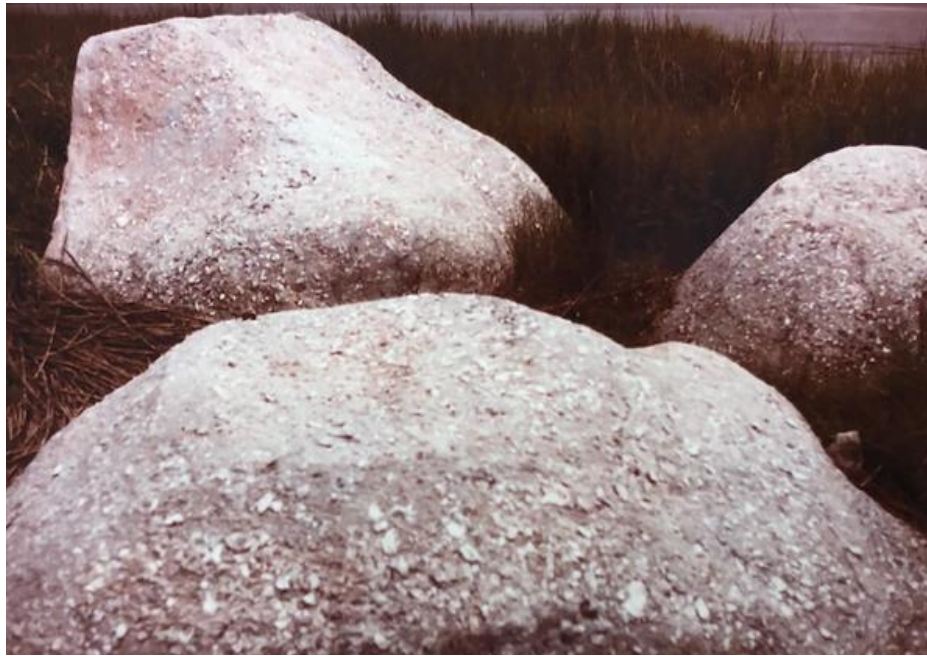


Figure 1.17

Buchanan's early *frustulum* series were the result of experiments with OPC, wherein the object relied on the texture of its mold to achieve surface nuance, as this kind of concrete was smooth and relatively uniform. Compelled by an interest in how weathering reveals experience, Buchanan used tabby from the early 1980s-onwards in her later *frustulum* experiments and in

⁸³ The author has maintained the capitalization and punctuation from Buchanan's original text. Buchanan, Beverly. "Wall Fragments—Series Cast in Cement." Description of body of work written by the artist for solo exhibition at Truman Gallery, New York (1978). Box 15, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

some of her *Ruins*. The artist covered the surfaces of her *Marsh Ruins* installation with tabby concrete [figure 1.17] and would even stain or paint the tabby surfaces to further heighten and expose the wear on the uneven surface [figure 1.18]. The stained surface of tabby enhanced the stark changes in color brought about as the *Marsh Ruins* weathered in the surrounding swamplands.



Figure 1.18

Jagged and uneven, tabby concrete has a texture that encourages and reveals earthly nuances more than the smoothness of OPC. As the first concrete material made and used in the U.S., tabby predates the development of OPC by nearly 200 years.⁸⁴ A material born of geographic and ecological specificity, tabby relies on the lime produced from limestone, oyster shells, or other lime-rich deposits as its binding agent. The lime binds together the aggregate of water, sand, and shell. The use of local ingredients meant that builders need not import any foreign

⁸⁴ Gritzner (1978).

materials, which reduced the expense of construction. Compared to stonework which required the use of masons, and woodwork which required skilled carpenters, tabby was relatively easy to manufacture and did not require the use of trained laborers. Versatile, tabby can be poured into many different sized molds. The most difficult parts of the process were melting the oyster shells down and properly mixing the materials. In the southern United States where remnants of tabby construction still exist, the forced labor of enslaved people made tabby cost effective.

Buchanan's use of concrete beckoned toward a history of ancient Roman and modern empires, in which various types of localized concrete were deployed to build massive monuments and state buildings. Buchanan's project attended to public memorializing, albeit in an at first private, sacred, and ritualistic process. Distinctly, concrete is the consummate material for claiming and representing authoritative histories through architecture. Roman concrete, also referred to as *opus caementicium*, was a construction technique that used water, a binding agent, and an aggregate—the basic components of any concrete. What made the chemical compound of *opus caementicium* unique was the use of volcanic, or pozzolanic, ash along with lime and seawater. Vitruvius made several references to pozzolan concrete, mostly in the second book of his *Ten Books on Architecture*, written around 25 B.C.E, as he discussed Dinocrates, the Greek architect and advisor of urban planning for Alexander the Great. The Pantheon in Rome, completed around 125 C.E., is perhaps the most famous and enduring architectural site made in this technique. Modern research, both novel and based off ancient Roman texts, has revealed that chemical reactions within the use of volcanic ash deposits strengthen over time, making Roman concrete more durable than what is possible to manufacture today. The strength of the crystalline structure in pozzolan concrete has allowed its constructions to endure for centuries. Concrete is a material suited for both duration and revealing the process of decay and weathering over time.

Ubiquitous for its longevity, concrete becomes the ideal material for Buchanan's early sculptural explorations into site, memory, and texture.

The earliest uses of tabby concrete in the United States date to the 1670s, though there is some evidence that as early as 1580, the indigenous communities in the Southeast U.S. built structures using a material that was tabby-like. The height of tabby use was in the 18th and 19th centuries; the material saw the start of its demise during the Civil War, and the last known date of a new tabby construction was in 1920. Though tabby structures exist from North Carolina to Texas, the material was especially popular in Georgia because of the state's extensive marshlands, which breed oysters. The origins of tabby are not clear as there are two likely early sources: there are lime deposits and evidence that tabby could have originated along the northwest coast of the continent of Africa, and similar evidence of early experiments with lime as a binding agent in Spain and Portugal. Historians generally agree that the Spanish brought tabby to the Americas as there is no evidence of the material being used north of Spain, or in any non-American British colonies. Etymologically, tabby likely comes from a combination of a few words: *tapia* in Spanish means wall, especially one made of mud just as *taipa* in Portuguese means mud wall; *tabbi* in Arabic means mixture of mortar and lime, and in Morocco *tabbi* referred to a construction material of clay earth mixed with lime or other deposits from stone. Though there were different versions of tabby concrete based on the local availability of resources, the tabby concrete usually seen in Georgia required the burning of oyster shells to produce lime deposits. The shells were gathered from middens, or piles of shells that had built up over the years from the indigenous people who inhabited the lands prior to colonization. During the 1700s, some of these middens were probably several acres wide. Though tabby was more durable than wood which was critical in the humid climates of the coast, over time the material

reveals itself to be pervious, and water would eventually eat away at it. This accounts for the eventual turn away from tabby by the early 20th century as other developments in construction materials revealed sturdier options.⁸⁵



Figures 1.19-1.23

⁸⁵ Contemporary uses of tabby are usually decorative, *e.g.*, fireplace mantles and outdoor fountains, not structural. See Yelton (2007).



Figures 1.24-1.26

In her uses of tabby, Buchanan melted oyster shells for her own production of lime. Sometimes collecting the shells from local restaurants, the artist documented her own time-intensive process of creating tabby concrete and then casting the material into various molds. In one booklet called “Making Tabby Sculpture in Macon, GA,” Buchanan outlined her tabby-making and subsequent sculptural processes in the backyard of her home in Macon in the early 1980s. She described that the materials required were: “oyster shells from local seafood restaurant, concrete mix, water, old bricks as molds, hose for exposing shells in blocks, goggles, gloves, kneepads, and eye shields.”⁸⁶ The following eight pages of the booklet include black and white images of the artist at work, with handwritten captions on the opposite page. The first photograph [*figure 1.19*] of Buchanan stooped above a bucket with a box of oyster shells, is annotated, “Odor of shells was overwhelming in backyard, they had to sun-dry about 4-5 days.” After drying the shells, the artist prepared the shells to be added to the mixture in the bucket [*figure 1.20*] after which she mixed the shells and concrete [*figure 1.21*]. Next, the artist assembled a mold made of bricks [*figure*

⁸⁶ Box 11, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

1.22] smoothed the mixture so it would be ready to pour into the brick mold [figure 1.23] and poured the mixture [figure 1.24]. The artist's last steps were to rinse off the resulting structures to rid the shape of excess mix and dirt [figure 1.25], and then document herself washing the final sculptures to expose the shells embedded within the surfaces [figure 1.26].

The insistence upon revealing the shells on the textures of the resulting sculptures is critical: Buchanan formally connected her structures to the legacy of tabby constructions built by enslaved people in the U.S. Southeast, especially in Georgia. The shells at once signaled a geographically specific history of labor, and the ingenious turn of a local, readily available material into a literal building block of modern civilization in the American South. Scholar Cheryl Finley's idea of "mnemonic aesthetics" offers a useful framework to think through Buchanan's methodology: for Finley, the tool of the mnemonic in artistic practices requires a "ritualized politics of remembering."⁸⁷ Finley theorized the slave ship as icon and defined these depictions broadly, as either actual renderings of a ship that transported captured and enslaved people in the Middle Passage, or representations of the experience of this forced displacement. These aesthetic descriptions offer a way of accessing or relating to the present which is routed through an empathetic understanding of the past. Though Buchanan depicted neither a diagram of a slave ship nor experiences of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, her deployment of tabby concrete and her choices about form and geographic site functioned as a ritualized politic of remembering and memorializing.

⁸⁷ Finley (2018).



Figure 1.27

Covered in tabby concrete, the physical material that functions as mnemonic connection to the past, and consisting of three concrete structures covered in tabby with the tallest of the forms standing around five feet high, *Marsh Ruins* boasts natural, organic forms, unlike the earlier more rectangular forms of the carton-and-brick-molds that produced the frustulum, and the cubic and angular forms of other *ruins* installations, like *Ruins and Rituals* [figure 1.27] an installation to which this essay will briefly return, and *Garden Ruins* [figure 1.28], a grouping of large angular cut blocks of Pink Salisbury Stone that bare distinct indentations. The mounds of *Marsh Ruins* do not look like objects that are the result of stringent and measured pouring processes, and instead are rounded and soft. The natural aesthetic of *Marsh Ruins*, both in the formation of its constituent heaps and its location in a marsh, belies its institutional background: the artist was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in sculpture in 1980. The monies procured from these grants went towards the production of *Marsh Ruins*. Further, the process of installation required approval from state and city agencies, environmental clearances, many contractors, and park professionals. The artist documented her

correspondences with the Georgia government to install sculptures;⁸⁸ the City of Brunswick finally granted the artist permission to place an “environmental sculpture” on the lot near Overlook Park on U.S. 17 on March 19, 1981.⁸⁹



Figure 1.28

While both *Marsh Ruins* and Buchanan’s *Ruins and Rituals* located in Macon, Georgia are critical tripartite *ruins*, the three components of *Ruins and Rituals* work distinctly from *Marsh Ruins*. Where the three components of *Marsh Ruins* are visible to those who enter the marshes of Glynn State Park, *Ruins and Rituals* takes advantage of differing levels of access to information. Where one component of the installation is visible to the audience, the other two portions are only revealed to those who know where to look. The second component is located in a remote,

⁸⁸ Box 14, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁹ Box 13, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

wooded area, which only those with the exact coordinates of the installation could find. The artist denies the audience any view of the third component, which she submerged in the Ocmulgee River. There is no extant documentation of either the second or third portions of *Ruins and Rituals*, save one photograph taken by Martin Kane of a frustula in Buchanan's studio with a note that reads "cast concrete sculpture at bottom of Ocmulgee River, Oct 1979 Macon, GA" [figure 1.29].

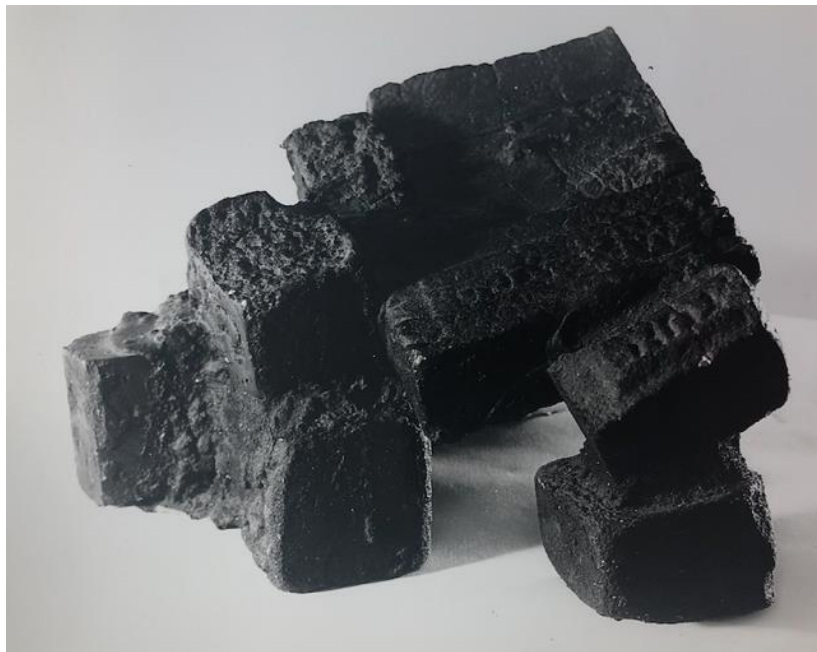


Figure 1.29

This interplay between visibility and invisibility, knowledge, and nature was central to Buchanan's practice. Buchanan created sculptures to stand without an audience. The artist's varying degrees of indifference to the audience suggests that Buchanan was at least partially invested in what would eventually be called "thing-power" as theorized by Jane Bennett,⁹⁰ which posits that everyday man-made objects are imbued with a strange and not-fully-knowable

⁹⁰ Bennet (2009).

aliveness. In Bennett's conceptualization, humans are subject to the "vital materialities" encountered; these material objects become autonomous and acting subjects in their own right. They will go through the cycle of life: they endure and eventually succumb to their surroundings.

Andy Campbell described how *Marsh Ruins* is subsumed every day by the waves that break upon its concrete surfaces—this slow, environmental assault results in a sculpture in a "truly pitiable state: cracked, broken, and partially buried in smelly marsh mud."⁹¹ The natural ecology of the marshes takes on the *ruins* as abode. The difference in viewability of *Marsh Ruins* between high tide and low tide is stark, as evidenced in a photograph of the installation submerged ten feet during high tide on November 12, 1981 [*figure 1.30*] and low tide as seen in another photograph taken by the artist that same afternoon [*figure 1.31*]. In time, the concrete surfaces are pockmarked by the water, sands, muds, and creatures that chip away at and embed themselves over many tides. The gradual entropy explored through *Marsh Ruins* reflects the physical and mental decomposition experienced by the enslaved people who first worked with tabby concrete in the American South. *Marsh Ruins* endures but will eventually succumb to the natural cycle of its site. Each component will one day be like the frustula first placed in the lapping waters of the Ocmulgee River, which was never meant to be seen, or which can only be found by those who know where to look, and, even then, cannot be distinguished from the rest of the marsh. Instead of making loud those lives silenced by institutional memory, Buchanan offered a way of honoring and remembering, a balm through which to understand how these silences came to be, and how to confront the persistent attempts at silencing those lives moving forward.

⁹¹ Campbell, 15.



Figure 1.30



Figure 1.31

As noted by one critic, Buchanan's works induced connections to prehistorical sites of ruination.⁹² This essay maintains that her ruins are less about ancient history than they are about resolutely modern United States Southern histories, though the materiality and history of concrete is important. While Lowery Stokes Sims wrote that the *ruins* "assume a more ancient presence," the author cited a less temporally distant formal connection as she compared Buchanan's *ruins* to the burial mounds of the Creek Native American culture, whose primary divisions of the Muskogee, or "Upper Creeks," and the Hitchiti, known as the "Lower Creeks," lived in what is now Georgia and Alabama.⁹³ In 1813-1814, the United States declared war and forced the Creeks to cede twenty-three million acres of land and to move west. By evoking a history of colonization on U.S. soil, Sims suggested Buchanan's impulse of memorializing those lives abused, displaced, and forgotten, especially in the South.

⁹² Rickey (1980); Lippard (1983).

⁹³ Sims (1981).

Buchanan's memorializing impulse also responded to two critical historical moments in the Marshes of Glynn, the site of *Marsh Ruins*. Most importantly, the marshes are separated by only a few miles across the Mackay River from Dunbar Creek on Saint Simons Island. It was in this creek where in 1803, a group of 75 captured Igbo warriors from what is now Nigeria survived the Middle Passage and committed mass suicide as a refusal to enslavement in America. Now called the Igbo Landing, this site near Glynn County has been immortalized and honored as a landmark central to Gullah culture and the story passes from each generation to the next by oral tradition. Due to a land dispute, there is no official memorial to this history.⁹⁴

A few miles away from Igbo Landing, lapping water slowly eats away at the increasingly porous tabby concrete of Buchanan's *Marsh Ruins*. The first sign of decay is the lightening and eventual erasure of the brown stain that was painted on each surface. Next, the shells poke out more and more as the concrete mixture erodes. Over time, the sculpture will take on different shapes, revealing how nature has influenced its survival. The sculptures endure, though. It will take many more decades for *Marsh Ruins* to disappear even if expedited by climate change. Quietly, the sculpture honors the land and those who become embedded within the land. The Igbo warriors became part of the waters, the sands, and the florae of Saint Simons Island. So too does *Marsh Ruins* become part of its surrounding waves. But, until its disappearance, the *Ruins* hold strong and resist total erasure – thing-power *qua* agency. While historicization, too, captures *Ruins* for posterity, Buchanan insisted that her sculptures live on as part of the land, and thus will exist even after there are no more viewers (or historians).

The Marshes of Glynn were immortalized in the late 1870s poem of the same name by Sidney Lanier, a native of Macon, Georgia who joined the Confederate Army in 1860 where he

⁹⁴ Goodwine (1998).

served with the Macon Volunteers until he was captured and imprisoned by the Union Army. Lanier would eventually die of tuberculosis in 1881. His poem, devised as a salve to those despondent Southerners after their loss to the Union, wrote of his Christian God's "greatness" in the creation of the marshes. Throughout the 1900s, children of the South were made to memorize the poem as a source of state pride, tenacity, and holiness.⁹⁵ Buchanan would have undoubtedly been familiar with Lanier's legacy and perhaps wished to offer a similar ode to the marshes, without the same misguided lamentation for the lost Confederacy. Andy Campbell, in his examination of *Marsh Ruins*, made the prescient connection between the historical context of Lanier's poem and the reality for Black people living in the same area.⁹⁶ Within approximately fifteen years after the publication of Lanier's poem in 1878, Glynn County would be the site of the mob lynching of three Black men: Henry Jackson and Wesley Lewis in 1891, and Robert Evarts in 1894.⁹⁷ The racist legacy of the lost Confederacy was alive and well. Buchanan's choice of the Marshes of Glynn was no coincidence. The artist chose this location to put pressure on the national memory and reframe what it means to live in the Marshes of Glynn.

Geographical sites are "anchors and frames" to deploy Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally's formulation. Especially in the production of African American culture, wherein culture is taken less as an archival ontological entity (as posited by Pierre Nora) and more as process and practice of creation (Susan Willis' definition), Fabre and O'Meally offer that memory is the crucial mechanism by which to access site, past, and present.⁹⁸ Further, as

⁹⁵ Bagwell (2008).

⁹⁶ Campbell (2016).

⁹⁷ Lee (2019).

⁹⁸ Fabre and O'Meally (1994): 10.

Katherine McKittrick reminds readers, geography is socially produced and thus is never ontologically static or consistent. Instead, actors constantly produce geographical space and meaning.⁹⁹ The Marshes of Glynn, as geographical site, have been re-produced and re-inscribed with meaning through its histories described above; Buchanan entered into the space to create her own meaning. McKittrick further theorizes the historical connection between Black women and spatializing: through a poetics of landscape, as defined and explicated by Édouard Glissant and Sylvia Wynter, McKittrick proposes, Black women are able to “critique the boundaries of transatlantic slavery, rewrite national narratives, respatialize feminism, and develop new pathways across traditional geographic arrangements.”¹⁰⁰ The geographical site itself as marshlands, immortalized through historical precedent, also demands an interrogation of the physical constraints that inform the ontology of *Marsh Ruins*. For Buchanan, her own labor of creation was never removed from the final objects and installation. In requiring the audience to re-perform similar physical maneuvers of bending, searching, stooping, and maneuvering through treacherous lands, Buchanan insisted on a complex network of labor that inextricably connects site, maker, and viewer, or past, present, and future.

⁹⁹ McKittrick (2006).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, xxiii.



Figure 1.32

Buchanan's connection to marginalized histories, laborers, and their constituent natures finds an interlocuter in Ana Mendieta's work. The third chapter explicates more fully the relationship between Buchanan and Mendieta through shared experiences in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Biographically and politically connected, the two artists also shared formal interests that explicated a Third World feminist project constituted by counter-memory. Mendieta's renowned *Siluetas* (*Silhouette*) series [figure 1.32] which the artist began in 1973 upon a trip to Mexico and would create through the late 1970s are of interest here, as are the artist's *Esculturas Rupestres* (*Rupestrian Sculptures*) [figure 1.33] which she began creating by the turn of the 1980s. The most famous of her works, the *Siluetas* are traces of Mendieta's body made in the earth, thus indexing a body once in situ. This series is comprised of more than 200 earth-body works wherein Mendieta placed her body into the land and would trace, burn, carve, fill with materials,

paint, or otherwise activate her own initial silhouette, often in a ritualistic performance.

Performed privately, these traces exist and are exhibited in documentation, both photographic and filmic.

In 1980, Mendieta returned to Cuba for the first time since she and her sister were sent to the United States as part of Operation Pedro Pan in 1961 when the artist was only twelve years old.¹⁰¹ Fascinated by the land and her connection to it, she carved and sometimes painted her *Esculturas Rupestres* into the soft limestone walls of caves and grottos outside of Havana. These carvings take the shape of an abstract but archetypal womanly body and are named after deities and ancestral spirits from the Taíno and Ciboney cultures of the Caribbean. Akin to the “search” articulated in the introduction to the *Dialectics* exhibition catalogue, when Mendieta writes, “Do we exist?...To question our cultures is to question our own existence, our human reality. To confront this fact means to acquire an awareness of ourselves. This in turn becomes a *search*, a questioning of who we are and how we will realize ourselves,”¹⁰² Mendieta re-performed her bodily encounters with site over and over again in a quest for understanding of her own person within her own matrix of alienation and exile. Grappling with seriality and repetition, negative and

¹⁰¹ Mendieta’s father joined the anti-Castro counterrevolutionary forces when the artist was a child. In an effort to avoid Communist indoctrination at the hands of Castro, Mendieta and her sister were subsequently sent to the United States along with around 14,000 other children under Operation Pedro Pan, which lasted from 1960 through 1962 and would be the largest unaccompanied exodus of minors to another country. After several refugee camps, Mendieta and her sister were placed in an orphanage in Dubuque, Iowa. She would pursue her undergraduate studies at the University of Iowa where she studied painting and received her B.A. in 1969. During this time, in 1966, the artist was reunited with her mother and younger brother. Still at the university, Mendieta received her M.A. in painting in 1972. After 18 years in one of Cuba’s political prisons for his involvement in the Bay of Pigs revolt, her father later joined them in 1979. For a complete and thorough examination of the notion of (dis)location and its iterant experiences of exile and alienation, which rests outside the scope of this essay, the author directs the reader to Blocker (1999).

¹⁰² Mendieta (1980).

positive space, the relationship between land and body, and humans' innate susceptibility to natural courses, Buchanan and Mendieta used earthly materials and documentary practices to explore memorialization and posterity.



Figure 1.33

Crucially, the ingredients of Buchanan's *Ruins* and Mendieta's *Siluetas* and *Esculturas Rupestres* exist in nature. Land is a fitting subject as it bears the inevitability of life and death. The artists' specific geographical sites, the United States South for Buchanan, and Mexico, Iowa, and Cuba for Mendieta, are intimately connected to personal stories of otherness. Buchanan was most concerned with the legacy of enslaved laborers in the U.S. South, where Mendieta was invested in womanness and spirituality as political strategy routed through sites personal to the artist. For Jane Blocker, Mendieta relied on the earth specifically because of its pre- and anti-nation formulation, and because the earth, as an essential and natural entity, reveals the binary between land and nation to be unproductive. Mendieta routed her art practice through earth, or as Blocker writes, "the essential, the primitive, and the colonized" precisely to insist upon the untenability

of nation and land as mutually exclusive.¹⁰³ The earth and its materials offered the artists a means of connection to a specific past and a site onto which they ensure vitality, just as they call into question the association of the earth with notions of primitivity and essentialized labor.

Ruination links the two practices, too. Here, Jacques Derrida's and Georg Simmel's work with ruination is illuminating. Both philosophers interrogated the *techne* of affirming survival, and how architectural ruins link past and present. Derrida did this through studying photographs of ruins in Athens, Greece to excavate survivalist strategies; Derrida's focus was human connection as a way of linking past and present. For Simmel, a trained sociologist, culture was the critical avenue to link ruination and the present. Both scholars interrogated what it meant to sustain and insist upon vitality in the inevitable entropic cycle of human life. As Simmel wrote, the ruin "creates the present form of a past life."¹⁰⁴ While Buchanan's *ruins* are situated in nature, and some are purposefully placed to be consumed by nature, so too will Mendieta's traces and carvings be erased by their natural sites. Buchanan's outdoor ruins are incorporated into earth over time; some are completely overcome by nature and are no longer visible to an untrained or unseeking eye. The marks from the molds fade as the sides smooth. The sculptures become subsumed by grass, moss, water, and dirt. In this process, and in the artist's relinquishing of control of the object, Buchanan freed the outdoor sculptures into nature. Similarly, Mendieta's *Siluetas* are sloughed away by water and wind, and the *Esculturas Rupestres* fade into their soft limestone hosts. Trouillot writes that history begins with bodies and artifacts;¹⁰⁵ Buchanan and

¹⁰³ *Ibid* 49.

¹⁰⁴ Simmel (1911).

¹⁰⁵ Trouillot, 29.

Mendieta connected the past and projected towards the future through their own materials and methods—body and earth in nature.

Buchanan and Mendieta, however, approach their relationship with land and ruination differently. For Mendieta, the earth was a crucial way of shoring up the power of nature and its connections to the empowered feminine, historically marginalized and cast off as weak or fragile. Mendieta's engagements with dirt and sand were not bureaucratically realized: she encountered the sites on her own time by her own means. The indexes of bodily traces that the artist left behind will wash away within hours or days. There was never a perceived threat of permanence in their installation. Dissimilarly, Buchanan had to obtain permission for larger installations. Whether this came in the form of negotiations with local government or myriad grants to supply funding, Buchanan's *Ruins* were the result of permission for sustained engagement with various sites.

The artists are also linked by their documentary impulse, where photography serves dually as spur to memory and to privacy, evoking the compatible and mutually generative politics of counter-memory and obscurity. Buchanan was an avid documentarian of her process and resulting objects. Her archives are replete with images and annotations which reveal her devotion to posterity. Mostly Polaroids, the photographs capture the artist posing with her sculptures, casting concrete, and contemplating the results—some of the images are taken by a photographer, while others were taken by friends so the artist could stand within the frame. She obsessively documented her travels with her camera and diaries. Buchanan self-published small booklets of her photographs of shacks in the South; she also printed annual calendars with images of the artist experimenting with charring her *Shackworks* in wheelbarrows. Most importantly for this essay, Buchanan detailed the process of creating *Marsh Ruins* with her

Polaroid camera and written captions. This constant documentation which ranges from crisp and clear images that explicate her process to blurry photographs that seem to be taken quickly and unceremoniously reveals Buchanan's devotion to building memory. Mendieta's photographs, like Buchanan's, capture both the artistic process of creation and the resulting object that in turn circulates as evidence of object *in situ*. The process pictures are important for each as the artists' bodies become present. Buchanan's body is not explicitly part of the final object—though her labor is implied—whereas Mendieta's body is the medium through which her *Siluetas* take shape and its absence is conspicuous in the resulting ephemeral trace and documentary photographs.

This shared documentary impulse which relied on the medium of photography reveals an interest in materiality through multiple media. Though the land is the primary material for both Buchanan and Mendieta—for Buchanan, that land was melted and mixed to create a construction material for her sculptures that honored laborers before her, whereas for Mendieta the land was the surface onto which the artist imprinted her body—photography became the vehicle of translation to future audiences. Photography ensured that the artists could place work on sites appropriate to their project, but that these installations survived beyond their location. The incipient work was always of a particular locus, but the works' iterations and reproductions can still circulate widely. This documentation is for posterity, as proof of existence, but it is also for exhibition and archival purposes, such that the works exist doubly, in nature and in photograph. Both artists' photographs are often exhibited either alongside artworks or as the artworks themselves. Through their documentary practices, the artists created two twinned works and experimented with transcendent possibilities of dis- and trans-location. The ability for the photograph to enact its own experiences of dis- and trans- location onto the audience was central

to Mendieta's practice, Blocker argues. Further, this gesture protected the initial performances of creation as private and thus honored opacity and intimacy as political strategies.

Both Buchanan and Mendieta thought about nature as the primary site of life's labors. Where Mendieta used her actual body, Buchanan activated her body to produce objects that reproduced mechanisms of labor from the past. Mendieta's *Siluetas*, as traces of the artist's body, index life, much in the same way that Buchanan's textured sculptures are fragments that together constitute a testament to survival. Buchanan's *Ruins* are part of a history that resists cannibalization by institutional and national memory and insists on survival by other means. So too do Mendieta's *Siluetas* and *Esculturas Rupestres (Rupestrian Sculptures)* demand interiority and control while engaging the exterior. The impulse that connects the trenchant practices of Buchanan and Mendieta is perhaps best summed up in the last lines of a poem written by Mendieta in 1981: "I go on to make my mark upon the earth. To go on is victory"¹⁰⁶ Buchanan and Mendieta inscribed their testimonies into land that birthed and buried culturally personal histories. These actions were available at first only to the artist and their intimates, and later to broader audiences through photographic and filmic reproductions. The original site of production was protected and sacred, refusing mass consumption and manipulation. In doing so, the artists interrupted and rerouted national narratives of culture and memory, just as their practices were devoted to examining at once the universal and the specific, immutability and ephemerality, suffering and transcendence.

¹⁰⁶ Ana Mendieta, unpublished poem, June 1981. Accessed through Spero, Nancy, "Tracing Ana Mendieta," in *Artforum*, April 1992.

Buchanan was driven by a profound sense of mortality—her own, and that of the forgotten enslaved people and laborers to whom she pays tribute.¹⁰⁷ Sensitive to narratives of those who labored and were lost to a false history of American progress, Buchanan dedicated her practice to *memento mori*—the sites and materials of forgotten labor, and the very act of forgetfulness acted out by nature’s eroding touch. In her essay “Memory Made Modern,” Lucy Lippard recounted Buchanan’s confrontation with her Macon, Georgia installation *Ruins and Rituals* upon completion: “[Buchanan said *Ruins and Rituals*] looked so much like a graveyard she thought of calling it ‘Southern Comfort.’”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ In one of the artist’s self-created booklets of frustulum images, Buchanan wrote as the annotation: “working shots of making a small tabby sculpture in Macon, GA / sometime around 1982 or 1983—had tumor, didn’t know it, used oyster shells.” The artist often annotates her personal images with language like this: unemotional and factual. This reveals a collapsing of distance between the artist’s own practice and process of creation and her numerous health issues. Buchanan, booklet called “Making Tabby Sculpture in Macon, GA” of frustulum images and process of creation, (1982). Box 11, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰⁸ Lippard, Lucy. “Memory Made Modern.” in *Women’s Caucus for Art, 2011 Honor Awards*, New York, NY.



Figure 1.34

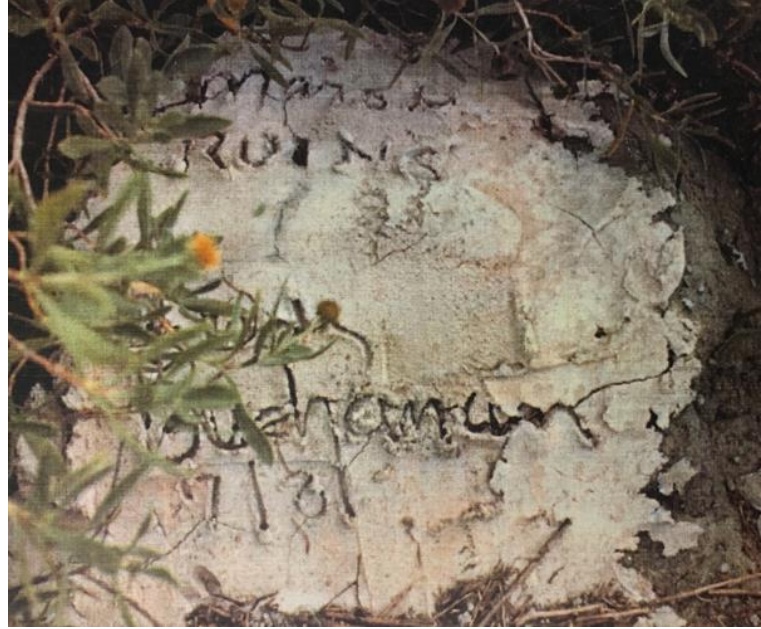


Figure 1.35

On Friday, August 27, 1982, Buchanan, alongside companion Gina Templeton, performed and documented an installation of a three-part sculpture on the grounds of the Job Chapel A.M.E. Church Cemetery in Monroe County, Georgia.¹⁰⁹ In perhaps her most direct connection to those grave sites of the formerly enslaved, this installation is understudied and rarely discussed in scholarship on Buchanan's outdoor pieces. Buchanan devoted her travels within Georgia in the early 1980s to seeing architectural ruins of enslaved labor; this included the site of a former hospital for the enslaved, as well as her seeking out the small grave markers of those who perished. In her short text describing the A.M.E. installation, Buchanan was careful to note that

¹⁰⁹ The African Methodist Episcopal Church, commonly referred to as A.M.E., is a church borne of anti-slavery protests, and was the first independent Protestant Episcopal Church founded by Black people in the United States. Doctrinally Methodist, A.M.E. is devoted to anti-racist interpretations of the Bible, teachings, and worship. The Job Chapel A.M.E. Church Cemetery's address is 1228 Pea Ridge Road, Juliette, Monroe County, Georgia 31046. See process and installation images, Box 7, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

she signed her name in one of the three cast portions; she did this using a nail when the concrete was still wet. Unlike *Marsh Ruins*, where one can find the artist's signature on a small stone that the artist lathered in concrete [figures 1.34-1.35], and this piece in Monroe County, not all of her sculptures are signed. The artist's decision to not only sign this piece, but to document in her diaries the process of signing, was a critical gesture of counter-memory, an insistence on life.



Figure 1.36

In his scholarship on Buchanan, Andy Campbell recounted a similar narrative with one of Buchanan's former studio assistants, Virginia Pickard, who was in high school at the time. Pickard and Buchanan would drive around rural Georgia with a car packed of cast *frustulum* in search of graveyards of the formerly enslaved. These sites, often hidden by the abundance of plant life, revealed themselves only to those who were seeking them out. Buchanan and Pickard identified these burial grounds by wooden fragments or stones arranged in a specific and deliberate manner that indicated a ritual marking of sorts. Campbell noted that some of these

sites were in Gullah or Geechee communities. When the artist and her studio assistant found an agreeable site, Buchanan would sign a *frustula* and place it in situ. The scholar's focus on Buchanan's engagement with Black death in the U.S. South, configured here as a commemoration of Black life, concludes that this was a ritual to the "forgotten dead."¹¹⁰ It is not known where all of these freely placed *frustulum* stand today, though some photographs exist.

Buchanan was obsessed with the process of memorialization, produced through the artist's own labor, as a way of accessing and honoring past labors and rituals of survival. Campbell, in an addendum to his scholarship on Buchanan's *Ruins*, writes that the artist, who towards the end of her life was living with dementia, had a photograph of *Marsh Ruins* adhered to the wall above her bed. The tilted and blurry image of the artist with her environmental installation [figure 1.36] takes on the quality of a personalized grave marker for the artist who would pass away in 2015. Buchanan built her monuments with a triumphant and melancholy irony. The artist's historical project is remedial but unflinching, and more descriptive than aspirational. Buchanan's monuments, at once insistent and consigned, will yield slowly to the dual indifferences of nature and time.

Where Buchanan's *ruins* insisted on commemoration conjured through processes of labor, Nengudi, as the following chapter elucidates, similarly honored the bodies' choreographies through her use of *remains* in sculptural pieces that eschewed permanence as their primary condition.

¹¹⁰ Campbell, 40.

CHAPTER TWO
MATERIALITY & THE “SENSUAL SELF”:
SENGA NENGUDI’S USE OF *REMAINS*,
1975-1981

In a 2013 interview with scholar Elissa Author for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, artist Senga Nengudi (b. 1943 Chicago, Illinois) located the inauguration of her “sensual self” in her lesser-known *Water Compositions*:

“...[*Water Compositions*] was the beginning of my sensual self...I really wanted to have something that people could feel and that had a sense of the body...with those water sculptures, if you felt them...it was really quite sensual...it had this sense of the body because it was pliable.”¹¹¹

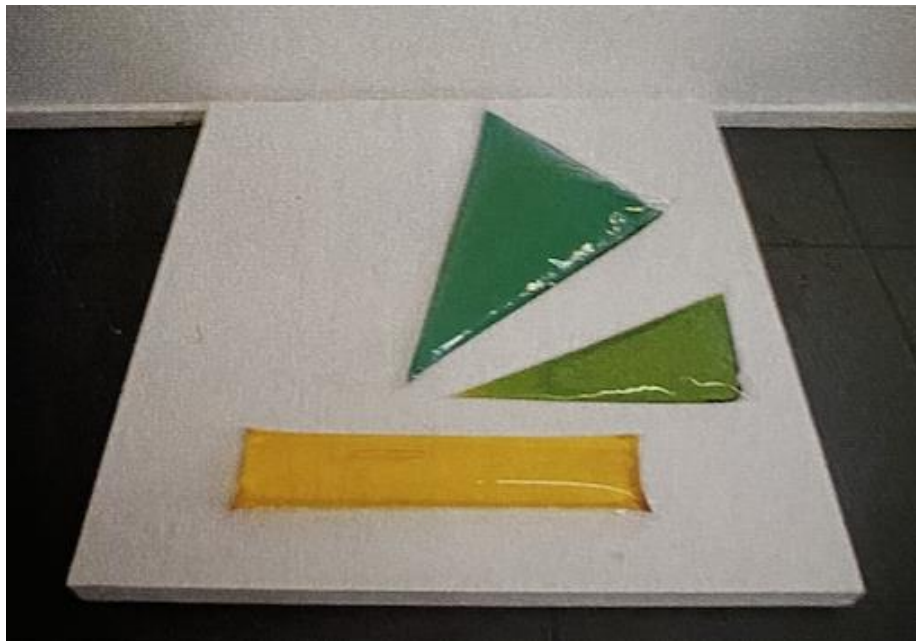


Figure 2.2

Created between 1969 and 1971, Nengudi’s *Water Compositions* are soft sculptures of vinyl forms filled with water and food coloring which are then sealed with a heat gun. They are

¹¹¹ Author (2013): 8. Excerpts from this interview published in Weber and Mühling (2020).

constituted of geometric shapes and variably rest atop pedestals—the earliest of these series occupy the traditional site of sculpture [figure 2.1]—or they spill out over the confines of the structural support. She would soon suspend some of the points of the sculptures with thick rope such that the bulbous plastic would relent to gravity and droop towards or lay completely on the floor, revealing the artist’s interest in distributed weight [figures 2.2 and 2.3].



Figure 3.2



Figure 2.4

Images with the artist and her *Compositions* reveal the sculptures’ scale [figures 2.4 and 2.5]. While the earliest water sacks were small and restricted to an exhibition pedestal, the subsequent sculptures took on a scale proportionate to bodies. The supplies to make these sculptures were simple and accessible, affordable, and ubiquitous, points that would endure as critical for the artist’s material choices throughout her entire practice. The artist would later cite her first

encounter with the practice of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark (b. 1920, Belo Horizonte, Brazil; d. 1988, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) as inspiring her interest in “sensorial objects.”¹¹²

In a 2018 interview with Tyler Green, Nengudi looked back at these early works and described her “fascination” with the movement of water whose “undulations” were “very sensual” for her.¹¹³ She explained that ability for one’s hand to experience movement upon touching the *Water Compositions* was a critical, motivating methodology for her practice. Water, as an organic and life-sustaining material, overtly connected Nengudi to bodily forms. And still, the works are resolutely abstract. They elicit touch, a bodily function, and all the sensorial spikes and relations that exchange between viewer and object would conjure.



Figure 2.4



Figure 2.5

Henri Ghent, curator of the 1971 exhibition “8 artistes afro-américains” at the Musée Rath in Geneva, Switzerland, exhibited and described Nengudi’s *Water Compositions* as more

¹¹² Bradley (2014).

¹¹³ Green (2018).

“academic” than artist’s Claes Oldenberg’s soft sculptures that referenced pop culture.¹¹⁴ Ghent continued, “her ingenious use of water encased in intriguing plastic forms suspended from thick, heavy rope makes clear her interest with the distribution of weight and suspension of soft forms. This exercise in physics is thrust into the realm of art by virtue of her limitation of form and her coloration of natural matter.”¹¹⁵ Though he identified the important experiment Nengudi takes on with material, abstraction, and form, and how this was distinct from her contemporaries, Ghent missed the figurative, and thus sensual, thrust of *Water Compositions*. Certainly, the artist conceived of her *Compositions* as an intervention into the hard materiality of Minimalism, but it was not simply through their softness. These sculptures also foregrounded the body as malleable form, accessed most potently through abstraction. A detail of *Water Composition III* [figure 2.6] first made in 1970 and recreated in 2018 reveals how the folds of the water-filled-vinyl roll on top of each other, touching as they succumb to gravity’s force. Like folds of stomachs or bends of the elbow, the collision of the weighted portions of varying colors is tense and vulnerable.

¹¹⁴ Ghent, Henri. *8 Artistes Afro-Américains*. Geneva: Musée Rath, 1971, 29. Organized by Henri Ghent, a curator based in New York, the 1971 exhibition “8 artistes afro-américains” at the Musée Rath in Geneva, Switzerland was the first exhibition to bring contemporary African American artists to Europe and included more than 70 works by Romare Bearden, Bob Thompson, Alvin Smith, Ruth Tunstall, Fred Eversley, Marvin Harden, Wilbur Haynie, and Senga Nengudi. Nengudi’s inclusion was represented by five of her *Water Sculptures* made between 1970 and 1971. See Jones, Kellie. “Beyond Reverie,” (2014). See documents and archives in box 7, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

¹¹⁵ This 1971 exhibition was Nengudi’s first international show. In her archives, the artist notes her excitement at the announcement of her inclusion in the exhibition, as well as correspondence between the curator and the artist preparing for the shipment of her *Water Compositions*. Nengudi, Senga, diary entries and ephemera from *8 Artistes Afro-Américains* (1971). Box 2 of Recent Addition Collection, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA. During this same year, Nengudi exhibited her sculptural work in a solo exhibition at California State University, Los Angeles to achieve her master’s degree in sculpture and relocated from Los Angeles to East Harlem, New York at the advice of a professor, where she would live until 1974.

Nengudi focused on the haptic experience as a conduit for sensuality. Cool and smooth to the touch, the thick vinyl encasing dyed water would not communicate the same experience of fleshiness that pantyhose and sand would accomplish soon after.



Figure 2.6

Nengudi, like Buchanan, engaged methodologies of abstraction as routes to query the status of the body in various stages of duress and ruination. Where figuration is literal and overdetermined, a political-aesthetic strategy deployed in the Black Arts Movement, abstraction frees the artist from the limits of representation. *Water Compositions* did not elicit understanding responses in audiences. Evincing her devotion to the bodily by way of abstraction, these objects were once described as “outrageously abstract” by her colleague, friend, and artistic collaborator

David Hammons (b. 1943, Springfield, Illinois) to Kellie Jones in 1986.¹¹⁶ Importantly, Hammons noted in the same interview with Jones that Nengudi's work "got more figurative" while Hammons' "got more conceptual" during the 1970s while they intermittently shared a studio on Slauson Avenue in Los Angeles—between 1971 and 1974, Nengudi lived between New York City and Los Angeles.¹¹⁷ At a time when Black artists were tasked with making explicitly political art under the rubric of the Black Arts Movement which tended towards figuration and Afrocentric themes, Nengudi's figurative-adjacent abstractions were not immediately legible or didactic to mass audiences as communicating a Black nationalist politic.

Stephanie Weber writes of how the "transient bodies" of *Water Compositions* represented how Nengudi's approach to political artmaking was not obvious.¹¹⁸ Rather, her political inclinations came through in the "sutures and scissions of material, form, and process, as well as in a belief of the potential of collective creativity and improvisation."¹¹⁹ This chapter also argues that it was through Nengudi's centering of visceral sensorial experiences of touching and being touched that she created her politics of communal vulnerability and endurance in the face of ultimate undoing. She was levying her own distinct critique of formalism and politics through materiality and abstraction, always routed through and towards the body.

The artist ceased making these soft sculptures upon the proliferation of the waterbed. Created by San Francisco State University design student Charles Prior Hall in 1968, the

¹¹⁶ Jones, "Interview with David Hammons," (1986).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Weber, "Dynamic Topologies," 37.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

waterbed was patented in 1971. Patent number US3585356A for “liquid support for human bodies” claimed the invention of:

“[a]n article of furniture comprising a flexible bladder which I substantially filled with a liquid. A supporting framework is provided for holding the liquid filled bladder in such a manner that a body resting upon the bladder is floatably supported by the liquid. Heating means is provided for maintaining a temperature of the liquid at a temperature on the order of the Temperature of the human body. In some embodiments, solid particles, such as Styrofoam, are disposed in the bladder to dampen shock waves in the liquid and to provide additional support for a body resting upon the bladder.”¹²⁰

The inventing teams’ deployment of the term “bladder” to describe the object that contains water is useful in signaling the centrality of the body’s relationship with said object, just as it reveals how the team might have conceived of mimicking a bodily organ as a comforting site for a resting body. The etymology of “bladder,” first published in 1887 and at the time of this writing, most recently updated in March 2022, reveals a historical relationship with the animal body.¹²¹ Inherited from Germanic, the Oxford English Dictionary defines a “bladder” as: “a membranous bag in the animal body;” “a morbid vesicle containing liquid or putrid matter; a boil, blister, pustule;”¹²² and “a filmy cavity full of air, a vesicle, a bubble; anything inflated and hollow.” The invention of the waterbed signaled a commercialization of the ideas Nengudi was exploring, and perhaps represented an overdetermined culmination of the artist’s efforts with contained liquid forms, thus terminating her interest in water-in-vinyl as medium for her artistic experiments.

¹²⁰ Hall (1971).

¹²¹ Oxford English Dictionary (OED).

¹²² OED caveats this second dominant definition of “bladder” as a use that is now obsolete. However, this anachronistic definition further elucidates the conception of this term as always already related to the corporeal.


It is clear too that this form soft, filled sacks was always already related to the body for the artist. Tellingly, before her *Water Compositions*, Nengudi was experimenting with the bladder-as-form in her *Environment for Dance*, installed and performed at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1969 [figure 2.7]. This “environment” was formed of many milky-clear large plastic bags inflated with air, activated by people’s choreography in between and around the balloons. This “experiment” as the artist called it, occupied a room in the museum.¹²³ The balloons were packed into the room such that viewers could not avoid interacting with the soft sculptures as they moved. There was also a grand piano accompanying the environment. Informed by Nengudi’s undergraduate studies in dance and her non-collegiate pursuit of the artform, this work revealed the artist’s early intention to having her works touched and activated by an untrained audience, just as it focused on choreography as process.



Figure 2.7

¹²³ Webster, “Dynamic Topologies,” 40.

Both the 2013 and 2018 interviews position the artist looking back at her oeuvre and evaluating themes that connect her bodies of work. This viewpoint provides the artist with her past lineage that has since revealed patterns of interest. However, it is clear from the artist's archives, contemporaneous documentation and accounts, and scholarship that Nengudi was exploring sensuality since her beginnings as a creative. Sensuality, I argue, is a defining feature of Nengudi's practice. Long before she explicitly identified her efforts to locate her "sensual self," Nengudi was attempting to understand what the possibilities of sensuality could do for her artistically and politically. It becomes clear that sensuality has always been routed through the body for the artist, through bodily movements that call upon the supporting container to variably endure and sustain itself through moments of aggressive contact.



QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you prescribe to any particular philosophical or aesthetic doctrine?
2. What are your primary objectives?
3. How are these objectives transmitted through your work?
4. How would you define the importance of:
 - a. philosophy
 - b. aesthetic objective(s)
 - c. process
 as they relate to your work?
5. Would you classify your art in terms of existing stylistic categories? *in the general sense yes, conceptual - But specifically, no, I believe something new is developing that does not fit into categories (that's why good and bad)*
6. What, if any, existing stylistic classifications influence or have influenced your work? *DADA, Environmentalist? (No, great, Albinberg, none)*
7. What are the influences and/or developmental changes which have affected your work? *besides the above - personal over artistic?*
8. Art Process: Do you begin with: (1) idea, (2) emotion, (3) experiment, (4) other? *Emotion which forms into an idea, then the experiment, then the representing concept*
9. What is your critical evaluation of your work as it relates to: (1) self, (2) art world, (3) public?
10. Do you place an importance on communication between your work and its audience? What are the objectives of your communication or non-communication? *to share something with them - the joy in moving, the pure pleasure, freedom, flight*
11. Do you learn and/or relate to artworks/artists - (1) within your stylistic realm; (2) outside your stylistic realm?

both - I learn + relate to other artists in my stylistic realm - I would tend to learn + relate to artists outside my stylistic realm - I'm developing my style

Just Above Midtown Gallery 50 West 57 Street, 5th floor New York, New York 10019

Figure 2.8

Before Nengudi identified sensuality as an indelible force in her practice, she was already thinking about the body and the feelings of the body. In an artist questionnaire for Just Above Midtown Gallery dated around 1977, Nengudi wrote in response to a question about her art process, that she began with “emotion, which forms into an idea, experimentation” [figure 2.8].¹²⁴ With emotions as the impetus, Nengudi moved through her body in material experimentation. She elaborated on the same document that together pantyhose, which she

¹²⁴ Box 9, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

regularly referred to as “nylon mesh,” and sand created a “sensual human-like form.”¹²⁵ Nengudi also made clear to Elissa Auther in their 2013 interview for the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian that from the time she was a young girl, she knew two things: she “wanted to dance” and “wanted to do art.”¹²⁶ Upon her transfer from Pasadena City College in 1961 to California State University Los Angeles during her first year of her undergraduate studies, the artist became very involved in the dance department. Nengudi would complete her undergraduate degree with a major in sculpture and a minor in dance. As a teaching assistant at the Pasadena Art Museum around the same time, the artist gave tours to young schoolchildren who she would encourage to dance in response to the artworks. The artist has always foregrounded a visceral reaction to experiences over a linguistic or academic response.

In a 1996 interview with the artist, Kellie Jones references Nengudi’s lamentation of not having the “right” body for dance.¹²⁷ This is a heavily coded reference: the “right” body, or “facility” as dancers call it, presumably means thin, tall (but not too tall), and lacking curves. It would not be a stretch to assume the “right” body was also coded White. Jones has traced dance and movement as a through-line through Nengudi’s work, and argued that Nengudi’s practice hinges on the performing, choreographed body.¹²⁸ Though Nengudi leaves behind a formal training in dance, its iterant focus on visceral choreographies and processing human experiences

¹²⁵ Box 9, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

¹²⁶ Auther (2013).

¹²⁷ Jones, “Black West: Thoughts on Art in Los Angeles,” (2006).

¹²⁸ See Jones, “In Motion: The Performative Impulse,” in *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s*. (2017). Other scholars similarly trace the dance-based components of Nengudi’s practice. See Tani (2015).

through the body remains central to Nengudi's motivating force. The artist's interest in bodily movements is unwavering as she will later reference two other modes of embodied changes that drive her works: first, regarding her *R.S.V.P.* series, which the artist began creating upon being pregnant with her first child, Nengudi has expressed that this experience piqued interest in the body's ability to droop, contort to its surroundings, take form and shape, and maintain resilience, all the while being indelibly marked from contact. Secondly, the artist has cited in a conversation with friend, collaborator, and curator Linda Goode Bryant her fascination with bodies riddled with addiction and how the body seems to maintain resilience outwardly, all the while being cannibalized from within:

Nengudi: I've always been taken by movement. I was really moved by the swaying bodies of the drug addicts I'd see on the street. At that point in the '70s, it was heroin, which was all over the place. And the addicts on the streets where I lived looked truly like a forest of trees in the wind, because they'd be standing there, scratching, looking around, swaying slowly this way and that as they nodded, almost to the ground. There'd be maybe eight or ten people on a corner.

Goode Bryant: But they never fell, did they?

Nengudi: They never fell!

Goode Bryant: They go so low.¹²⁹

Before Nengudi located sensuality through alternative artmaking materials, she was exploring modes of bodily contortions in her earliest drawings, likely made during graduate school. These drawings, donated by the artist in 2021 as part of her most recent and therefore unprocessed (at the time of writing) addition to her papers at the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana, are signed by Sue Irons, the artist's name before changing to Senga Nengudi in the first half of the 1970s. Roughly eighteen by twenty-three inches and charcoal on paper, these drawings were made prior to her prized sculptural and performative abstractions,

¹²⁹ "Making Doors: Linda Goode Bryant in Conversation with Senga Nengudi." (2018).

these works on paper center the figure.¹³⁰ Crucially, the drawings reveal the artist's path towards the sensual before her *Water Compositions*.

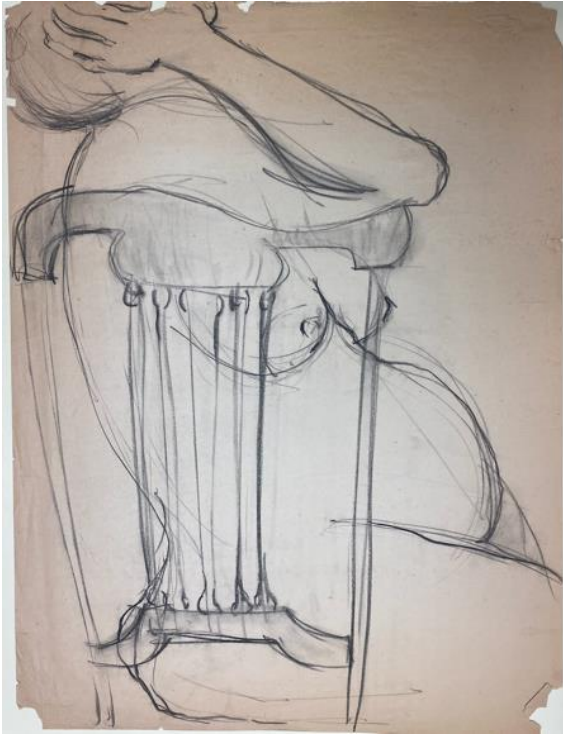


Figure 2.9

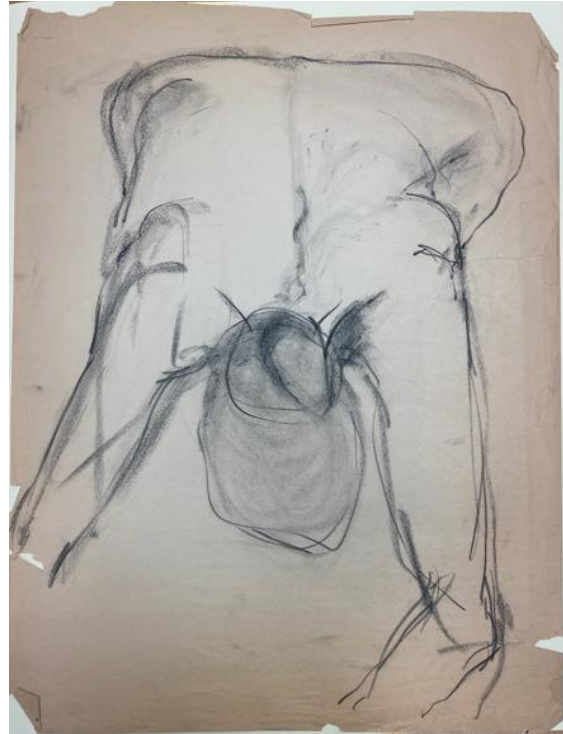


Figure 2.10

In one drawing [figure 2.9] a woman is depicted sitting in profile with her right side forced up against the bars of an ornamented chair. Her hand grips the side of her face as her head is thrown upward while her elbow rests atop the chair. It is unclear if this gesture signals exhaustion, exasperation, or perhaps agony. Her buttocks and stomach are pushed against the vertical supporting bars of the chair, as if revealing a curiosity of the fleshy interaction with hard surface. The flesh pushes through the openings, finding room wherever able. The seated woman's

¹³⁰ These are only two of the drawings recently donated to the Archives, and a future project might attend more closely to her two-dimensional output. See Senga Nengudi papers (1943-), Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

stomach hangs over the folds of her thigh while her right breast pushes up against the panel supports of the furniture. Her curves are echoed in some of the chair's ornamentation but is otherwise much softer and flexible than the still, hard wood of the supporting device. This drawing is specifically important in tracing Nengudi's awareness of her "sensual self" as it indicates a material interest in depicting tensions: the soft, fleshy body of the sitter compared to the static architecture of the chair; the breathing body as opposed to the dead support; and the body's ability to contort to space as opposed to the wood which dictates space.

In the other drawing [*figure 2.10*] a woman is depicted with her head in exaggerated foreshortening coming towards the viewer. Her back seems to be flat, as if hinged at ninety degrees at her hips. Her arms shoot forward, though her hands are not rendered. Her face is towards the floor beneath her, though there is not physical context in which she is situated. The viewers only see the back of her head with her hair collected in a tidy bun. Like her wrists and hands, her legs are also phantom objects: not depicted for the total legibility. Nengudi captured her woman mid-stretch, only depicting the parts of the body most acutely feeling this contortion. From these drawings, it is clear the artist's interest in pursuing the body, especially the womanly body whose biologies allow and disallow expansions unavailable to the male sex.

Both drawings attend to moments of abstraction with the corporeal depictions which are not made fully available to the audience. The lacking parts of the body and the spatial context signal that the focus is on the part of the body that is depicted and its own movements, regardless of its surroundings. Nengudi revealed an interest in the ability of bodies to intervene, connect, and motivate their surroundings all the while it occupies and demands its own territory. Considering the artist did not pursue the medium of drawing on paper as a primary medium, perhaps Nengudi encountered and registered the limitations of two-dimensionality early-on.

Though these charcoal drawings expose Nengudi's early interest in sensuality as accessed through the body's relationship with its surroundings, the medium would fail to re-stage those precise moments and corporeal experiences of contact which dominate her later sculptural and performative works.

In the *Water Compositions*, the artist found an accessible object for interaction which was unattainable in her earlier drawings. Her audiences could feel the movement of the water beneath their hands. In several places, the artist has described that touching has always been a central feature in her work: she always intended for her sculptures and objects to be touched by the audience. Unfortunately, this was not a sustainable interaction due to the fragility of her objects and the constraints of museum which disallow touching artworks in favor of preservation. It is worth noting that none of the original *Water Compositions* are extant; some were re-made in 2018 for the artist's major solo exhibition *Senga Nengudi: Topologien / Topologies* at the Lenbachhaus in Munich, Germany. The artist, who has explicitly claimed a lack of interest in permanence,¹³¹ would continue to encounter the effects of fragile objects later in her *Repondez S'il Vous Plaît* (R.S.V.P.) (1975-ongoing) series of soft sculptures made of pantyhose and sand, which she began in 1975, and to which this essay will return. Though the *Water Compositions* is where the artist explicitly locates the genesis of her "sensual self," sensuality has, as this chapter

¹³¹ In a letter from the artist to her gallerist Thomas Erben dated February 15, 1995, Nengudi writes: "It is important for you to understand that permanence has never been a priority for me—to the chagrin of many. I guess when people are with my art I want them to have an experience—for it to be an event." Yasar, 85. This deployment of the term "event" that Nengudi uses can be explained by her encounter in the 1960s with artists like Claes Oldenberg, Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine, and Robert Rauschenberg who were creating Happenings. While Nengudi worked as a teaching assistant at Pasadena Art Museum and as a teacher at the Watts Towers Art Center, she was exposed to this "explosive mix of experimental art forms" as Odita described in his article (1997: 25).

argues, always been a defining feature for the artist, from her dance education to her drawings, and finally to her sculptural installations that are intended to be activated.

In a 2011 interview with Jori Finkel for the Los Angeles Times, Nengudi described an exhibition on African art at the Fowler Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles. Though it is unclear exactly to which exhibition Nengudi is referring, what captured her attention was the installation and curation of the show wherein the objects were installed “so close together [that] you almost had to brush against the work, and you could smell the wood.”¹³² The two senses Nengudi registers here are the haptic sensation of touch, and the olfactory response to the material. She continues, “this idea that people can brush up against sculpture, have a sensual experience with it, is really attractive to me.”¹³³ This became a guiding principle of the artist: she explored sensuality through her material experimentations with discarded materials, theorized by Linda Goode Bryant and Marcy S. Philips as *remains*, a term to which this essay relies upon and will explicate later.¹³⁴ Nengudi focused on the haptic possibilities between textiles and bodies, and the corporeal experience of expansion and fatigue. Through her abstracted forms, Nengudi eluded the optic register of figuration. Instead, the artist evoked the touches and stresses—those very visceral encounters—of the body being undone. Nengudi’s emphasis on weight and its ability to swell and motivate was made clear in *Water Compositions* at the turn of the 1970s.

¹³² Finkel (2011).

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Goode Bryant and Philips (1978).



Figure 2.11



Figure 2.12

The first half of the 1970s witnessed Nengudi abandon vinyl and water in favor of accessible or otherwise discarded materials like flag remnants [*figures 2.11 and 2.12*], other fabrics, and plastic sheets. These “evanescent spirits,” to use Jones’ term,¹³⁵ were installed in sites across East Harlem during her four-year span living in New York City and served as the only works by the artist on display during the time.¹³⁶ Nengudi has hinted that these cut-outs were a “concession” to the Black nationalist aesthetics of Harlem at the time.¹³⁷ As site-specific installations, the flag and vinyl works were never shown in a gallery. Nengudi described these works as “different than what most people were doing” as many of her contemporaries were

¹³⁵ Jones, “In Motion,” 206.

¹³⁶ Nengudi’s works from 1971-1975 represent a fascinating period of experimentation for Nengudi. A future project might contend with her use of flag remnants, vinyl textiles, and her approach to figurative cut outs during this time. Her large two-dimensional plastic tarp figures are ghostly interventions into dilapidated sites.

¹³⁷ Author (2013).

creating “three-dimensional sculpture as well as true paintings, so this was somewhere in between, and it was still kind of performative because some of the pieces I hung up in the back area of my apartment building so that some of the energy of the neighborhood would be there.”¹³⁸ Of this most explicit engagement with figuration, the artist has described that she was inspired by the movement and destitution of the “swaying bodies of the drug addicts” on the street in the aforementioned interview with Goode Bryant.¹³⁹

This period of experimentation would continue in a focused direction upon her decision to engage pantyhose in 1975. The artist described “happen[ing] upon” pantyhose, which would become her primary art-making textile.¹⁴⁰ On her decision to use pantyhose, Nengudi has reflected:

I was looking for material that kind of reflected the female body. And I looked and I looked and I looked, and I couldn't find anything. And then, finally, I found the pantyhose, and that was right after my first son was born in 1974. Right after that, I went, “Wow,” because the whole birthing experience—you're expanding and then all of a sudden, after it's over, you're contracting, and your body kind of goes back into shape.

I really wanted to somehow express that experience. When I first started, I tried different things in it. Then when I came upon sand, I said, “Oh, this is it,” because sand had weight, and it allowed different forms to take place because of that weight. The other stuff didn't. It was hard or whatever. I tried using resin. I tried using white glue [to make the sculptures permanent, but] it just didn't feel right.¹⁴¹

Importantly, Nengudi's earliest experimentations with used pantyhose saw the artist coating the nylon mesh in resin.¹⁴² Perhaps resin alluded to permanence and preservation of the mesh, just as

¹³⁸ Author (2013).

¹³⁹ “Making Doors: Linda Goode Bryant in Conversation with Senga Nengudi.” (2018).

¹⁴⁰ Green (2018).

¹⁴¹ Author (2013).

¹⁴² Taormina, *Bodies in Action*, 31.

its sheen could mimic skin. However, Nengudi quickly realized that the hardened, unprocessed plastic destroyed the malleability of the mesh sculptures, and so she abandoned this technique in favor of leaving the mesh exposed and uncoated. Nengudi realized that these attempts to coat the nylon disallowed the affective properties of the pantyhose laid bare. The *R.S.V.P.* series started evolving in 1976 and resulted in around twenty total pieces in the original series. The artist has continued to re-create and expand the series as the original pieces are no longer extant.¹⁴³

Pantyhose, which were introduced to the market in 1959 as a single garment combining nylon stockings and underwear, engendered her objects with an anthropomorphism and reflected the tactility, elasticity, malleability, and fatigue of the body. The artist alternatively filled and left empty portions of the pantyhose with discarded metal objects, tires, and most famously in her *R.S.V.P.* series, sand, a material which the artist realized had the ability to fill space and create shapes in a similarly sensual mode as the water and vinyl due to its weight.¹⁴⁴ This chapter examines the artist's arrival at pantyhose as ideal material for her theoretical and practical interest in the possibilities of sensuality.

The artist's investment in the choreographies of the body, even when the body is attacking or failing itself, is palpable most explicitly in her *R.S.V.P.* series. The body endures, even as it verges on ruination. This project contends that, though Nengudi's *R.S.V.P.* series speak to the ability of the body to endure and sometimes triumph over expansion and fatigue, the performative sculptures are more nuanced and less explicit: the sculptures that constitute

¹⁴³ It is critical to note the connection between impermanence in Buchanan's and Nengudi's series discussed in this dissertation. Neither were invested in permanence for art history's sake. Rather, the affective possibilities of materials enduring and fading due to their context and utility, as they reflect the corporeal cycle, were more interesting to the artists.

¹⁴⁴ Green (2018).

R.S.V.P. are about the very *feelings* the body and its person endure throughout corporeal change. At moments, the emotions conveyed in the pantyhose sculptures are unbearable, exposing fundamental fragility and impossibility. Other moments in the sculptures endure more optimistically.

Nengudi has described her devotion to “used bodies.”¹⁴⁵ These bodies undergo violation and intimacy, precarity and survival. The artist’s project has never been simply optimistic: her “used bodies” show signs of wear and trespass, just as they are resilient and capacious. They bend and contort to accommodate new growth and surroundings; they always carry the scars, visible to the plain eye or not, of these movements. The strength of the *R.S.V.P.* series is that they privilege the non-optical commiseration with the emotions and tensions at the center of the works. The sculptures, which were intended to be “caressed, fondled, and stroked by the artist as well as viewers,” are a synecdoche of the bodily response to the zeniths and nadirs of growth and aging.¹⁴⁶ Rizvana Bradley has explained that representation was never the main goal for Nengudi’s performative assemblages. Beyond signifying, Nengudi’s work “affects or produces other kinds of bodies, sensations, and perceptions that can be felt and that in turn provoke emotion.”¹⁴⁷ Tracing a “history of bodily subjection,” Nengudi’s work insists on both “limit and possibility.”¹⁴⁸ Always embedded in her works with pantyhose is the inevitable veracity that these bodies will always give out in the end as they succumb to biology’s relentless march.

¹⁴⁵ Nengudi, artist statement, Thomas Erben Gallery, 2003.

¹⁴⁶ Jones (2006): 52.

¹⁴⁷ Bradley, “Stretched Infinity,” 74.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 75.

To fully understand the force of sensuality in Nengudi's practice, this chapter continues with a brief summary of the development of nylon, the first fully human-made fiber that revolutionized the textile industry. This summary elucidates the profound social and economic impact of Nengudi's chosen art-making material of the pantyhose, which were made predominantly with nylon in the 1970s. Nylon's material history reveals how the physical properties of the fabric combined with a campaign by DuPont Company to develop nylon and later, make nylon pantyhose, an ubiquitous product, enrich a close reading of Nengudi's deployment of the textile.¹⁴⁹ When these histories—art historical and material—are examined side by side, Nengudi's practice is revealed as one that catalyzes *remains* as primary site of sensual exploration and experimentation.

After this historical intervention, the chapter follows with an examination of two specific projects in which the artist participated that elucidate how the artist's interest in materials as a vehicle for sensuality has allowed her to explore communal engagement with bodily evolutions.¹⁵⁰ To situate Nengudi's practice within the context of these two moments—the

¹⁴⁹ It is important to note that though this chapter focuses most closely on Nengudi's use of previously worn predominately-nylon pantyhose, she used nylon textile sheets often in her works made between 1971 and 1975.

¹⁵⁰ Despite Nengudi's inclusion in important exhibitions and publications in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the artist's practice remained underdiscussed until the 2000s. The artist locates her exhibition with Thomas Erben Gallery in 1996 as her reintroduction to the art world. Thomas Erben began representing the artist in 1995 and her exhibition in 1996 was the inaugural show for the gallery. Her second exhibition with the Gallery was only a year later in 1997. The artist's 2003 exhibition with the Gallery elicited positive reviews and was the occasion for the artist to remake many works from her *R.S.V.P.* series at the behest of her gallerist, Erben, and her friend and fellow artist, Lorraine O'Grady. Many cited that Nengudi was an overlooked artist and situated the artist as precursor to contemporary artists Maureen Conner, Ernesto Neto, and Sarah Lucas. See *Village Voice* "Critic's Pick" (Sep. 24-30, 2003); Cash (2004). One acknowledged artist Lorna Simpson's declaration that Nengudi was a "legendary avant-garde artist, overlooked in the discovery of [B]lack art...an artist's artist." See Levin (2003). Rizvana Bradley notes that despite the local success of her Gallery shows, *R.S.V.P.* was largely unrecognized until the

publication of *Contextures* by Linda Goode Bryant and Marcy S. Philips in 1978, and the opening of *Afro-American Abstraction* at MoMA PS1 in Queens, New York from February 17 through April 6, 1980—demonstrates her affinity towards communities of thinkers and creators who were dually unsatisfied by the tenets of second wave feminism¹⁵¹ and contemporaneous national movements that prioritized the legibility and didacticism of figuration. *Contextures* offers a theoretical and art historical model for understanding Nengudi's approach to materiality. *Afro-American Abstraction* underscores the artist's devotion to formal abstraction as a route to explore the bodily over figurative representation, a political aesthetic methodology in which Nengudi was disinterested. The third chapter of this dissertation attends to Nengudi's inclusion in *Dialectics of Isolation*, alongside Beverly Buchanan, and is devoted to excavating the artists' engagements with feminism. Together, these three moments articulate key elements Nengudi explored in her material choice of pantyhose: the anti-capitalist use of found objects because of their residues of other lives and economic feasibility, the possibilities of abstraction to elucidate the iterant feelings, both physical and emotional, of bodily expansion and fatigue, and finally, pantyhose's ability to conjure a specific woman-centered community.

The Development of Nylon

In 1938, a report was published about the status of silk hosiery in the United States. At the time of writing, the U.S. imported 80% of Japan's silk production, with over 75% of the imported silk

exhibition *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*, curated by Valerie Cassel Oliver for the Contemporary Art Museum in Houston in 2013. Bradley (2015).

¹⁵¹ See the third chapter of this dissertation for a specific conversation about both Beverly Buchanan and Senga Nengudi's relationship with feminism vis à vis their inclusion in the 1980 exhibition *Dialectics of Isolation* at A.I.R. Gallery.

directed towards hosiery.¹⁵² The U.S. produced 500 million silk hosiery pairs per year. The average price was \$0.85, of which approximately \$0.10 a pair went to Japan to pay for the imported raw materials. According to the National Association of Hosiery Manufacturers, 90,000 people were employed in the making of hosiery that year, 30,000 were employed in prepping the textiles, and an incalculable number of people selling the resulting finished products. As Margaret Dana wrote in her report, “The silk stocking has become for virtually every woman – rich or poor, young or old – the symbol of liberty, democracy, and an undisputed self-respect.”¹⁵³ Dana’s argument was that despite the high rates of production, the silk market could not keep up with demand for hosiery made of the raw material. The alternatives to silk did not live up to consumers’ needs:

Cotton and rayon are both occasionally offered as substitutes, but silk is the only fiber which can be made into a yarn so fine it will produce the sheerness consumers require while retaining strength and elasticity enough to carry some degree of practical wearability. Silk is the strongest textile yarn known to man, but the filament is so fine that it takes 256,000 yards to make *one pound* of silk. But silk is costly.¹⁵⁴

Rayon was said to be “too stiff, ill-fitting, and shiny” to be a proper replacement for real silk.¹⁵⁵ With the prices of silk soaring, a black market of faux silk developed, where producers manufactured textile threads that combined silk with other fibers and fabrics. The result was a lower quality textile that could not achieve the same sheerness that silk stockings offered.

As an illegal market of silk expanded through the early decades of the 1900s, so too did scientific research into the possibilities of synthetic materials. As a means to diversify their

¹⁵² Cutlip (2015).

¹⁵³ Dana, 519.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 520. Emphasis Dana’s.

¹⁵⁵ Cutlip (2015).

business portfolio, DuPont had considered entering the artificial fibers business in 1916 with a proposal to buy the American Viscose Company (AVC). The British-owned firm did not want to relinquish all control of the business and offered DuPont 60% of its interest in AVC for \$30 million, which DuPont refused, valuing AVC at only \$10 million. Four years later, DuPont entered the rayon business in 1920 with Comptoir des Textiles Artificiels, a French manufacturer of rayon, which was then heralded as “artificial silk.” In the same year as the above report, 1938, DuPont Company invested nearly \$20 million in the expansion and construction of plants devoted to the development of a silk-alternative.¹⁵⁶

This investment came on the heels of a new hire to DuPont: Wallace Carothers, then-leader of organic chemistry at the Company, invented a new series of polymers by the spring of 1934, one of which would become nylon. Carothers would draw the first nylon yarns—the first fully synthetic polymers,¹⁵⁷ called polyhexamethylene adipamide molecules—in 1937.¹⁵⁸ Nylon would be considered the fourth revolution in textile history after mercerized cotton, synthetic dyes, and rayon.¹⁵⁹ The new fiber would become the biggest economic success DuPont had ever experienced, just as its development set off a massive shift in the textile industry towards the research, development, and production of more synthetic fibers. As *Fortune Magazine* reported at the time:

The drawn yarns ranged between 200 and 300 percent strong than comparable rayon. Some were equal to, and others 150 percent stronger than, comparable silk. They were

¹⁵⁶ *Fortune Magazine* (1940).

¹⁵⁷ Rayon is made of cellulose, which comes from plant fibers.

¹⁵⁸ Nylon was one of the fastest developments, occurring in only three years, in the history of the DuPont company. *Fortune Magazine* (1940).

¹⁵⁹ *Fortune Magazine* (1940).

abrasive resistant, practically nonflammable (merely melting at high temperatures), and substantially nonabsorbent in water. In a woven state they could be set in any determined shape by steam at a high temperature, and retained their shape through any number of washings and dryings below that temperature.¹⁶⁰

DuPont's Vice President Dr. Charles M. A. Stine announced to the world the invention of nylon and its possibilities at the New York World's Fair on October 27, 1938, immediately before the start of World War II (and a year and a half after nylon's inventor, Carothers, died by suicide).

Dr. Stine described that the company, which was then E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., had a newly developed filament that "came to being from coal, air, and water."¹⁶¹ Fortune Magazine published a full spread announcing the fiber and illustrating its scientific development [figure

2.13]. The name "nylon" was announced:

Nylon' is a generic name, coined by the du Pont chemists, to designate all materials defined scientifically as 'synthetic fiber-forming polymeric amides having a protein-like chemical structure; derivable from coal, air and water, or other substances, and characterized by extreme toughness and strength and the peculiar ability to be formed into fibers and into various shapes, such as bristles and sheets.'¹⁶²

Projections estimated that nylon would gross more than \$11 million for DuPont, then worth \$858 million, within its first year.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ *Fortune Magazine* (1940).

¹⁶¹ *New York Times* (28 October 1938).

¹⁶² *New York Times* (28 October 1938).

¹⁶³ *Fortune Magazine* (1940).

This Is How a New World Is Created . . .

THE NEW TECHNOLOGICAL WORLD

. . . of which nylon is a part, is not for those who shy at even the formula H_2O . Below, much simplified, are the probable steps by which du Pont's ammonia plant in West Virginia breaks down coal, air, and water into nylon's intermediate raw material—an amine salt—shipped to the nylon plant (right) at Seaford, Delaware.

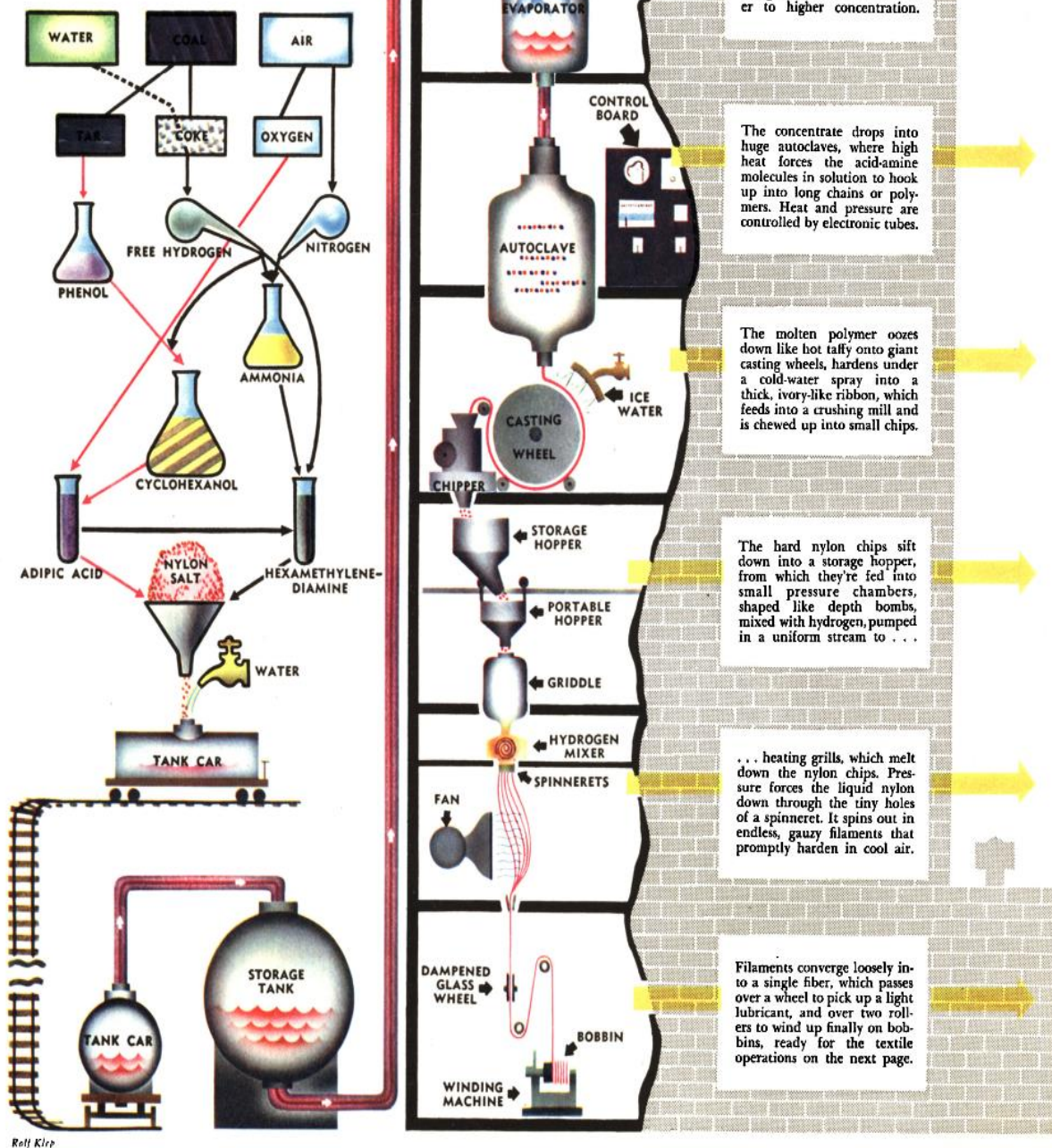


Figure 2.13

First tested for use as a replacement for the pig's bristles that made toothbrushes, nylon made clear to developers from the beginning that it would be used for apparel, namely a replacement for silk hosiery, which would become a huge success as soon as nylon stockings were introduced to the market.¹⁶⁴ The response was overwhelmingly positive, especially with the promise of production increasing and prices dropping. One journalist offered an honest comparison of the new synthetic stocking material when held against silk:

Nylon stockings are colder, harder, and smoother to the touch than silk. They snag about as easily as silk, but the thread will not break so readily. Once broken, however, nylon will run faster. Nylon stockings wash and dry in much less time than silk, but their non-absorbent character caused some wearers to complain that they become slippery in the rain or with perspiration. Their unique ability to retain the shape acquired in manufacturing through any number of washings gives them a constantly fresh appearance, but the fit becomes an important consideration.¹⁶⁵

Nylon hosiery was available briefly beginning on May 15, 1940, and encountered huge success with four million pairs selling out almost immediately. DuPont produced 2.6 million pounds of nylon, which sold for around \$9 million, within the rest of the year. By the next year, DuPont sold over \$25 million of nylon, and controlled 30% of the hosiery market. In August 1941, months ahead of the U.S. entrance into the war, *TIME* reported that “in Denver, women bought \$125, 000 worth of stockings in two day—enough to provide every woman over 14 in Denver with a pair, at 92 cents apiece.”¹⁶⁶ The success of nylon came as a massive blow to Japan's silk economy, and by the time the U.S. joined the war at the end of 1941, the country halted all imports from Japan while also diverting all of DuPont's production towards war efforts.

¹⁶⁴ The first pair of experimental nylon stockings made by the Union Hosiery Company for DuPont in 1937 are in the collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C.

¹⁶⁵ *Fortune Magazine* (1940).

¹⁶⁶ *TIME Magazine* (18 August 1941).

Nylon stockings¹⁶⁷ would not be widely available to the public until 1945, as the need for nylon in the War became clear within the same year that Dr. Stine introduced the fiber to the public. As Matthew Hermes described, “[nylon’s] introduction to American consumers was delayed until enough woven parachute fabric and braided parachute cord and outerwear and tenting and tire yarn and glider towrope had been made. The vanguard of the U.S. Army floated to earth in Normandy carried by and covered with nylon.”¹⁶⁸ It would become known as the “fiber that won the war.”¹⁶⁹ During the war, DuPont increased its nylon production to reach three times than its original capacity, making 25 million pounds of the fiber a year. Nylon was used for many necessary supplies including airplane tire cords, glider tow ropes, and parachutes. As the war eventually neared its end by the mid-1940s, nylon manufacturers began plotting production for hosiery again, and started to anticipate market needs.

In September 1945, nylon hosiery was finally made available to the public. From 1945 to 1947, in the two years following the end of the war, the demand for nylon hosiery exceeded the company’s ability to supply. This led to rioting at department stores and elsewhere where people

¹⁶⁷ To evade confusion, pantyhose and stockings are not the same item. Stockings are long, leg-coverings, while pantyhose are the product combining underpants and stockings in one garment. Nylon stockings were the mainstay of hosiery until the introduction of the pantyhose in 1959. Invented by Allen Gant Senior, a descendent of textile-mill founder John Gant, “Panti-legs,” which would soon become “pantyhose,” allowed consumers to purchase one complete product, instead of multiple parts as the separate stockings and underwear required the use of garter clips. The miniskirt became popularized in 1964, a tidy convergence that benefited the pantyhose market. The decline of the pantyhose arrived by the 1990s, as people eschewed the conservative covers in favor of exposed skin. Hosiery, declared Mintel, an international consumer analyst agency, was “an industry that lost its footing (Annis, 2006). In 2000, Robert Siegel, a host on National Public Radio’s *All Things Considered*, reported that the “average woman buys 15 pairs of stockings a year” (Siegel, 2000).

¹⁶⁸ Hermes, xv.

¹⁶⁹ Cutlip (2015).

waited for hours for the chance to purchase nylon stockings.¹⁷⁰ By 1948, textiles made up the second largest industry in the U.S. It was reported that the average consumer used 27 pounds of cotton, 6.3 pounds of rayon, and 4.9 pounds of wool annually. By 1956, one person out of seven was employed people in the country worked in the textile and apparel industries. Spandex was introduced to the expanding range of synthetic fabrics in 1959. Developed as a synthetic version of latex, spandex was more porous and less durable than the original but could stretch 500% without breaking. In 1966, Kevlar was introduced, and by 1968, more human-made fibers were being consumed than natural fibers in the U.S. Though nylon's popularity in fashion would decline by the 1970s, the synthetic fiber would still be used in many other products through this day.¹⁷¹

Despite nylon's decline, research into synthetic fibers continued. Synthetic fibers achieved ubiquity in the 1960s and 1970s, the general time period of focus for this dissertation. Polyester was especially popular, and it even surpassed nylon production by 1972. Known for their flammability, polyesters would become a safer option for households as lawmakers and manufacturers improved safety standards in the 1970s. Garments made of synthetic fibers were largely easier to wash, quick drying, more stain resistant, cheaper, and therefore more

¹⁷⁰ Known as the "nylon rush," rioting occurred all across the country. In San Francisco in 1945, 10,000 people lined up to purchase the first post-war hosiery shipment. There was chaos as people broke storefront windows trying to access the hosiery (Siegel, 2000). In Augusta, Georgia there was a riot so boisterous that a journalist wrote of people who "[risked] life and limb in bitter battle over nylons" (*TIME Magazine*, 18 August 1941). Perhaps the most famous riot occurred in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in June 1946 as 40,000 people queued for over a mile to compete for only 13,000 pairs of nylon stockings. Throughout the rest of the decade, DuPont would require that their accounts paid for their hosiery in advance (Wolfe, 2008).

¹⁷¹ Hermes, xv.

ephemerally used than their organic counterparts.¹⁷² Further, synthetic fibers did not shrink or bleed, and could be wrinkle resistant. Anti-microbial possibilities of synthetic fibers also became evident to researchers. By 2014, cotton imports were overtaken by synthetic fabric imports. Researchers at Stanford University announced the creation of a new fabric called *nanoPE* in September 2016 which promised smaller holes than usual in fabrics. Synthetic fibers altered the textile industry, and its promises have only continued to grow.

By the time of Nengudi's use of pantyhose in the 1970s, the hosiery was still made of mostly nylon, though small amounts of spandex were introduced to the garment to increase elasticity and the stable hold contemporary wearers seek. Through the artist's use of the hosiery garment, she evoked a rich history of economic and material development that had profound global impacts in the arenas of war and the sciences. The popularity of pantyhose, so inflated at one moment that people rioted across the country, offers context for understanding how Nengudi's chosen garment would have struck familiarity in everyone who encountered her work—whether through the nylon fibers themselves or through the particular form they took in this commodity. This intimacy of experience was critical to Nengudi's choice to use pantyhose and sand, evoking memories of touch, feel, or wear for all viewers. In fact, the artist's commitment to assembling her sculptures with previously worn pantyhose, or *remains*, becomes a viewpoint through which to understand the full scope of her artistic proposition, as discussed in that which follows.

¹⁷² This also coincides with a period of relative economic stability as income in households at the start of the 1960s was the highest they had been since the end of World War II.

Contextures

In 1978,¹⁷³ Linda Goode Bryant and Marcy S. Philips published their book *Contextures*, which was conceived initially under the title *The Abstract Continuum in Afro-American Art*.¹⁷⁴ By this moment, Bryant was already a champion of Nengudi's practice. In November 1974, Bryant opened her gallery Just Above Midtown (JAM) at 50 West 57th Street on the fifth floor,¹⁷⁵ in what was then the epicenter of the predominately White landscape of art galleries.¹⁷⁶ Bryant was

¹⁷³ This is the same year that Nengudi performed her now famous *Ceremony for Freeway Fets* in California. This performance piece took place near the Los Angeles Convention Center underneath a freeway overpass on Pico. This piece was ritualistic and communal, performed alongside her colleagues and friends of the collective Studio Z, to a small gathering of onlookers. Barbara McCullough made efforts to film the performance, but there were technical malfunctions. Roderick Kwaku Young's archival photographs which number a little over ten are the only extant documentation of *Freeway Fets*, in addition to oral histories. I point the reader to Jones (2017; 2020) for more on *Freeway Fets* and Studio Z. The artist's investment in community and a space for ritualistic healing will be touched upon in the following section on the *Dialections of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists* (1980), but is further elucidated, amongst others, in Bowles (2010), Jones (2017), McMillan (2018), Wood (2020).

¹⁷⁴ Letter from Marcy Philips to Senga Nengudi dated August 5, 1977 reads: "Being aware of the vacuum in quality publication that deal specifically with contemporary Black artist (sic), Linda Bryant and I are preparing a catalogue, *The Abstract Continuum in Afro-American Art*. This publication will provide not only a sequel to the *Two Centuries of Black American Art* catalogue sponsored by Philip Morris, but will also focus on Black art in the context of the overall developments in American art from 1945 to the present. [...]" Box 9, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

¹⁷⁵ JAM eventually relocated to TriBeCa at 178 Franklin Street in 1980, and upon this lease termination in 1984, moved to 503 Broadway in SoHo where it eventually closed in 1986. Nengudi would continue to show with JAM in both solo and group exhibitions. A show that merits further investigation is the artist's *Christopher Columbus* exhibition in the TriBeCa JAM space which was constituted of works made with muslin, gauze, hay, and latent with Christian symbols to critique religion and colonialism.

¹⁷⁶ For more on the history of JAM, its context and impact, see Meyerowitz (2001) and rigorous exhibition curated by Thomas (T.) Lax with Lilia Rocio Taboada and the accompanying catalogue devoted to the pioneering gallery *Just Above Midtown: 1974 to the Present*, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York which was on view from October 9, 2022 through February 18, 2023.

working at the Studio Museum in Harlem when she left to create her own space to promote Black artists, a vision shared by the Studio Museum but by different means. For the Studio Museum and other Black-run galleries,¹⁷⁷ Black nationalism guided the curatorial force, whereas Bryant was interested in exploring more conceptual and experimental art productions and interrupting the blue-chip market that boasted the work of predominantly European and White American artists.¹⁷⁸ During its twelve-year run, JAM exhibited primarily abstract works by artists such as Nengudi, Hammons, Howardena Pindell (b. 1943 Philadelphia, PA), Houston Conwill (b. 1947, Louisville, KY – d. 2016, New York, NY), and others who participated in burgeoning movements like Conceptualism, performance art, and video art. Through JAM, Bryant sought to inaugurate artists' careers, create a space for community discussion, and develop a collector base—especially a Black collector base; this last aim of JAM's is perhaps underdiscussed in scholarship on the gallery, but is a critical motivating factor of the exhibition space and its iterant projects, like *Contextures*. In 1977, Bryant debuted Nengudi's *R.S.V.P.* series made the same year at JAM in a solo exhibition for the artist.¹⁷⁹ Bryant's support of

¹⁷⁷ In addition to the Studio Museum in Harlem and JAM, other art spaces that prioritized the practices of Black artists in New York at the time included Acts of Art, Cinque Gallery, Genesis II, and Weusi. Kellie Jones and others have charted the history of galleries and venues established by African American artists in the 1960s and 1970s. For a summary of these institutions in relation to the swell of assemblage in southern California in the late 1950s and early 1960s, see Jones (2011) 15-27.

¹⁷⁸ Meyerowitz notes the exceptions to this were Romare Bearden's representation at Kootz, Cordier, and Ekstrom; Jacob Lawrence with Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery; and Norman Lewis at Willard Gallery (although Lewis would eventually leave Willard because he did not feel he was receiving sustained attention or appropriate sales. See Meyerowitz (2001).

¹⁷⁹ During this same year, three of Nengudi's works were included in the Studio Museum of Harlem exhibition *California Black Artists: RSVP XI* (1977), *Hanging on Winter* (1977), and *RSVP XII* (1977). In May 1977, Pearl C. Woods Gallery at 1938 South Western Avenue in Los Angeles also gave Nengudi a solo exhibition dedicated to her *R.S.V.P.* series. Pearl C. Woods Gallery was another exhibition space devoted mainly to the work of Black artists.

Nengudi was evident in her exhibitions and writings, and JAM would become an integral site for Nengudi's development as an artist.

Bryant and Philips, who met at City College in New York, conceived of *Contextures* as a credo and historiography independent of a specific exhibition; instead, the publication was the authors' take on the practices of Black artists who were working abstractly, as opposed to within the logics of the figure. In their preface to *Contextures*, Bryant and Philips described their two-fold purpose: to rectify the exclusion of African American artists from the legacy of abstraction in the United States since 1940 and to propose a genre of art called "Contextures."¹⁸⁰ For Bryant and Philips, "Contextures" described art that took its power not through its form and material but instead through its context and conditions of presentation. Though this dissertation writ large insists upon the very materiality of art objects as indelible to their projected politics, the "contextural" method is a particularly useful formulation that disallows preciousness in lieu of access.

Curiously, situated across the titular page for the first section of the book titled "Abstract American Art: 1945-1978" is an installation image of Nengudi's *I* [figure 2.14] from 1977, though the authors do not discuss the artist until the following section of the book, "Contextures." To include Nengudi as the image for the first portion on abstraction signalled her fundamental disinterest in questions of straight figuration and foregrounded the artist's occupation with the possibilities of nontraditional art materials. Nengudi's image, in its position preceding the bulk of the book as well as on the cover page, suggests that the artist represented

¹⁸⁰ Bryant and Philips, preface.

an accumulation of the knowledge generated by the authors.¹⁸¹ Though the work pictured is from 1977, just one year before the authors suggest their first chapter closes, and she is not discussed in the development of abstraction, Nengudi is deployed here as harbinger of where abstraction leads in the late 1970s and early 1980s, after the various explorations explicated in the preliminary chapter.

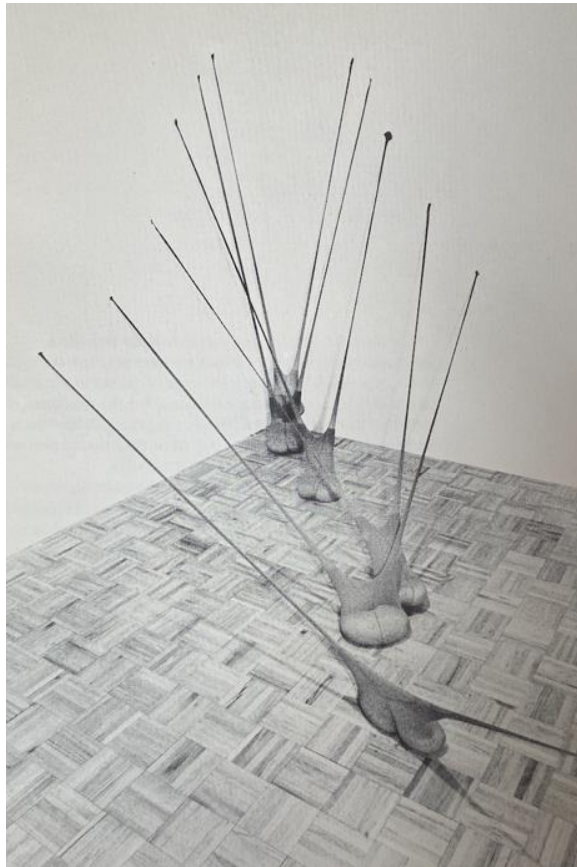


Figure 2.14

The first chapter locates African American artists within the American abstract continuum beginning in the 1940s. The authors sought to expand art history's understanding of Modernism as a methodological and theoretical approach to artmaking that deeply understands "the natural

¹⁸¹ The cover image of *Contextures* is Nengudi's *Costume Study for Mesh Mirage*, made in autumn of 1977 from paper tarp and "nylon mesh mask." Bryant and Philips, 103.

and indigenous physical and perceptual properties of art.”¹⁸² A Vasarian march of progress marks the author’s description of Modernism: the discussion begins with Cubism, and proceeds to Abstract Expressionism, Color Field, Hard Edge, Op Art, Neo-Dada, Pop Art, Minimalism, Super Realism, Process Art, Earthworks, and Conceptual Art. Each movement is accompanied by the author’s explanation of the movements’ iterant aims, artists who participated in the tenets of the movement, and the most important exhibitions that define the movement. With the intention to fill in racist gaps from the history of abstraction in the United States, Bryant and Philips paired abstractionists who were White like Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock, Morris Louis, Helen Frankenthaler, Kenneth Noland, Frank Stella, Sol Lewitt, Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, and Barnett Newman, with abstractionists who were Black like James Little, Suzanne Jackson, Al Loving, Alma Thomas, Frank Bowling, Marvin Brown, Sam Gilliam, Ed Clark, William T. Williams, Melvin Edwards, Raymond Sanders, and Adrian Piper.¹⁸³ Clark’s brushstrokes and compositional format were comparative to those of Rothko and Kline; Jackson to Pollock and Frankenthaler; Bowling, Thomas, and Gilliam experimented with shaped canvases as did Louis;

¹⁸² Bryant and Philips, 13.

¹⁸³ Biographical dates on these artists is as follows: Franz Kline (b. 1910, Wilkes-Barre, PA; d. 1962, New York, NY); Jackson Pollock (b. 1912, Cody, WY; d. 1956, Springs, NY); Morris Louis (b. 1912, Baltimore, MD; d. 1962, Washington, D.C.); Helen Frankenthaler (b. 1928, New York, NY; d. 2011, Darien, CT); Kenneth Noland (b. 1924, Asheville, NC; d. 2010 Saint George, ME); Frank Stella (b. 1936 Malden, MA); Sol Lewitt (b. 1928, Hartford, CT; d. 2007, New York, NY); Mark Rothko (b. 1903, Daugavpils, Latvia; d. 1970, New York, NY); Ad Reinhardt (b. 1913 Buffalo, NY; d. 1967 New York, NY); Barnett Newman (b. 1905 New York, NY; d. 1970 New York, NY); James Little (b. 1952 Memphis, TN); Suzanne Jackson (b. 1944 St. Louis, MO); Al Loving (b. 1935, Detroit, MI; d. 2005, New York, NY); Alma Thomas (b. 1891, Columbus, GA; d. 1978 Washington, D.C.); Frank Bowling (b. 1934 Bartica, Guyana); Marvin Brown (b. 1943 New York, NY); Sam Gilliam (b. 1933, Tupelo, MS; d. 2022, Washington, D.C.); Ed Clark (b. 1926, New Orleans, Louisiana; d. 2019, Detroit, Michigan); William T. Williams (b. 1942 Fayetteville, NC); Melvin Edwards (b. 1937 Houston, TX); Raymond Sanders (b. 1934 Pittsburgh, PA); and Adrian Piper (b. 1948 New York, NY).

Newman and Reinhardt were paired with Little; Williams to Stella and Noland, and Brown and Lewitt were Minimalism's companions. The authors assert Piper's prowess as the ultimate Conceptual artist with no appropriate White counterpart.

In this chapter, Bryant and Philips fit Black artists into the established and exclusory canon of American art. The most obvious criticism this methodology elicits is that maintaining the existing canon reinscribes and inadvertently supports the tenets of the canon that make it problematic and false in the first place: the Modernist canon's exclusions of artists of color and women artists are clear, and to abide by the racist and sexist logics that allow the canon to endure does not accomplish more than maintaining existing power structures. Representation is important but cannot be the end point. However, by piecing together a Modernist canon that includes Black artists alongside market established White artists, the authors of *Contextures* made efforts to increase the value of the work of Black artists.¹⁸⁴ This clever maneuver signaled to White gallerists and collectors that the work of Black abstractionists was multifaceted and eclectic, as opposed to monolithic, and invested in a range of formal questions about art production. The very need to substantiate these claims is revealing, but Bryant and Philips sought to raise the market profile of their artists while also asserting their art historical importance.

It is in the second portion of their book that Bryant and Philips proposed a framework for a critical understanding of artists in the 1960s and 1970s devoted to exploring Black culture and history through formal material experimentation and composition, what the authors call "contextures." Bryant was concurrently exhibiting the artists central to their argument in *Contextures*: Nengudi, Hammons, Conwill, and Pindell, especially. The authors charted Conceptual Art as an "outgrowth of the methodical process and objective nature of the

¹⁸⁴ Meyerowitz, 244.

Minimalists” combined with the challenge issued by Marcel Duchamp (b. 1887 Blainville-Crevon, France; d. 1968 Neuilly-sur-Seine, France) to “traditional aesthetics.”¹⁸⁵ In joining these specific histories of formalism and philosophy in their proposed genre of Contextures, Bryant and Philips signaled the tripartite impetus of conceptual artworks: material, process, and idea. Specifically interested how similar developments concerning abstraction occurred in the two coastal cultural capitals of Los Angeles and New York, Bryant and Philips linked the artists of Contextures through their “role and position of art to reality, the role and position of the artist, and the process and the use of ‘remains’ as the material in which the art objects are made.”¹⁸⁶ As one scholar framed it, contexturalist artists “synthesized the properties and conditions of reality.”¹⁸⁷ Informed by the synthesis of “additive” and “transitive” processes, the practice of Contexturalists was defined by an interest in alternative artmaking materials and the possibilities of contextualizing seemingly disparate portions of life together in a cohesive artwork.¹⁸⁸ For Contexturalists, meaning was accrued, never fixed, and always changing.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Bryant and Philips, 33.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁸⁷ Meyerowitz, 250.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ An important legacy to the theorization of *contextures* offered by Brant and Philips has to do with archiving: in 2022, The Museum of Modern Art, NY opened the exhibition *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces*. The first exhibition devoted to the multivalent histories of this gallery and community, *Changing Spaces*, curated by T. J. Lax with Lilia Rocio Taboada, led to not only a critical concurrent publication, with contributions by Eric Booker, Brandon Eng, Thelma Golden, Linda Goode Bryant, Marielle Ingram, Kellie Jones, Yelena Keller, Lax, Legacy Russell, and Taboada, but also to the acquisition of the Just Above Midtown Archives, stewarded by Goode Bryant, by the Museum’s Archives, Library, and Research collections announced in 2023. The exhibition, committed to surfacing the ingenuity and tenderness of the JAM community, traced the gallery’s geographical movement across Manhattan between 1974 and 1986, and deployed oral histories as critical sites of memory and archival knowledge. The

This methodology of instability continued in the artists' use of "remains." Bryant and Philips classified "remains" as distinct from both "discards" "which had a function or purpose that ceased to perform" and the "readymade" "which has an intended purpose and function which it still performs."¹⁹⁰ Remains, instead, "constitute the matter or substance left over from a primary action" whose "nature and conditions [of] existence are ephemeral" and might for example include grease, lint from clothes dryers, sand, hair, worn items, cut out paper dots, smoke, or other remnant substances from actions.¹⁹¹ Looking back on their theorization of "remains," Goode Bryant in 2001 explained that remains "referred to not only the physical substance, the left over remains, but also often served as a metaphor for the artist's position in society," suggesting that Hammons might be "recognized as a metaphorical left-over" as a Black man making experimental art in a predominantly White art market. In this way, Nengudi's use of pantyhose that are often not pale, instead ranging darker brown hues, might be said to nod towards a feeling of being "left-over" in society.¹⁹²

Crucially for the authors, remains were the opposite of discards and the readymade precisely because they are flexible and transient. This instability and slippery legibility of remains functioned formally and politically for Contexturalists. Kellie Jones described *remains* as "surfeit" to the performances undertaken by the artists described in Goode Bryant and Philips'

establishment of the Just Above Midtown Archives, which includes funding for a devoted archivist for a fixed term, is a catalyst for scholarship and art making, but also for community as it offers occasion of a *contextural* archiving praxis.

¹⁹⁰ Bryant and Philips, 40.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Meyerowitz, 251

book.¹⁹³ Jones, too, made this case when explicating the “assemblage aesthetic” of artist Noah Purifoy (b. 1917 Snow Hill, Alabama; d. 2004 Joshua Tree, California)¹⁹⁴ and the “aesthetic of making do” as a “sacred heritage” for John Outterbridge (b. 1933 Greenville, North Carolina; d. 2020, Los Angeles).¹⁹⁵ For Jones, the cooptation of discarded materials and Purifoy’s subsequent “transformational action[s]”¹⁹⁶ certainly signaled “an embrace of the outcasts who inhabited society’s margins”¹⁹⁷ just as it turned the paradigm of junk-as-dead on its head. Beyond gesturing towards politics and community, Jones also insisted that Purifoy’s particular use of detritus was a way to interrogate possibilities of “lack” reformulated into “that from which beauty flowed.”¹⁹⁸ Artists after Purifoy’s generation used junk to achieve conceptual and performative practices: these artists, like Nengudi, Conwill, Hammons, and Hassinger, harnessed the remains from their environments, particularly those from the Watts rebellions, as Jones explained, towards two ends: the artists evaded straightforward representations of the Black figure while also always and crucially referencing cultural touchpoints.¹⁹⁹

This use of cast-off materials is also akin to Greg Pitts’ term “cultural materialism” wherein “[artists employ] a range of media, that carries an explicitly or implicitly expressed

¹⁹³ Jones (2017): 190.

¹⁹⁴ Jones (2017): 71.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁹⁹ Jones (2006).

culture specific profile.”²⁰⁰ Purifoy’s use of junk was also an insistence upon taking seriously Black trauma and mental health. Outterbridge’s activation of castoff materials and textiles was at once connected to histories of Black craft in the United States South just as it relates to a practice of nurturing spaces for respite. Nengudi worked under Purifoy at the Watts Towers Art Center while he was director. Similarly, Nengudi accrued discarded, once-used pantyhose that contained multitudes of bodily encounters, from pleasures to trespasses. She centered Black women’s process and healing through her choice of the ubiquitous fashion staple, tones of pantyhose she used, and the provocation to communal testimony and experience.

Following a discussion on the body prints and deployment of hair in the work of her friend and collaborator David Hammons (b. 1943, Springfield, Illinois), Nengudi is introduced in “Contextures” through her *Water Compositions*, discussed in the introduction to this chapter, and her “nylon mesh” works of the later 1970s, which are the fulcrum of that which follows. The artist’s practice is defined as one that explores tension and flexibility through her use of pantyhose. Nengudi has discussed in several places her interest in used pantyhose. Because of their ubiquity, the artist knew she could access the now-bygone fashion staple:

That’s why I initially used used pantyhose. I got them from the thrift stores. I got them from friends. And of course, I would wash them, but my thing was that, just like an African fetish or something, because it was worn by somebody, their energy was still in it. Their story was still in it. So that’s why, normally, I try and use something that’s already been used. Sometimes, of course, I have to go with new ones. But that’s the reasoning for it originally.²⁰¹

With the honest declaration of the impossibility of always sourcing proper or appropriately used pantyhose, Nengudi was clear about the possibility of a sensual transmission of “energies” from

²⁰⁰ Pitts (2007).

²⁰¹ Author (2013).

body to body that the material makes available. In another interview, Nengudi reiterated that the worn quality of the pantyhose communicated “residue[s] of energy of stress left over from the person that had worn them before.”²⁰² The clarification of an interest in *stress* that the body accumulates marks Nengudi’s practice and choice of the pantyhose. Their ubiquity in women’s fashion makes the pantyhose of Nengudi’s performative sculptures familiar and relatable to viewers, but only those who have endured the slow, fragile, often frustrating process of donning pantyhose every day in accordance with polite fashion standards understand that the undergarment signals something bleaker and more prescriptive in the artist’s deployment.

Odili Donald Odita has described that the “found” aspect of Nengudi’s work “speaks about survival (of a people).”²⁰³ Certainly, Nengudi was invested in pantyhose because of their ability to “mostly” resume to their original shape after being “tested to their extreme limits.”²⁰⁴ Their very molecular formation assures that the pantyhose can achieve this; however, the material is not infallible, nor are the bodies of whom Nengudi’s works speak. For Jessica Bell Brown, Nengudi’s work represents a “persistent awareness of failing.”²⁰⁵ This is made legible through the relationship the artist’s practice has to the body’s choreographies: “to embrace potential downfall is to surrender to the inevitable collaboration between the dancing body and gravitational force.”²⁰⁶ This “downfall” is realized in Nengudi’s praxis through both the moving body and also through the used, moving, transforming materials.

²⁰² Bradley (2014).

²⁰³ Odita (1997: 25).

²⁰⁴ Bradley (2014).

²⁰⁵ Bell Brown, 26.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

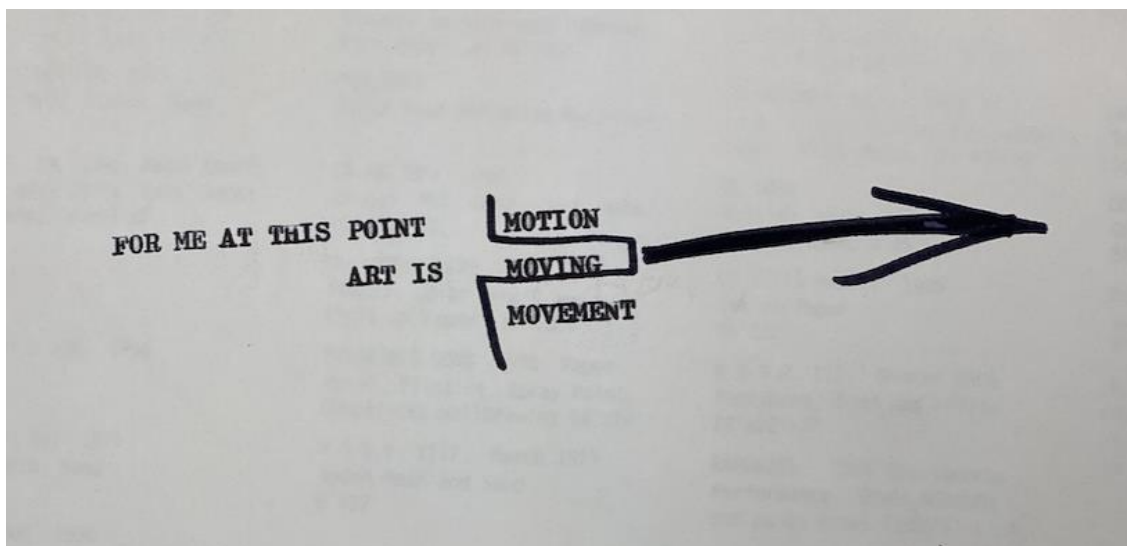


Figure 2.15

Kellie Jones centers movement as defining feature of Nengudi's work from this era, as well as that of her colleagues, friends, and sometimes collaborators Hammons, Maren Hassinger (b. 1947, Los Angeles), and Houston Conwill.²⁰⁷ Movement here is discussed in several modes: in bodily choreographies such as dance forms, but also in the generative possibilities of transience and liberation. Movement can be fashioned itself as a "surfeit" to formal tenets of artmaking. In an undated artist statement from around 1966 [figure 2.15], Nengudi related her own intrinsic association between art and motion. The artist's definition of movement seems capacious, as she tracked various forms of movement throughout her practice, from dance-inspired choreographies to activate her sculptures, to the translation of forms themselves as a form of movement and transformation. In a notebook entry dated September 12, 1982, Nengudi wrote: "To transform one thing into another is such a thrill: be it material, mind, or body. For me transformations are stimulating, titillating, and exciting. That's where I am. That's where I'm going. I salute the

²⁰⁷ Jones (2017).

ocean for its ceaseless efforts in this field.”²⁰⁸ Around the same time, the artist chronicled her response to attending a West Indian Day Parade in Haiti, detailing the process of “being drawn in by performers and becoming a performer instantly yourself.”²⁰⁹ That relationship between seeing a performance—or in the case of Nengudi’s *R.S.V.P.* series, bearing witness to a performative sculpture sometimes activated by dancers, and made of a material that implies a performative process of *wearing*—and becoming performer oneself collapses in her work. This is the importance of haptics for Nengudi: the possibility of touch, vis a vis performance, is always already foregrounded.



Figure 2.16

²⁰⁸ Box 2, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

For Nengudi, her sculptures are artifacts, indexes of movement, and evidence of prior performance and existence.²¹⁰ In fact, her sculptures were always meant to be performed, and were not precious in their production costs or shipping logistics had to do with literal means of survival: “there was always an issue about money, my concept was I could take a whole show and put it in my purse. I could take it out of my purse and hang it up and there you are—there would be no costs for installing or shipping. I liked this idea that a woman’s life is in her purse.”²¹¹ The artist had been exploring this notion of movement, manipulation of materials, impermanence, and access since the 1960s, in fact. In her statement accompanying her degree-earning master’s project, “Black and Red Ensemble,” which was made of four mill black polyethylene and red-colored ceiling, walls and floor, and white spotlights, Nengudi described that her objectives were:

To manipulate a series of large black polyethylene half circle shapes within a defined red-colored area (ceiling, walls and floor). The concepts being dealt with in this project are those of space, time and change. The flexibility of the material makes it readily available for manipulation at will. Space, besides being occupied by these half circles is further effected [sic] by the loose, reflective shapes against a rigid rectangular box (the gallery). Moreover the reflective quality of the material is enhanced by the spotlight illumination. The arrangement and placement of these shapes will be changed each evening after the closing of the gallery, giving additional emphasis to the manipulability of the shapes and their placement. The purpose of the daily change is to present a sense of impermanence and an underlying feeling of casualness.²¹²

By 1977, Nengudi had been experimenting with malleable materials from pantyhose and sand to nylon plastic sheets (see *figure 2.12*, a work referenced earlier in this chapter), plastic bags, cement, water, metal, rubber [*figure 2.16*] and found objects. She would also use materials like

²¹⁰ Auther (2013).

²¹¹ Finkel (2011).

²¹² The author has retained all of Nengudi’s formatting and grammatical structures. Box 1, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

bamboo and cheesecloth in her exhibition *Christopher Columbus* which took place at JAM's TriBeCa location in 1981 [figure 2.17].²¹³ Movement, configured through the dancing body and also through the translation of materials from new to used, from one form to another, was always central to the artist's methodologies.



Figure 2.17

At the end of his *Soho Weekly* 1977 review of *The Whitney Counterweight*, a constellation of five exhibitions staged by artists across New York City in response to the Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial of the same year,²¹⁴ John Perreault arrived at Nengudi as a “discovery”

²¹³ Box 5, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

²¹⁴ Perreault explains in his review that “[t]he *Whitney Counterweight* is an artist-initiated, five-gallery exhibition in artistic dialogue with the Whitney Biennial. An early press release described it as ‘performing an artistic dialectic with the Whitney Biennial. [...] It is the belief of the Whitney Counterweight that artists should be, realistically, responsible and adequately equipped to initiate change, redefine and liberate new movements in the world in which we are one of the

for the critic. The artist's *R.S.V.P.* series was on view in a solo exhibition at JAM as part of the *Counterweight* network of challenges to the Biennial. Perreault was so taken by Nengudi's works, in fact, that he used a method of activating her performative sculptures, namely the maneuver of *stretching* the pantyhose and altering their gravitational center, to formulate his thesis of the review, which was titled "The Whitney Counterweight: Stretching It," and was accompanied by only one image, the image of Nengudi activating her *R.S.V.P. No. 10* (1977) [figure 2.18]. The critic wrote:

Nengudi is a discovery. I first saw some of her works in a group show at Just Above Midtown a month or so ago and she is, from my point of view, one of the stars of the Whitney Counterweight. Her current solo, entitled 'R.S.V.P.' can only confirm her talents, her emotions. For the most part the pieces "look" wonderful. They are "up-to-date." If her work were only "up-to-date" then I wouldn't be moved to write about it. The works have to do with tensions and "tensions," with space and architecture and materials. But above all they have to do with emotions, without being sentimental. Her materials are pantyhose and sand. And yet the anthropomorphic is so stretched out, from wall to wall, from floor to ceiling, that the abstract and the personal and the sociological are perfectly wed. This is feminist type art of the highest order. And yet it is abstract, sort of. That peculiar mixture is exciting. [...] Those sand-filled globs that weight Nengudi's spaces are testicles as well as breasts. Even Joe Namath has been known to wear panty-hose. We have all been stretched by products and by time. And where is the breaking point? It's all an illusion.²¹⁵

working forces. We artists are our own gatekeepers and it is from us, not from the anterooms of creation, that new visions and new movements arise [...] It becomes the responsibility of the artists themselves to initiate a public reality of their shared visions.'" Perreault lodges a few complaints of the Counterweight participating galleries, namely that "a great deal of the work was not yet up and/or labeled." He reports that, once he was able to see all of the works of the 93 participating artists, the Counterweight exhibitions together could be thought of like the independent salons of Paris at the end of the 19th century. As a counter to the Whitney's polished biennial, the critic offers the Counterweight shows as "rugged, ragged" and devoted to "art in the raw" as opposed to the Whitney's devotion to "art that has been digested." His final thought about the opposed exhibitions, the reviewer writes: "for all of its faults, the Counterweight is vital, messy, gargantuan, problematic. It is exactly what we need. It helps to balance the studied 'classy-ness' of the Whitney Biennial." (Perreault, 1977).

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Though Perreault's review reads as a semi-self-congratulatory pondering, the critic regularly championed women artists and displayed perspicacious observations about Nengudi's *R.S.V.P.* sculptures that remain central to this project's argument. His note about the tensions visible in the artist's works between the abstract and the bodily will be the focus of the next section of this chapter, and his note on the works' feminist proclivities will be the attention of the third chapter of this project. Perreault wrote of the bodily processes that Nengudi's sculptures attempt to convey, and of the bodily responses viewers would have upon encountering the works. Moreover, the critic's treatment of Nengudi's process was precise: the artist foregrounded these bodily reactions, all visceral, subconscious, and automatic, but she evaded the saccharine, the slick, and the sentimental. Critically, as a White gay male writer, that Perreault related to the ubiquity of the pantyhose is emblematic of this dissertation's argument that Nengudi's material choice was partially informed by the goods' familiarity and accessibility across all classes and genders in the United States at the time. Though Perreault does not seem privy to the point of the artists' materials as previously used garments, a central methodology of the artist and to this dissertation's argument, Perreault aptly identified several vectors of Nengudi's practice that coalesced in her performative sculptures.



Figure 2.18

Contextualism, as coined by Bryant and Philips in 1978, encapsulated and described a specific type or strain of Postminimalism deployed by African American artists in which materials and objects shift from original or intended contexts to explore new networks of relationships with the surrounding world and viewers. Crucially, Contextualist art practices were iterated and completed over and over again; they are never fully complete or permanent. The *found* aspect of Nengudi's performative sculptures, theorized through Bryant and Philips as *remains*, functioned as a route towards the body, even as that route relied on the possibilities of abstraction. This process will be articulated through Nengudi's inclusion in *Afro-American Abstraction*, the 1980 exhibition at PS1, New York, which is the primary focus of the final section in this chapter.

Afro-American Abstraction

Two years after the publication of *Contextures*, and curated by April Kingsley, the exhibition *Afro-American Abstraction* opened at PS1 in Long Island City, Queens, New York on February

17 and was on view through April 6, 1980. There was a small booklet published on the occasion of the exhibition,²¹⁶ which was later expanded into a complete exhibition catalogue by the Art Museum Association (AMA) in 1982.²¹⁷ In addition to Nengudi, the artists included were Ellsworth Ausby (b. 1942 Portsmouth, Virginia; d. 2011 New York City), Ed Clark, Houston Conwill, Melvin Edwards, Sam Gilliam, Maren Hassinger, Richard Hunt (b. 1935, Chicago, Illinois), Jamilah Jennings (b. 1946 Anniston, Alabama), James Little, Al Loving, Tyrone Mitchell (b. 1944 Savannah, Georgia), Howardena Pindell, Martin Puryear (b. 1941, Washington, D.C.), Charles Searles (b. 1937, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; d. 2004, New York City), George Smith (b. 1941),²¹⁸ Jack Whitten (b. 1939, Bessemer, Alabama; d. 2018 New York City), and William T. Williams.

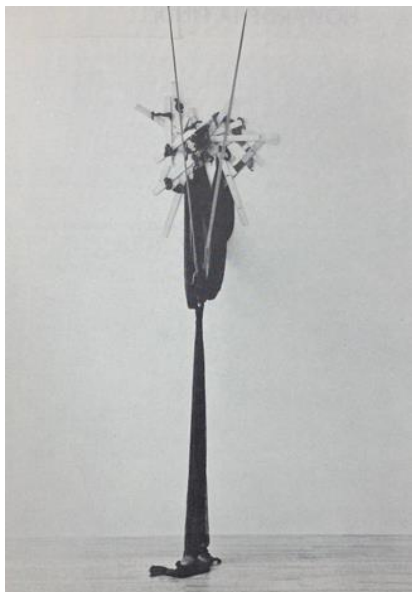


Figure 2.19

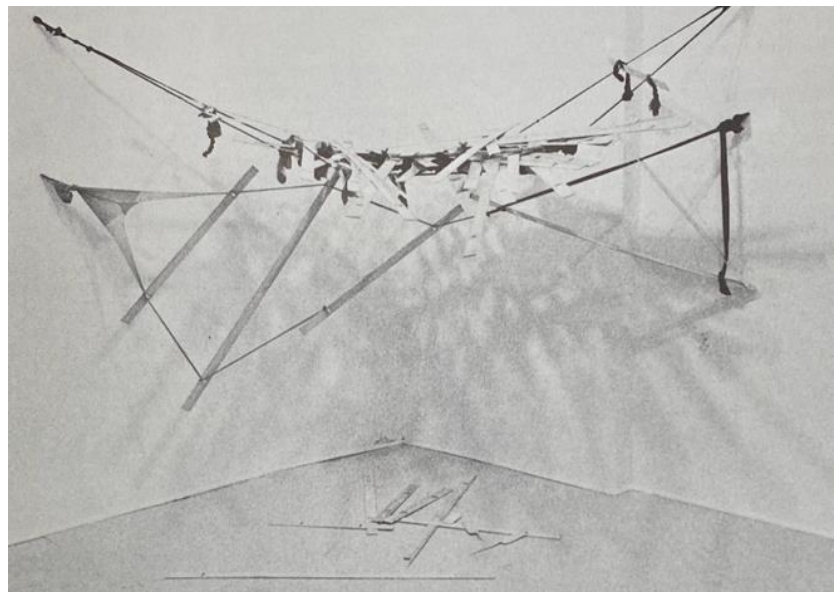


Figure 2.20

²¹⁶ Box 3, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ At the time of writing, the author has been unable to verify Smith's birthplace. He has been a resident of Houston, Texas for nearly four decades.

Two years later, beginning in 1982, the Art Museum Association (AMA) restaged Kingsley's exhibition and sent the show on a national tour between July 1, 1982 and November 11, 1984.²¹⁹ For the 1980 PS1 installation, Nengudi contributed her piece *Maybe a Hamburger Will Soak Up the Tears* made in the same year [figure 2.19]. Made of an unidentified fabric, wood, and sand, *Maybe a Hamburger* towered at over twelve feet tall and four feet wide. For the 1982-1984 tour, perhaps due to the fragile and ephemeral nature of her works, Nengudi exhibited *Nukey Nukey* also made in 1980 [figure 2.20]. The announcement card for the original 1980 exhibition announced a multidisciplinary program that was to include poetry, film, photography, and sound, and incorporated performances by artists not included in the exhibition, like Lisa Jones, Pope.L., and Ralph Lemon, to name only a few.²²⁰

Kingsley claimed in her 1981 version of the introductory text to the exhibition catalogue that "*Afro-American Abstraction* is the first important survey of its kind since the spate of shows

²¹⁹ Terri Cohn, the associate curator of the exhibition, announced in a letter to Nengudi on 21 March 1983 that the exhibition was "very well received," resulting in a "substantial tour." Box 9, Senga Nengudi papers, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C. *Afro-American Abstraction* toured the following venues: Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles, California (July 1-August 30, 1982); The Oakland Museum, Oakland, California (November 13, 1982-January 2, 1983); The Brooks Memorial Art Gallery, Memphis, Tennessee (February 10-March 24, 1983); The Art Center, South Bend, Indiana (September 4-October 16, 1983); Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio (January 22-February 26, 1984); Bellevue Art Museum, Bellevue, Washington (March 25-May 6, 1984); Laguna Gloria Museum of Art (June 1-July 15, 1984); and Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, Mississippi (September 7-November 11, 1984). It is worth noting that the Mississippi Museum of Art venue was tentative, and at the time of writing, the author has been unable to confirm that the exhibition concluded its tour here. The catalogue does not list a venue after the Laguna Gloria Museum of Art; the only indications of the Mississippi exhibition are in correspondence from the AMA coordinators to Nengudi in 1982. Box 12, Senga Nengudi papers, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.

²²⁰ Box 3 of 2021 addition, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

devoted to Black artists around 1970.”²²¹ Her goal in curating the exhibition was to “update the work of some established Black artists, as well as to introduce many talented younger artists who have emerged since that time.”²²² Anticipating the critique that there was no coherent abstract style that united these artists, Kingsley proposed that all 19 artists “convey a common spirit.”²²³ The language and optics of Kingsley, a White woman, curating a show of exclusively Black artists united under a “common spirit” certainly warrants skepticism in her use of an essentializing framework. Equipped with rightful suspicions, this section moves forward to understand why Kingsley mounted this survey show at this moment in the early 1980s, and what Nengudi specifically contributed to the curator’s understanding of abstraction at the time.

Deploying “heritage” as the operative methodology of abstraction uniting the artists, Kingsley defined her terms through first, the artist’s “direct heritage,” by which the curator meant the “modernist [art] tradition,” and second, the artist’s cultural and ethnic heritage.²²⁴ She situated the artists’ abstract works in the art historical modernist wake of Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism, and in the avant of Postminimalism and Conceptual art. For Kingsley, the influence of these earlier movements was made clear in the formal and material properties of her selected artist through the use of “shaped canvas, patterning, and assemblage,” and “welded-steel construction and installation art.”²²⁵ The conversation about the artists’ “direct heritage” quickly

²²¹ Kingsley, *Afro-American Abstraction* (1981). Box 3, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

segued into the curator's assertion that alongside these "mainstream modes," the works "[evoked] subtle involvement in [the artists'] African cultural heritage."²²⁶ The formal properties of this minimally-specific geographical connection came forth through "bold physicality, rhymical liveliness, and textural richness, as well as a tendency to use linear, geometric imagery, and high-energy color."²²⁷ Through the work of Alain Locke, W.E.B. DuBois, James H. Porter, and artists Whitten, Edwards, and Loving, Kingsley defended her position that Africa, as both specific geographical place and theoretical idea of homeland, was a site in the abstract imaginary of the artists in *Afro-American Abstraction*.



Figure 2.21

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

She charted the artists' relationships with the continent, whether through physical visits or through more distanced forms of research and identifies how their travels formally affected their artworks. Williams and Clark were both inspired after trips to Nigeria; Puryear gleaned technical skill after years of teaching in Sierra Leone; Edwards made several (unspecified) trips to the continent to study vernacular architectures; though Hunt never traveled there, he had a vast collection of African sculpture. For those artists who did not have such direct relationships with Africa, the curator found formal and material links: Edwards referenced Bakota figures, Chase-Riboud had a "ceremonial mask aspect," and Pindell's hanging grid was "dedicated to the Macumba goddess Iemanja."²²⁸ Conwill, Hassinger, and Nengudi, Kingsley mentions, were also united in their representation by Linda Goode Bryant. In their exhibitions and events at JAM, they had explored the possibilities of performance connected to African "ritualistic and mythic aspects."²²⁹ Nengudi's *Maybe a Hamburger Will Soak Up the Tears* (1980) [see figure 2.19 above] specifically demonstrated "more subtle correspondences" but had "coincidental physiognomic similarity to Bambaran antelope heads"²³⁰ [figure 2.21].

It is true that Nengudi was thinking about Africa, especially through questions of spirituality and ritual. The artist had been thinking about her personal and wider communal relationship with the continent for a few years by the time of *Afro-American Abstraction*. This interest likely swelled during the artist's time in New York City between the years 1971 and 1974 when she encountered and became friends with artists in the WEUSI Collective, which is soon discussed in this section. In 1974, the artist, whose birth name was Sue Ellen Irons, changed

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

her name to N'Senga, which was later shortened to Senga, which was a name that a friend of hers from Zaire (now the Republic of Congo) had given her. Nengudi was subsequently added.²³¹

While Kingsley skirted the line of cohering “Africa” as a monolithic, homogenized imaginary, she attempted to be specific with her selected artists and their references, and culled together a group of artists who had not been exhibited at such a scale prior. Her emphasis on abstract works of all mediums arrived as a critical survey of artists who operated against the tenets of realism and figuration that reigned during the Black Arts Movement, which had culminated only five years prior to the opening of the exhibition and also underscored a relationship to African ancestry.²³² Like the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, the Black Arts Movement “championed the aesthetic pleasure of blackness and focused on reception by black audiences.”²³³

The Movement was wary of abstraction as incapable of communicating a nationalist agenda. There were financial concerns with abstraction, too, as an approach to artmaking that could not bring prosperity to Black creatives. A famous example of the neglecting of a Black abstractionist is found in Norman Lewis, who exhibited with Willard Gallery and was revered by critics, though he never saw much success during his lifetime.²³⁴ Just Above Midtown Gallery, despite its investment in conceptual and abstract practices, had to make money to sustain itself.

²³¹ For a more complete examination of Nengudi’s evocation of “Africa” in her works, see Jones, *South of Pico* (2017); Jones, “Black West,” (2006); Odita (1997); and the artist’s interview with Green (2018) wherein she discusses the influence of Yoruban masks and African drumming on her practice.

²³² Jones, “Black West,” (2006).

²³³ *Ibid.*, 21.

²³⁴ See Gibson (1992) and Henderson (1996).

They sold David Hammons' body prints, and Palmer Hayden's watercolors, which scholar Lisa Meyerowitz says "sold consistently at JAM to beginning Black collectors for between \$125 and \$500."²³⁵ Hammons would switch to more conceptual and installation practices by 1975, which Linda Goode Bryant supported, as her mission "was not dictated by money and the ability to buy supplies."²³⁶ In fact, Goode Bryant defiantly championed debt as a critical method of how she sustained the space during its multi-year run in the 2022 *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Similar to Hammons, Nengudi was "not oriented toward commercial value."²³⁷ As this chapter has described, part of this was due to the fact that the artist was not interested in permanence. Nengudi described to Meyerowitz in 2000 that she deliberately used materials that do not last: "It's part of my philosophy of dealing with what the human body goes through, transforms itself—similar to African art which is made of wood, and, eaten by termites, turns to dust. I was interested in transformation and materials that have their own life."²³⁸ This is not to say that Nengudi did not sell any artworks: in a letter from Goode Bryant to the artist dated 31 March 1977, the gallerist wrote: "[t]hings are popping, especially for you and David [Hammons]. The response has been tremendous," and enclosed a check and a statement of sale of two artworks.²³⁹

²³⁵ See Meyerowitz, 254; and Hockley interview with Goode Bryant (2019).

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 255.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ The two artworks that sold were titled *Sakkin* and *Chant*, for \$100.00 each, and were sold to Gylbert Coker and Barbara Mitchell, respectively. It is worth noting that Goode Bryant's invoice of sale reads that the artist's percentage of the proceeds is 60%, which is more than the common gallery rule of 50% divide between gallery and artist. Box 9, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Upon her relocation to Harlem where she was based for the first half of the 1970s, Nengudi described feelings of dislocation while attempting to anchor her practice within both the “uptown scene” and the “downtown scene.” Uptown, Nengudi gathered with artists at the Studio Museum in Harlem and at the Weusi-Nyumba Ya Sanaa Academy of Fine Art Studies.²⁴⁰ Invested in representation as the appropriate mode of communication in the service of Black nationalism, the uptown scene did not cohere with Nengudi’s abstraction, or as Nengudi has described, she “could not resolve” the issue of representation uptown.²⁴¹ Similarly, the art community downtown was dominated by White artists. Nengudi explained, “I wasn’t ready or excited by the downtown scene...The politics and ways of doing things [at downtown galleries] were not particularly fair.”²⁴² It might have made Nengudi more confident to know that one day, acclaimed culture critic Greg Tate would say that her sculptures made of pantyhose “[treat] the modern art cathedral’s sterile white cube as a maroon-occupied forum for elegantly and gesturally bursting loose from the cube’s imperialist designs.”²⁴³ He might have said the same about Buchanan’s *frustula*, fragmenting apart the whiteness of the gallery space.

Kellie Jones has offered nuance to the ways in which the aims of the Black Arts Movement percolated through artists working in abstraction, particularly in assemblage. For if the rhetoric of the Movement stipulated a commitment to social consciousness and the well-

²⁴⁰ The WEUSI Artist Collective was formed in 1965 in response to the Black Arts Movements. Derived from Swahili and meaning “Blackness,” WEUSI united artists who deployed recognizable African imageries and symbolisms into their works. The Weusi Nyumba Ya Sanaa Gallery was based out of 158 West 132nd Street and became the Weusi-Nyumba Ya Sanaa Academy of Fine Art Studies in the early 1970s.

²⁴¹ Meyerowitz, 230.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ Tate (2018).

being of the Black community, then Noah Purifoy's "junk was democratic," as were the assemblages--an artform itself that Jones has argued was linked to "narratives of poverty"—of Betye Saar, John Riddle, and John Outterbridge.²⁴⁴ Jones quoted Outterbridge discussing assemblage's sociopolitical valences: "how you use whatever is available to you, and what is available to you is not mere material but the material and the essence of the political climate, the material in the debris of social issues."²⁴⁵ This sentiment that materials evoke a political history is critical to Nengudi's choice of pantyhose as the container of her sensual sculptures.

Purifoy, Outterbridge, Riddle, and Saar exemplified the Los Angeles assemblage aesthetic of the 1960s and paved the way for artists like Nengudi to explore assemblage by different means. At the same time, the Black Arts Movement's culmination, as diffuse as it was, marked an inflection point in the political landscape. Scholars have revealed the multitude of reasons why the Movement ended, some more progressive than others. Two causes include that by the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, there was increased oppression and violence against nationalist groups like the Black Panthers backed by the U.S. government; and there was a new swell of attention to Black women writers and creatives in the 1970s which countered the Movement's hyper-masculinity.²⁴⁶ Jones has assured however, that the Movement's "lessons about the profound beauty *and* complexity of black culture were never lost, and moved forward into the future."²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 29. From Outterbridge's 1993 oral history with University of California, Los Angeles.

²⁴⁶ See Jones (2006).

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

Nengudi's assembled structures incorporated a charge towards performance that earlier abstract artists had not prioritized, just as she focused on Black women within the burgeoning landscape of second-wave feminism. Greg Tate formulated this newfound freedom for Black artists to explore and experiment with sources, methodologies, materials, and forms as "cultural confidence," which "freed up more black artists to do work as wonderfully absurdist as black life itself."²⁴⁸ Tate illuminated assemblage as not only the term for the material conglomerates of artists like during this time, but also to understand the myriad referents artists now felt able to incorporate, from political thought leaders to filmmakers, theater to jazz and DJs, poetry to dance.²⁴⁹ However, like Jones, Tate noted that the "cult-nats" are owed a debt for "making so much noise about the mythic beauties of blackness that these artists could traffic in the ugly and mundane sides with just as much ardor."²⁵⁰ Beyond her own bodily experiences, Nengudi's sources of inspiration stretched from the Japanese avant-garde group Gutai, which formed in 1945,²⁵¹ to African rites and rituals,²⁵² to the choreographies of her friends.²⁵³ Scholars have elucidated her connection to these sources, as well as link her objects to the sculptures of Claes Oldenburg and the assemblages of Bruce Conner.²⁵⁴ The importance of these varied sources is

²⁴⁸ Tate (1986).

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ See Jones (2017); Lax (2018); Weber (2020).

²⁵² See Jones (2017); Oditia (1997).

²⁵³ See Bell Brown (2015); Bowles (2016).

²⁵⁴ See Jones (2017); Lax (2018).

Nengudi's refusal of a single taxonomy and a single hero of her work. She privileged communal space and embodied knowledge, grafted from global sources.

Where Tate located Nengudi's sculptures within an expanded field of assemblage, Rizvana Bradley has positioned Nengudi within a wider matrix of Black performance, an extension to Jones' designation of movement as a defining feature of the artist's practice.²⁵⁵ Bradley has formulated Black performance as an intervening theoretical corrective to Rosalind Krauss' famous 1979 charge of the "expanded field of sculpture" wherein sculpture of the 1970s was configured in the negative—against architecture and against landscape.²⁵⁶ Bradley adds Blackness as a condition alongside Krauss' proposed "axiomatic features of the architectural experience"²⁵⁷—space, weight, depth, and physicality—all conditions that Bradley asserts are altered if experienced as a Black "lived body."²⁵⁸ Propelled towards a discovery of new axiomatic features, in Bradley's formulation, Nengudi's *R.S.V.P.* series are postmodern sculptures of the highest order that "pursue the practiced technique of corporeal expression and revelation that have emerged in the wake of a long history of bodily depravation."²⁵⁹

In 1977 on the occasion of first exhibitions of her *R.S.V.P.* series at both Pearl C. Woods Gallery in Los Angeles and Just Above Midtown Gallery in New York, Nengudi wrote: "[m]y works are abstracted reflections of used bodies—visual images that serve my aesthetic decisions

²⁵⁵ Bradley (2015).

²⁵⁶ Krauss (1979).

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁵⁸ Bradley (2015: 164).

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

as well as my ideas.”²⁶⁰ Where Uri McMillan has offered that Nengudi’s *R.S.V.P.* sculptures are “abstract gesture[s] of becoming,”²⁶¹ I add that they are also gestures of *undoing*, of ruination, and of *sag*.²⁶² Abstraction allowed Nengudi to represent the very condition of being used. Her sculptures’ anthropomorphism is not literal. Instead, it is a sensual anthropomorphism whose forms are inspired by the very feelings, physical and emotional, of wear and age.

Nengudi’s investment in articulating sensuality motivated her artmaking practice since its genesis in the 1960s. In Rizvana Bradley’s words, Nengudi’s sculptures, through their sensual matrix of “making, doing, and enacting” offer “an alternative mode of sensuality, of corporeal inhabitation and experience” that “[resists] the practice of formal aesthetic making.”²⁶³ Accessed through her chosen materials, her devotion to bodies both in motion and used, and her commitment to abstraction as form, Nengudi’s *R.S.V.P.* series have political and art historical stakes that resonate equally in the late 1970s as they do today. From the earthly materials of water and sand to engineered plastics and industrialized textiles, the materials that Nengudi partners evoke experiences of touch and wear within viewers. Her sculptures’ abstracted forms allow for a kind of cognitive distance between being overtly of the body and being complete formal ruminations. Within this imagined distance, the very physical sensations and the

²⁶⁰ Nengudi, “Nylon mess [sic] series,” announcement. Box 1, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

²⁶¹ McMillan, 98.

²⁶² The third chapter of this dissertation returns to Jessica Bell Brown’s inspection of the *sag* in Nengudi’s works.

²⁶³ Bradley, “Transferred Flesh,” 163-5.

internalized feelings of the body are ushered forward, claiming their ability to communicate knowledge across bodies, places, and time.

For Nengudi, sensuality was an act of revolution: foregrounding her own feelings and experiences *became* political and was first a vulnerable act of expression. The artist's feminism was at once specific (related to Black women's bodies) and universal (she referenced the "commonalities" between all bodies, on a cellular level). Nengudi's sculptural inventions are feminist anti-capitalist gestures that at once privilege embodied knowledge, what Nengudi artistically theorized through sensuality, while refusing proper use of an economic commodity, one bound up in histories of material production and market anticipation. Her recapitulation of used pantyhose not only coopted a highly marketed good, one traditionally geared towards women's bodies, but also rebuked those materials historically used in the service of "good art," namely durable materials made specifically for the act of artmaking. By working against the earlier discussed false dichotomy of abstraction and figuration, incorporating multivalent and layered sources, invoking a communal politics that relies on embodied knowledge, and offering a new recourse to the body through abstraction, Nengudi's feminist politics were and remain unique. Her methods insisted upon recycling and refusal—twinned actions that worked together against capitalist expectations of consumption. Like Nengudi, Buchanan similarly labored against simple ingestion of her artworks, instead offering a newly configured feminist circuit of resistance and refusal. The final chapter that follows will offer a close examination of Buchanan and Nengudi's feminisms.

CHAPTER THREE
MATERIALIZING COMMUNITY: *DIALECTICS OF ISOLATION* (1980)
AND THE MAKING OF A NEW “WOMANIST” IMAGINARY

First used by Alice Walker in her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose* published in 1983, “womanism” was the author’s term to describe a feminist politic that centered Black women and women of color. Though *womanism* was popularized in the 1980s, after Buchanan began her *frustulum* series and Nengudi her *R.S.V.P.* series, these artists were perspicacious in their skepticism about the second wave of feminism that dominated the 1970s political landscape for its monolithic casting of “woman” as an upper-middle-class White woman. Nengudi’s own archives reveal research into *womanism* as a more appropriate formulation for her own ideas.²⁶⁴ Paired with their distrust of traditional modernist modes of abstraction and artmaking, the practices of Buchanan and Nengudi, this chapter contends, foresaw the need for a worldview that prioritized and took seriously the specific experiences of Black women artists, both within a White-dominated art system, and against a backdrop of patriarchal nationalism.²⁶⁵

In an interview from 1972 with former Cinque Gallery program coordinator Patricia Gloster, which is briefly discussed in the first chapter, Buchanan expressed discontent and concern about the rigor of the feminist movement and its capacity to help Black women. In

²⁶⁴ Box 2, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

²⁶⁵ Nengudi was more vocal than Buchanan about the divide they experienced within Black intellectual circles of the focus on nationalism, which was also patriarchal in its methods and goals, and the resulting harm, or ambiguity with which Black women were treated. See Auther (2013) interview with Nengudi where she describes her hopes for “healing” between the Black men and Black women of her community.

response to Gloster's query about whether or not the "women's liberation movement [had] been beneficial to women painters,"²⁶⁶ Buchanan responded:

I think that the women's movement, on a whole, has helped to highlight the difficulties that women artists face as a group. In that sense, they have been beneficial. It remains to be seen exactly what the results of the movement, as far as getting women more shows, will be. As far as pointing out to museums and galleries and the general public exactly what kinds of problems women have as artists because they are women, the women's liberation movement has certainly been in the forefront of doing that. I think some of the other things that might be done, for example, would be to publish more stories, intimate stories, or the problems women have had to race and about the obstacles we have had to overcome, as some men have had, but specifically because they have been women.²⁶⁷

The artist pointed to hopes of a proliferation of more stories authored by women, to increase the understanding of how capacious the "women's experience" really was. Speaking to women artists in particular, Buchanan lauded the movement's efforts to raise awareness of the marginalization of women in the arts. However, she remained concerned about the long-term shifts that the movement bolstered. Buchanan was prescient in these concerns. Gloster continued, and asked the artist about Black women's position in the second-wave feminist imaginary, to which Buchanan ponders:

I am not sure the women's movement is really ready for the black woman artist. Black women artists are emerging as a dynamic force on their own, and I don't think that they need the women's liberation movement. Black women artists, I think, share a general suspicion that once the hurrah has died down, the black woman artist will still be at the back door and what we will have is the white woman artist who has gotten her work shown and that is about it. We can agree on the basic principles of the women's movement, but as far as black women artists are concerned, it is my impression that most are a little skeptical. When the battle is over, we'll have been left out anyway.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Box 15, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Buchanan does not sound optimistic, understandably so. Looking back at her experience in the early to mid-1970s trying to get her work shown by galleries in New York, Buchanan recounted how one gallery said to her, “we don’t show Black art,” to which the artist responded with her trademark dry wit, “oh good, let me show you my slides.”²⁶⁹ Nengudi was vocal, too, about Black women artists’ exclusion and disavowal from White art spaces. Where the second-wave feminist movement displaced domesticity and child-rearing, Nengudi noted that many Black women could not afford childcare. For Nengudi, her experience of pregnancy and care for her children and those of her friends was always at the forefront of her day-to-day life, and so that the White artist feminist gatherings did not allow children was absurd to the artist. Similarly, and as quoted earlier in this project, Nengudi was unphased by the feminist push to economic independence by securing jobs for women, for as she noted, “Black women have always had to work.”²⁷⁰ In a more recent 2009 interview with feminist scholar Amelia Jones, Nengudi was even more clear:

My own Black community I found the most engaging and inspiring...The feminist movement was a whole other story. Don’t get me started! We were included in as a necessity. I hardly felt like an equal partner. Although I did sit on a couple Women’s Building committees, it never quite felt like home in the early days. [...] Maren Hassinger was asked to be in a Women’s Building show: she was the only Black female to be asked to be in the show. Though she was included in the show we did a protest performance on the steps of the entry to the exhibit. It was called the “Spooks Who Sat By the Door.” We stood there in silence. They didn’t get it. Once again, we were invisible.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ Buchanan recounted this story as an address to a 1985 symposium audience, which was recorded and reported years later in an ARTnews article by Patricia Failing from March 1989 titled “Black Artists Today: A Case of Exclusion.” Box 2, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

²⁷⁰ Taormina, 33-4.

²⁷¹ Jones (2009).

Nengudi registered her frustrations with tokenism and the overlooking of Black women artists. Citing the inspiration and support derived from her own “Black community,” Nengudi signaled a palpable alienation from White feminist art circles.²⁷²

In 1972, the same year of the Gloster interview, on Wednesday, August 16, Buchanan imagined otherwise in a diary: “if only I could not think so much about these doomed young Black women I see every day.”²⁷³ The artist, who had been a public health educator in East Orange, New Jersey to support her emerging art practice, committed to the arts fully when she was 37 years old, upon being accepted to exhibit in Truman Gallery’s 1977 exhibition of “new talent.” With two master’s degrees from Columbia University, one in parasitology and one in public health, Buchanan’s profound concern about the status of Black women was likely rooted in a wider understanding of how the health industry failed Black women specifically.

It is no stretch to think that Buchanan, in her academic and professional studies of health, had learned about the vesicovaginal fistula surgeries of controversial doctor James Marion Sims, the “father of modern gynecology,” who, in the 1850s in New York established the first hospital devoted exclusively to women. It is therefore likely that Buchanan, in naming her series *frustula*, which she has noted as relating to the Latin etymology of *fragment*, was also alluding to this medical affliction of *fistulas*. Sims was born in 1813 in South Carolina, and later relocated to Alabama to open a practice after his two first patients died while in his care. Though Sims had no gynecological training—indeed gynecology was not an established discipline, and few doctors concerned themselves with women’s healthcare at the time—he began experimenting in

²⁷² For more on experiences and theories of White feminist circles and subsequent alienation of non-White women, see Collins (2008) and Threadcraft (2016).

²⁷³ Box 16, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

surgical treatments of vesicovaginal fistulas after a patient came to him with a vaginal injury after falling off a horse. The National Institute of Health defines a vesicovaginal fistula as an “abnormal opening between the bladder and the vagina that results in continuous and unremitting urinary incontinence,” and qualifies the “entity” as “among the most distressing complications of gynecologic and obstetric procedures.”²⁷⁴ Fistulas, generally defined as an opening the forms between two parts of the body, can occur in many sites on the body. Vesicovaginal fistulas specifically are formed as the result of complications during childbirth, after vaginal or bladder surgeries, infections, or injuries, and have been linked to gynecological cancer. The only way to repair a vesicovaginal fistula is through surgery. Between 1845 and 1849, Sims performed experimental vesicovaginal fistula operations on enslaved Black women with no anesthesia. Many modern scholars have discussed the unacceptable ethics of these operations, while others have defended his surgeries as incredible feats of tenacity and research that saved patients from the indescribable pain caused by fistulas.²⁷⁵ By the time of the relocation of his practice from the south to New York in the 1850s, the use of anesthetics had become more widespread, thus opening his surgeries to White women, and proliferating his research across more wealthy and White populations.²⁷⁶

It is part of this project’s assertion that Buchanan always foregrounded Black women’s bodies in her practice, as the artist was inundated with concern about their condition of being “doomed”—both in their physical health and institutional neglect. Nengudi shared Buchanan’s

²⁷⁴ See Stamatakos, et al (2014).

²⁷⁵ See Wall (2006).

²⁷⁶ Kapsalis (1997).

concerns with Black women's health, especially in their centering of care for others. In her 1977 press release accompanying the first exhibition of her *R.S.V.P.* series, Nengudi wrote,

I am working with nylon mesh because it relates to the elasticity of the human body. From tender, tight beginnings to sagging end... The body can only stand so much push and pull until it gives way, never to resume its original shape. After giving birth to my own son, I thought of black wet-nurses suckling child after child—their own as well as those of others, until their breasts rested on their knees, their energies drained.”²⁷⁷

This informed the artist's interest in “used bodies,” and underscores the primacy of the body in the artist's material choices. Further, Nengudi acknowledged the labor of healthcare that Black women performed, for their own children, and for the community.

Nengudi drew what she imagined to be the look and feel of sagging breasts, tired from providing sustenance, contorting the back's ability to support. Four sketches from one of her notebooks from 1976 depict these ample breasts: at once they relent to gravity, just as they propel movement [*figures 3.1-3.4*].²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ Nylon mess (sic) series Nengudi Pearl C Wood 3 box 1 Amistad Archives (1977) press release notes. For more on the act of suckling and taking away, or draining Black women's bodies, see Morgan (1997).

²⁷⁸ Box 12, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

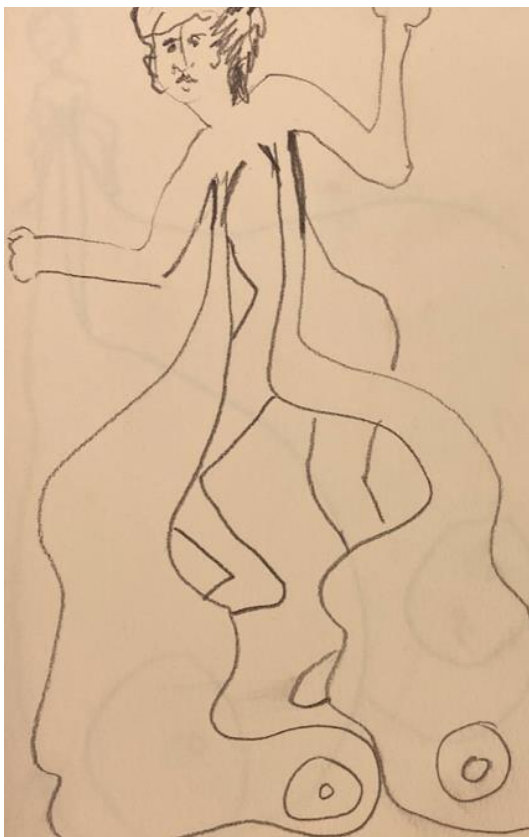


Figure 3.1

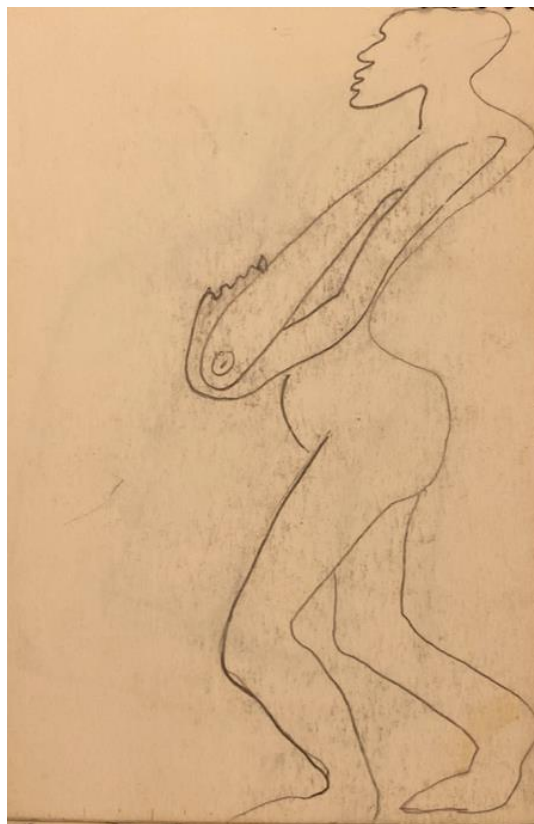


Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3

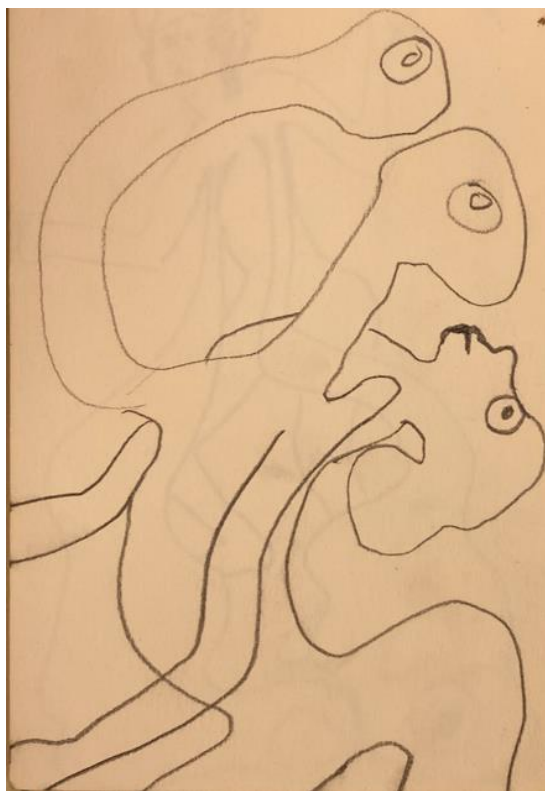


Figure 3.4

These evocative sketches exaggerate the physical realization of fatigue. In their heightened physicality, the sketches, some of which show smudges by the artist's hand, convey the feeling of exhaustion their bearers felt. Jessica Bell Brown writes of the alienation between distended breasts and supporting body that Nengudi seems to capture in these drawing, configured through the image of a *sag*:

A 'sag' connotes not only a slow undoing, as with a dress hem lowering to the floor stitch by stitch, but also time's victory over the body's once-supple vitality, an unfriendliness to the physicality of the body. Muscles atrophy; skin loses its collagen and slowly droops. Over time our bodies betray us by simply becoming unrecognizable.²⁷⁹

As Bell Brown suggests in the same writing, Nengudi's sculptures, sutured to the wall as they are, are acts of defiance in the face of unavoidable sag; it is "at this threshold between free fall and weightlessness" where the artist's pantyhose and sand sculptures live.²⁸⁰ Unwieldy, heavy, and destabilizing, Nengudi's sketched breasts are uncontrollable, excessive, and agents of their own choreographies. The artist's fixation on breasts as capable of life-providing sustenance, as the site of labor performed by Black women, signals the artist's methodology of foregrounding embodied knowledge in her practice. Especially invested in the feeling of bodies that have undergone various forms of duress, the artist searched for a material that "reflected the female body," for which she chose pantyhose after the birth of her first son in 1974.²⁸¹ It was crucial for the artist that this material was flexible, but not infinitely so. The pantyhose's flexibility mimics the making and undoing of the body. In an artist questionnaire with Just Above Midtown gallery dated around 1977 [see image reprinted as *figure 2.8* in the second chapter of this dissertation],

²⁷⁹ Bell Brown, 24.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ Author (2013). Nengudi would have her second child in 1979.

Nengudi wrote of her interest in “nylon mesh” as a material that “extends itself beyond its original shape, [it’s] flexible.”²⁸² Of filling the material with sand, Nengudi described that sand is “constant, yet always changing” by which she meant its accumulated form can shift while retaining approximately similar volumes and spaces.²⁸³ Firm skin eventually gives over time; just as the nylon transfigures to make space for the weight of the sand, the body endures, though not limitlessly.

On the occasion of her inclusion in a 2018 group exhibition called *The Un-Heroic Act: Representations of Rape in Contemporary Women’s Art in the U.S.*, Nengudi described to the curator Monika Fabijanska that:

It was about the human condition in general, and specifically women’s. I have a young cousin who almost died as a result of a plastic surgery. Sadly, we (and I do mean “we”) do everything to try to fit into the societal view of perfect, pretty, the norm. It was true in the 70s. It is even truer today. My pieces are abstraction of the bodies, the emotions, the physicality. There are layers of what happens to us as women. What I dealt with in *R.S.V.P.* directly was my pregnancy, but then the other stuff came out almost unbeknownst to me.²⁸⁴

Nengudi cited the societal pressures placed on women’s bodies, which can become so intense that women subject themselves to physical danger in the pursuit of a perceived image of perfection. This pressure is a familiar experience for the artist who once described that during her studies of dance in the 1960s, she felt discomfort in her body, as it did not conform to look like the bodies of her classmates.²⁸⁵ Nengudi further elucidated the centrality of the body’s *feelings* in

²⁸² Box 9, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ Fabijanska (2018).

²⁸⁵ Bradley (2014).

her thinking: “it wasn’t just about the body; it was about tensions, mentally as well as physically—what the body goes through just during life.”²⁸⁶

The feminism of Buchanan and Nengudi comes forward through their choice of materials, their investment in abstraction as a way of accessing the Black women’s bodily experience, their theorizations and creative explorations of ruination and remains, and finally in their commitment to a new womanist imaginary. One site of this exploration of a new, more capacious feminism, was the Artists in Residence Gallery in New York. (A.I.R.). This chapter focuses on the site of A.I.R. and its iterant collectives and publications, including the Heresies Collective, and is especially concerned with the 1980 exhibition *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*.

Heresies

In mid-December 1979, Buchanan received a letter²⁸⁷ from Ana Mendieta inviting Buchanan to submit slides of her works for consideration in what would become the fabled 1980 exhibition *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States* at

²⁸⁶ Author (2013).

²⁸⁷ Box 12, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

²⁸⁸ Alfred Sauvy, the French scientist, first coined the term “Third World” in 1952. Originally a Cold War-era term used to describe those nations that were neither aligned with the countries that comprised NATO (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, West Germany) nor with the Communist Bloc (those communist states in Central and Eastern Europe and East and Southeast Asia that were under the hegemony of the Soviet Union), “Third World” signals those nations in what we now call the “Global South,” inclusive of most countries in Asia, Africa, and Central and Latin America. The term was adopted by women of color in the 1970s to signal a way of theorizing transnationality, decolonial politics, and a feminist scaffolding inclusive of class, race, and gender. For further information on the history of the term

A.I.R. Gallery in New York.²⁸⁹ This exchange was the beginning of Buchanan and Mendieta's friendship and artistic exchange that would last through Mendieta's untimely death in 1985.

Mendieta explained to Buchanan that she had seen Buchanan's work at the Heresies Collective office when Buchanan submitted slides of her sculptures to be included in the 1979 issue of the Collective's journal, *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*. The issue in question, called *Third World Women: The Politics of Being Other*²⁹⁰ explored artistic engagements with so-called "Third World feminism," in the United States, a movement that disrupted and destabilized the all-too-White conventions of the 1970s Second Wave feminist movement. This issue was borne of prior critiques and protests levied against *Heresies* for its lack of inclusion of women artists of color in earlier issues; indeed, the collective's membership was nearly exclusively White during the 1970s and 1980s.²⁹¹

Combahee River Collective, the Boston-based Black feminist collective active from 1974 through 1980, aimed rightful critique at *Heresies* for their lack of inclusion of any women artists

"Third World feminism," see Sandoval (1991). For consideration of the term "Third World feminism" in an art historical context, see D'Souza (2018).

²⁸⁹ A.I.R. Gallery, the first feminist art gallery in the United States, was established in 1972 as an artists' collective, exhibition space, and non-profit gallery. Though revolutionary in its framework and approach to artists' financial empowerment, A.I.R. Gallery had a predominately white and middle-class membership. Howardena Pindell was the only Black founding member of the gallery; Pindell shouldered the early labor of combatting white-and-classist feminism in the gallery space by holding accountable the gallery's membership structure which required financial contributions to the collective's space. D'Souza, (2018).

²⁹⁰ "Third World Women—The Politics of Being Other," issue 8, *Heresies* 2, no. 4 (1979). This issue of *Heresies* was edited and realized by Lula Mae Blocton, Yvonne Flowers, Valerie Harris, Zarina Hashmi, Virginia Jaramillo, Dawn Russel, and Naeemah Shabazz. Accessible online through the Heresies Archive <http://heresiesfilmproject.org/archive/> and through Brooklyn Museum Library Collection.

²⁹¹ Tobin (2019).

of color in the journal's third issue, *Lesbian Art and Artists* published in the fall of 1977.²⁹² *Heresies* published Combahee River Collective's statement as well as their own response in the journal's fourth issue, titled *Women's Traditional Arts: The Politics of Aesthetics* (1978).²⁹³ In their responding statement, *Heresies* denied intentional exclusion but admitted to "passive exclusion;" the editorial collective then wrote of their intention to "publish an issue on Black, Spanish-American, American Indian, and other Third World women to be edited by Third World Women."²⁹⁴

The resulting issue *Third World Women: The Politics of Being Other* included texts that examined the relationship between institutions, women artists, and laboring bodies in the U.S. and abroad. The issue showcased artwork, poetry, and essays from Mendieta, Adrian Piper, Myrtha Chabrán, Vivian E. Brown, Yvonne A. Flowers, Betye Saar, Valerie Harris, Howardena Pindell, Suzana Cabañas, Katherine Hall, Jaune Quick-To-See Smith, and many others. Notably, Audre Lorde, who contributed her 1979 poem "Need," was the only woman included who also signed the aforementioned Combahee River Collective protest letter.²⁹⁵

²⁹² "Lesbian Art and Artists," *Heresies* 1, 3 (1977).

²⁹³ "Women's Traditional Arts—The Politics of Aesthetics," *Heresies* 1, 4 (1978).

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*



Figure 3.5

Printed after an essay by Erlene Stetson and opposite a poem by Michelle Cliff is Buchanan's 1979 frustula sculpture *Wall Fragment/Ga*, [figure 3.5].²⁹⁶ A tripartite work of concrete cast in a mold made of bricks, three blocks of varying dimensions sit on the floor; none rise above the viewers' knees. The viewer would need to stoop down low to sit atop a block, but they beckon the viewer to do so. The blocks of *Wall Fragment/Ga* are not attached in structure, only in arrangement. Immediately legible in its formal structure, the surfaces are dark gray, and almost appear to be found boulders. Each plane is covered in scratches and dents as if organically made, but the blocks' rigid corners betray their deliberate casting.

Stetson's text preceding Buchanan's piece called "A Note on the Woman's Building and Black Exclusion" provided historical context to an earlier piece published in *Heresies* about the

²⁹⁶ "Third World Women—The Politics of Being Other," *Heresies* 2, 4 (1979): 48.

Woman's Building at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893.²⁹⁷ Cliff's poem "Against Granite,"²⁹⁸ appeared opposite to Buchanan's sculpture, and describes the experience of imprisoned Black women who write their own histories of incarceration while sitting and leaning against granite walls. Cliff's prose is a fitting textural companion to Buchanan's frustula. Cliff wrote:

The historians—like those who came before them—mean to survive. But know they may not. They know that though shadowy, the border guards have influence, and carry danger with them. And with this knowledge, the women manage. And in the presence of this knowledge the historians plant, weed, hoe, raise houses, sew, and wash—and continue their investigations: into the one-shot contraceptive; the slow deaths of their children; the closing-up of vulvas and the cutting-out of tongues. By opening the sutures, applying laundry soap and brown sugar, they draw out the poisons and purify the wounds. And maintain vigilance to lessen the possibility of reinfection.²⁹⁹

Cliff suggested that these historians derived their strength from a legacy of other Black women who had taken it upon themselves to compile and protect their own archives, to secure their own histories but also as a map for posterity. The title and narrative conjured within Cliff's prose illuminate Buchanan's sculpture in several critical ways. In the most preliminary sense, the poem calls attention to the materiality of the sculpture, a cast concrete piece, printed across from it. It pricks curiosity in the reader about the process and structure of the sculpture mirroring this body of text. However, the poem's title on its own offers an ambiguous relationship with the material that remains central to the narrative. The clause "against granite" suggests one of two possibilities: either the action of physical weight *against* granite, such that the granite supports and counteracts the gravity of the leaning body, or *against* is deployed here to indicate oppositional action, or events that stand counter to each other. The poem's contents produce an

²⁹⁷ Grabenhorst-Randall (1978) and Stetson (1979): 45-47.

²⁹⁸ Cliff (1979): 49.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

image of tenacious, exhausted women leaning against hard-wearing materials as their only physical reprieve. Granite, for the women in Cliff's work, is the material that constitutes the physical space to which they are remanded, but it also protects and encloses these women in sacred moments of commune. Granite is also metaphor for resistance and survival; the women congregate in the privacy of this structure to share oral histories and conjure possibilities. The relationship between the incarcerated women, their attendant labors both physical and emotional, and the material's presumed smoothness, coolness, and relentless hardness cues the reader into the complex network of relations in this poem: the prison system, the human lives held within, and the futures projected outside of its confines. Like granite, concrete suggests both the imposition of authoritative durability and the comfort of familiarity.

The frustula, like many of Buchanan's early sculptures, is cast with Portland concrete, a mixture of silica sand, limestone, clay, chalk, and other ingredients which are melted together to create a paste, which then binds together chemically inert aggregates of rock and sand. At once sturdy and recognizable, Portland cement is the most common and accessible type of cement which is a basic ingredient in concrete, mortar, and stucco.³⁰⁰ Soon after beginning her frustula, Buchanan turned against Portland concrete. It was a material too universal and smooth, too familiar and digestible without the specificity of those experiences she wished to honor and memorialize in her body of work. In a letter from the artist to gallerist Betty Parsons, Buchanan lamented the recently attained "slick" quality, as she wished instead to achieve a more weathered

³⁰⁰ Portland cement usually derives from limestone which is ground to a fine powder. Limestone is a low-cost and widely available material, which makes Portland cement one of the most widely used building materials in the United States; its ubiquity and affordability explains Buchanan's encounter and work with the material. The name comes from Portland stone which was quarried on the Isle of Portland in Dorset, England in the early 19th century. Joseph Aspdin obtained the first patent for the newly developed mixture in 1824. Aspdin and his son, William Aspdin, are regarded as the inventors of modern Portland cement.

appearance.³⁰¹ This move from sleekness to desirable roughness would require the artist to work not only more slowly as opposed to casting many pieces at once such that they all attain the same texture, but also with exclusively heavier and more difficult materials. She would no longer use cardboard to create molds, as she sometimes did with found materials like milk cartons, in earlier *frustulum*, and would use brick only. The artist also turned toward tabby, a specific concrete compound that the artist had to prepare herself, as opposed to the easily mixed Portland cement. Aware of the physical demands of this artistic decision especially enduring her ever-fragile health, Buchanan wrote: “it will take me longer and the work is physically more demanding but I’ll do it.”³⁰² A material local to and once-ubiquitous throughout the U.S. South, tabby was the artist’s material of choice in her later *Marsh Ruins* outdoor installation, discussed in this dissertation’s first chapter.

Wall Fragment/GA, like all of Buchanan’s frustula, complicates questions of land, laboring bodies, and memory. Buchanan’s concrete, akin to Cliff’s granite, is transformed from ahistorical material into a material reflection of a complicated network of institutional power and individual survival.

Dialectics of Isolation

Subsequent to the publication of the *Third World Women* issue of *Heresies*, and a few months after *Afro-American Abstraction* opened at PS1, was the now-legendary 1980 A.I.R. Gallery exhibition, *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United*

³⁰¹ Betty Parsons Gallery records and personal papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

States, conceived by Mendieta. In her correspondences with Buchanan, Mendieta explained that she “liked what [she] saw” in Buchanan’s submission to *Heresies*. Mendieta would formally invite Buchanan to take part in *Dialectics* in an urgent handwritten letter in late February 1980.³⁰³ Multiple correspondences between Nengudi and A.I.R. administrator Lajuana Easterly in the spring and summer of 1980 reveal Easterly imploring the artist for information about transporting and shipping her work for the exhibition.³⁰⁴ Though the logistics of putting together an exhibition and maneuvering many personalities are certainly onerous, the humor Nengudi might have found in this letter amuses today. For Nengudi, pantyhose meant her works were always accessible, transportable, light, and resisted the heavy industry of Minimalist artists. As quoted earlier, the artist explained, “my concept was I could take a whole show and put it in my purse. I could take it out of my purse and hang it up and there you are—there would be no costs for installing or shipping. I liked this idea that a woman’s life is in her purse.”³⁰⁵ Nengudi’s praxis is the artwork itself, too, in this way, just as her commitment to evoking a specific kind of women’s experience is evident.

³⁰³ In the letter, Mendieta urges Buchanan to respond quickly as Mendieta had attempted many times to touch base with Buchanan via telephone. Mendieta alerts Buchanan to these communication efforts, and expresses apology at short notice, as well as excitement to include Buchanan’s sculptures. Further, Mendieta advises that Buchanan’s piece in the show “should not be too large as [Mendieta was] not sure the floor [was] strong enough to hold much weight.” Box 13, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

³⁰⁴ Box 6, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

³⁰⁵ Finkel (2011).

On view from September 2-20, 1980, *Dialectics* was co-curated by Mendieta alongside artists Zarina Hashmi³⁰⁶ (b. 1937, Aligarh, India; d. 2020, London, England), who had co-edited the *Third World Women* journal issue, and Kazuko Miyamoto (b. 1942, Tokyo, Japan), a member of A.I.R. Gallery since 1974. Though this exhibition would become Mendieta's most trenchant contribution to A.I.R.'s program and mission, *Dialectics* was far from Mendieta's only investment in the status of women artists of color in the Gallery's space. Mendieta joined A.I.R. in 1978 upon the artist's move from Iowa where she had received her MFA.³⁰⁷ After joining A.I.R., the artist became involved in the Gallery's Task Force on Discrimination against Women and Minority Artists, established that same year, and participated in a program on Latin American women artists in 1979. A.I.R. would exhibit Mendieta's first New York solo exhibitions, just as it is through the Gallery that Mendieta befriended important curators Lucy Lippard and Lowery Stokes Sims. However, the specter of "white feminism"³⁰⁸ that loomed in the collective's space proved limiting and exhausting. Of the artist's specific positioning as not Black and not white, Genevieve Hyacinthe has asserted that, "Brownness made Mendieta a powerful translator of black Atlantic forms into contemporary art language because she was not, and could never be, a part of dominant white culture, and neither could she be of black North American culture."³⁰⁹ Hyacinthe emphasized Mendieta's positioning of in-between-ness wherein

³⁰⁶ The artist is known professionally as Zarina and will be referred to as such here on out.

³⁰⁷ See Bryan-Wilson (2013).

³⁰⁸ Mendieta employed this term in her introductory text to the *Dialectics* exhibition. Mendieta (1980). Xeroxed excerpt of original review clipping accessed in Box 13, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Review reprinted in full and accessed in Rosenthal (2013): 206.

³⁰⁹ Hyacinthe (2019): 52.

Third World feminism became an appropriate and useful scaffolding for her artistic and sociopolitical ambitions. Intending instead to align herself with the Cuban exile community and Third World feminist circles, Mendieta would leave A.I.R. in 1982.³¹⁰

Conceived as a conversation, or dialectic, between the included artists and the predominantly white membership of the Gallery at the time, *Dialectics* claimed power in the subject-position of “otherness.”³¹¹ More broadly, the exhibition was positioned against the predominantly White contingency of the second-wave feminists and their politics that assumed a narrow category of “woman.”³¹² *Dialectics* sought to align women of color in the United States with the sociopolitics of the international “Third World.” In her opening statement, Mendieta claimed the artists of the exhibition as “other” and condemned second-wave feminism for “[failing] to remember” their nonwhite colleagues whose “struggles [were] two-fold” as their experiences and politics accounted for both gender and race.³¹³ She queried, “Do we [of the Third World] exist?... ”³¹⁴ She offered the exhibition as a “search, a questioning” of identity, creative potential, and political stakes.³¹⁵ Following her charge, the works included in the

³¹⁰ Mendieta (1980).

³¹¹ My goal herein is not to attend to the terrific nuances, successes, and shortcomings of this exhibition—that scholarly work exists, and I encourage the reader to seek out these sources. Here, I would like to understand how both practices of Buchanan and Nengudi work in the driving interest of this exhibition, and what their inclusion in the exhibition tells us about their larger practice and the direction of their feminist politics.

³¹² Many scholars have discussed the goals of second-wave feminism and their narrow, exclusive goals. I especially point the reader to Nancy Fraser who discusses the feminist imaginary of the 1960s and early 1970s, and is discussed in the introduction to this dissertation. (Fraser, 2009).

³¹³ Mendieta (1980).

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

exhibition represented the eight artists' efforts at not only answering Mendieta's question of existence with resounding affirmation, but also at interrogating their very conditions of existence and survival. As an exhibition positioned against the monolithic histories of the First World, *Dialectics* worked in the service of counter-memory. In their curation of the exhibition, Mendieta, Miyamoto, and Zarina fundamentally staged an intervening dialogue into the institutional space in which they were presenting.³¹⁶ The artworks themselves surfaced stories that revealed the stale structures of racism and Second-Wave feminism, splintering the imagined White coherent subject into fragments.

Writing in the introduction for the exhibition catalogue, Mendieta asserted the necessity of an exhibition of women artists based in the United States who identified with Third World feminist politics, offering space for a newly conceptualized feminist imaginary. The artists included in this exhibition were Judith Baca (b. 1946 Los Angeles, California), Buchanan, Janet Henry (b. 1947 New York), Nengudi, Lydia Okumura (b. 1948 São Paulo, Brazil), Howardena Pindell (b. 1943 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Selena Whitefeather,³¹⁷ and Zarina. Speaking to themes of belonging, exclusion, and plurality, the artworks chosen for the exhibition represented a variety of approaches to identification with the "Third World" in a variety of media.

For Mendieta and the exhibiting artists, the Second Wave feminist movement was ambivalent at best and dangerous at worst towards those who were left out from the movements' political underpinnings: Mendieta signaled that the white and middle-class feminist movement

³¹⁶ See D'Souza (2018; 2021).

³¹⁷ The artist's name is now Selena Whitefeather Persico; at the time of writing, the author has been unable to locate a verified birthyear for Whitefeather.

“failed to remember” artists otherwise whose “struggles [were] two-fold”³¹⁸ as non-white artists contended with race and gender. The exhibition was not an effort to consider the artists within the mainstream feminist movement of the time, but instead focused on the artists’ “personal will[s] to continue being ‘other.’”³¹⁹ Further, Mendieta queried:

Do we exist?...To question our cultures is to question our own existence, our human reality. To confront this fact means to acquire an awareness of ourselves. This in turn becomes a search, a questioning of who we are and how we will realize ourselves.³²⁰

Offering the exhibition as an experimental staging of artists’ processes of self-realization, Mendieta foregrounded the power of Buchanan and Nengudi’s engagements with counter-memory and the critical practices that constitute the processes of being resolutely “other.”

Baca’s portable fragments of her roaming social realist mural *Uprising of the Mujeres* (1979) were on view, and her catalogue contribution explained the importance of making art accessible to the masses. Buchanan’s *Wall Column* (1980) made of cast cement and washed with a mixture of acrylic paint and iron oxide to evoke the earth of the Southern-United States referenced a local historiography of labor and construction. Henry’s *Juju Box for a White Protestant Male* (1979-80), an assemblage of miniature objects that revealed the imagined desires of the titular subject, and Pindell’s now iconic video *Free, White, and 21* (1980) which premiered in this exhibition, both satirized racism, sexism, second-wave feminism, and their complicated relationship to desire. Okumura painted directly onto the gallery walls and floor, underscoring the human’s relationship to their surrounding architectures and environments through geometric abstractions. Whitefeather’s slideshow of photographs of plant life, *Complete*

³¹⁸ Mendieta (1980).

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

View of a Region in Every Direction (1980) was accompanied by a sound recording of the artist reading a poetic ekphrasis about an experience in nature, evincing her approach to belonging routed through the natural world. Zarina's *Corners* (1980) was handmade paper cast in plastic in which serialized and recessed cuboids had been pressed, pushing the paper away from the original flat surface, meditating on organic materials, Minimalist methods, and the politics of labor.



Figure 3.6

Buchanan's work included in the exhibition was *Wall Column*, a frustula from 1980 [figure 3.6]. Unpainted, this sculpture of cast concrete took up less than two square feet of floor space and would eventually enter into the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. *Wall Column* is unique compared to earlier frustula in that the constitutive fragments of the sculpture do not touch, and instead rest independently on the floor and are unevenly staggered. The fragment on the right presents a texture previously unseen in earlier frustula. The facing surface displays a texture of dramatic vertical indentations that are evenly spaced. Distinct from its other

two standing fragments, this repeated pattern recalls iron bars. The standing fragment in the center is the tallest, and commands status as the fulcrum of the sculpture. The individual fragments beckon towards this tallest piece; the resting horizontal slab in front of the tallest fragment seems to bend and forego the potentially of height available in vertical orientation. Instead, this piece lies flat and anchors the others. As an assemblage or composite of concrete fragments, *Wall Column* proposes a network of mutual support and protection. Each individual slab stands on its own yet accrues potency in texture and stature in relationship with its companions, when considered as a whole. In *Wall Column* Mendieta might have seen a physical representation of dialectical thinking. Through this frustula, exhibition viewers would at once understand the sculpture's iterant parts as individual and autonomous, just as they would recognize that the composite sculpture offered a complete system.

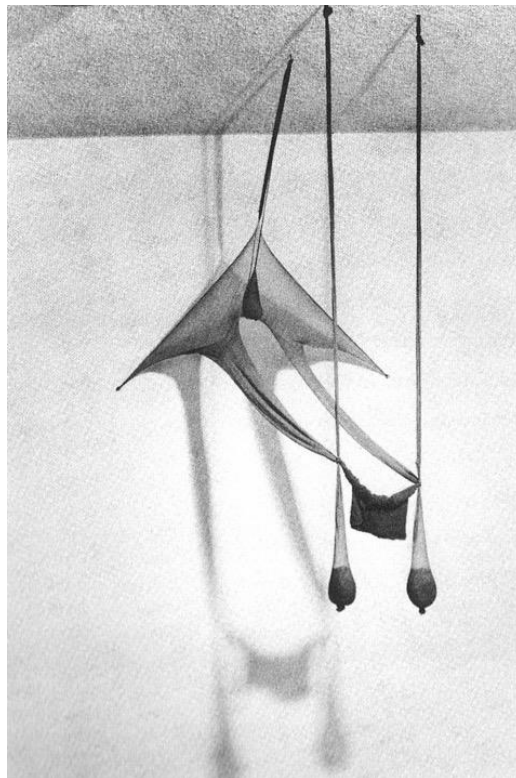


Figure 3.7

Nengudi's contribution to *Dialectics* was her soft sculpture pinned to the gallery walls called *Swing Low* (1977), whose image from the exhibition catalogue is reproduced herein [figure 3.7]. An abstract meditation on the endurance of the body, *Swing Low* was sutured to the ceiling at three points, and to the perpendicular wall at two points. Made of dark brown pantyhose and sand, and suspended from its anchoring points, *Swing Low* is bodily, fleshy, precarious, and graphic. A triangular formation serves as the background of the work, made by the saddle of a pair of pantyhose. In the center of the triangle is an extra layered portion of the pair of pantyhose that covers the wearer's anatomy—this component stretches to the ceiling to form the first of the three anchors of the sculpture suspended in the air. Its two legs extend out, drooping and wrinkled, and attach to two falling legs attached to the ceiling. These legs shoot down to the floor in parallel and accumulate in two sand-filled sacs of about equal proportions. These orbs are tied off to limit the escape of the contained material. Between the bulbs is the pantyhose waistline, where one would hoist up the fashion item to feel secure. Shadows created by the sculpture and its lighting lurk on the walls, extending the space that *Swing Low* occupies. On the page opposite the image of *Swing Low* in the *Dialectics* catalogue was the description written by the artist regarding her practice: "I am concerned with the way life experiences pull and tug on the human body and psyche. And the body's ability to cope with it. Nylon mesh serves my needs in reflecting this elasticity."

In the same way that *R.S.V.P.* beckons a response from the viewer, so too does the title *Swing Low*, a work made in the same vein of her 1977 series. The title comes from "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," the widely known African American spiritual. Written by Wallace Willis, a formerly enslaved man who lived in Choctaw County, Oklahoma, and first performed in the late 1800s, the song's history and promise of emancipation by way of a Christian heaven has become

a popular referent for Black visual artists based in the U.S.³²¹ In their discussion of the work, T. Lax has encouraged viewers to read Nengudi's *Swing Low* as a "synthetic, extra Christian religious symbol." With its bulbs quite literally swinging low, bisected by vertical and parallel supports, Lax has suggested that *Swing Low* nods to the Christian cross just as it does to the titular structure of a double-axel chariot. For if the spiritual represents the hope and promise of freedom for African Americans, Lax proposes so too does Nengudi's use of pantyhose, a non-traditional artmaking textile, that signals "the capacity to represent freedom-dreaming into the beholder's experience of this everyday material."³²²

The power of Nengudi's soft sculptures was laid plain in *Dialectics*. Characteristic of Nengudi's works in pantyhose, *Swing Low* represents the artist's interests in questions of bodily possession and dispossession, expansion, and fatigue as well as particularly African American histories of capital and labor. The work, along with the artist's *R.S.V.P.* series, engaged with questions of bodily captivity by investigating Blackness as that which "marks" and "names" bodies.³²³ Rizvana Bradley understands Nengudi's sculptures as "disassembling" the Black body, whose very historiography the scholar traces through Hortense Spillers's formulation of the ungendering of Black bodies which is both a structural tool and a result of colonial control.³²⁴ Bradley has posited that the soft sculptures suggest "the materiality of this historically ungendered *flesh*," which is wrought apart from the *body* in the violent process of ungendering,

³²¹ See Lax (2018).

³²² *Ibid.*, 88.

³²³ See Stephens (2014) and Phelan (1993) on questions of "marking" and "naming."

³²⁴ Bradley (2015): 165.

“continues to structure, organize, and inflect performances of blackness in the present.”³²⁵ For the scholar, Nengudi’s pliable works “[re-activate] this symbolic rupture between body and flesh in its metaphorical and physical reengagement with the body’s raw material. Nengudi retraces the black body as a sort of open archive, underscoring an effort to wrest the black body from a set of overdetermined representations [...]”³²⁶ This “raw material” is exactly where Nengudi’s force lies: at once reminiscent of biological matter—skin, flesh, breasts, scrotums, bellies—her soft sculptures seem to not just represent, but reflect the very physical and psychological tugs that bodies endure. As if pulled out of one body and put on display as a distinct *other*, the bodies’ zeniths and nadirs become legible matter, relatable and knowledgeable.

Swing Low proposed a recourse through abstraction to the body that other works in *Dialectics* did not. Where Baca’s mural, for example, relied on social realism’s charge of bodies as forces for social progress, *Swing Low* evoked the body without being literal or figurative. The dual imagined feelings of pantyhose against skin and the psychological sensation of containment come to bear. Buchanan’s abstractions evoked bodily histories of labor and survival, just as they forced a physical contortion in viewers who found themselves bending their knees, stooping to get as close to the short forms as possible. The artists’ sculptural contributions to *Dialectics* prove irrelevant the imagined binary of artistic abstraction and political possibilities, instead assembling a capacious feminist ecosystem of recycled and refused capital, attuned to women’s communal and embodied knowledge.

Both within and outside of the context of *Dialectics*, both Buchanan’s and Nengudi’s sculptures asserted a need for politics that centers non-White women of the Global South.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

Scholars have largely agreed that feminism is an appropriate rubric under which to examine Nengudi's sculptures specifically.³²⁷ Of this, the artist has reflected:

I'm often labeled a feminist, but that was a title that was put on me because, really, as I was coming at my stuff, it was as a woman trying to express what it felt like to be me, my experiences, which, of course, in a sense would be feminist, but I'm doing it from a personal level. [...] I didn't see myself pushing forth a particular agenda. I was stating—and I guess still state, really—what it feels like to be an artist who is Black, who is American, who is a mother, who is a daughter, who is a wife. [...] That's what I was expressing. And to my mind, it's universal. So just in that statement, sometimes just stating who you are—like in my classes I would often say, 'Being born Black is a revolutionary act in this country.' So yeah, it's political, but it's not like I have a gun. I'm not hating anybody. I'm just telling you who I am and where I see myself in the place of things.³²⁸

Centering the personal, Nengudi reinscribed her own experiences as central to her formation of politics. Nengudi's praxis reveals a capacious feminism, one that is more an assemblage than it is intersectional—that is, beyond evoking a politics based on a moment of intersection between heretofore disparate identity vectors, Nengudi offers a feminism that was always already informed by her complete and multivalent sense of self and community. In the same way, the inclusion of Buchanan's *frustulum* in both the *Third World Women* issue of *Heresies* and A.I.R. Gallery's *Dialectics of Isolation* exhibition evinced the artist's concerns about the process and subsequent circulation and context of her work. Wary of who was included in and who would profit from the women's liberation movement, Buchanan was invested in a women's liberatory politic that, like her approach to materiality and site, was localized and specific. Buchanan's material choice to leave behind Portland concrete for the more textured tabby concrete related to a specific historiography of architecture and labor in the U.S. South, as investigated in the first chapter of this dissertation. Similarly, Nengudi's sculpture of interest in this section, *Swing Low*,

³²⁷ See Jones (2017): 203.

³²⁸ Author (2013).

noded directly to African American cultural heritage. Both Buchanan and Nengudi were deliberate in their conjuring of local communities that would be united in their understanding of their referents. *Dialectics* offered a counter to second-wave feminism, a worldview that attended more closely to the sensibilities of both Buchanan and Nengudi.

Critical Response to *Dialectics*

Buchanan's hard, cast concrete slabs and Nengudi's soft, pliable sculptures revealed the impossible dichotomy of the abstract and the political, which contemporaneous reviewers of *Dialectics* underscored. Though this imagined binary of abstraction as an ahistorical and apolitical form and representation as tool for political change is explored more thoroughly in an earlier section of this chapter, the critical response to *Dialectics* revealed how deeply rooted this perceived dichotomy ran, beyond the Black Arts Movement. Carrie Rickey's review of the exhibition is regularly referenced in scholarship about the exhibition for it is one of the few forms of contemporaneous documentation of *Dialectics*. There are no extant photographs of the exhibition, nor is there a record of viewers' experiences.³²⁹ Rickey helpfully elucidated a framework for contemporary scholars to understand how the show might have been digested by viewers, but her imposition of abstraction as opposed to representation divided the exhibition, making the works seem mutually exclusive, operating in their own formal spheres. She located the abstraction of Buchanan, Nengudi, Okumura, Whitefeather, and Zarina against the figural impulse of Pindell, Henry, and Baca.

Rickey specifically characterized Buchanan's frustula as having the appearance of "primitive artifacts" that, when arranged as Buchanan did, resemble the logics of the massive

³²⁹ Shirazi (2021).

shards of Stonehenge.³³⁰ The connection of Buchanan's assemblages to prehistoric monuments is not wholly incorrect as surely the *frustulum* are about ruination and their materiality suggest ancient architectures, but this sole comparison issued by Rickey short-circuits the work's full capacities. Lucy Lippard corrected this presumption in her 1983 book *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory* when she wrote that Buchanan's later *ruins* "relate only peripherally, if at all, to prehistoric cultures."³³¹ What Rickey might have been aiming for, which Lippard later explicated, is that Buchanan's practice did suggest the desire for connecting the viewers to "experiences of nature and of the past."³³² Not only do the *frustulum* link present and past, they also stood as "an archaeology of the levels of consciousness" in Lippard's phrasing. As objects of dis- and trans-location, always informed by a specific site but situated elsewhere at remove, the *frustulum* attain a neither-here-nor-there-ness that allows them to slip between geographies and temporalities, at once of the past, present, and future.

Beyond *Dialectics*

A.I.R. Gallery would not be the only feminist space in which Buchanan and Nengudi participated.³³³ A few years prior to *Dialectics*, on June 2, 1977, Eva-Hamlin Miller, the Director of the H. C. Taylor Gallery of Art at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University,

³³⁰ Rickey (1980): 75.

³³¹ Lippard (1983): 39.

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ Buchanan's archives show that the 1980 exhibition was also not her first time interacting with A.I.R.: Buchanan noted in a diary that she had dropped off four slides "with background data included" to the Gallery at 97 Wooster Street on Saturday 8 May 1976. Box 16, Beverly Buchanan papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

wrote to Nengudi inviting the artist to participate in the group exhibition *15 Women – Part II* which would be on view from February 15 through March 19, 1978. Miller explained that this would be the follow-up exhibition to what she claimed was the “first all Afro-Women show” which included over 75 art objects and was on view at the Gallery in March 1970.³³⁴ Two months later in August 1977, Nengudi and Goode Bryant corresponded about the opportunity, with the gallerist encouraging the artist to participate, and also supporting Nengudi’s specific mode of operation: “I hope that you will feel favorable about participation in this exhibition. [...] I have discussed with Ms. Miller the importance of your being able to install the exhibitions. As well, I point out that your air-fare would absorb cost usually allotted to transportation of work in as much as your work is portable.”³³⁵ Throughout the mid-1980s, after *Dialectics*, the artist was also a member of the Women’s Building Performance Committee based in Los Angeles.³³⁶

Similarly, Buchanan would participate in affiliation shows, especially about women artists of the South. In 1996, she participated in *9 Women in Georgia*, a traveling exhibition organized by Gudmund Vigtel at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. on view to the public from 29 February through 27 May 1996. More recently, both artists were included in the blockbuster exhibition *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965-1985*, curated by Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockley, and on view at the Brooklyn Museum from 21 April through 17 September 2017.

³³⁴ Box 9, Senga Nengudi papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ Author (2013).



Figure 3.8

Nengudi's inclination to feminist spaces was apparent from the beginning of her artmaking career for her approach was singular: she used a material that was a staple in fashion for women; everyone seeing the object would have familiarity or a memory associated with the garment. Pantyhose, as elucidated in the second chapter, were ubiquitous and the result of decades of research, development, and marketing campaigns. Nengudi activated this material's already-there anthropomorphic associations. The artist, beyond indexing the body, also literalized the body in her performances and through choreographed activations of her pantyhose sculptures. The title of her 1977 sculptural series says it all: please respond. Bell Brown explains how this request, and by extension the rest of Nengudi's practice is rooted in and speaking towards

communities and friendships of Black women specifically.³³⁷ From the late 1970s through the 1980s, Nengudi and her collaborators staged various performances, often inspired by improvisational choreographies and various materials the artist sourced.³³⁸ In 1978, Nengudi activated used pantyhose as ritual costumes and totems for her collaborators in Studio Z in their *Ceremony for Freeway Fets* performance under a highway overpass in Los Angeles; in 1981, the artist collaborated with dancer Cheryl Banks and cornetist Butch Morris in her *Air Propo* performance at Just Above Midtown Gallery in New York [figure 3.8].

The friendship between artist Maren Hassinger and Nengudi in particular has become synonymous with activations of *R.S.V.P.*³³⁹ The longtime friends and collaborators, who both trained in dance, met in 1977, the same year of Nengudi's first exhibitions of her *R.S.V.P.* sculptures. Hassinger activated Nengudi's sculptures at Pearl C. Woods Gallery in Los Angeles [figure 3.9]. Upon witnessing Hassinger activate an *R.S.V.P.* sculpture four decades later, Bradley recalled the performance as one "full of introspection about the body's imaginative and physical limits, as well as a visual, embodied disruption that challenged our general perception of how a body moves through space."³⁴⁰ Dressed entirely in black spandex outfits, "the movements of the dancers were lyrical, almost balletic, and depended upon the continual transference of weight, balance, and emotional expression" resulting in a "a delicate pas de deux between sculpture and performance, in order to see what a collusion of these different forms, or

³³⁷ Bell Brown (2015).

³³⁸ The artist sometimes incorporated metal scraps, fabric bits, tape, newsprint, and plastic sheets into her works.

³³⁹ John Bowles has closely chronicled this friendship. See Bowles (2016).

³⁴⁰ Bradley, "Transferred Flesh," 162.

approaches to form, might bring to bear.”³⁴¹ As a centered practice in Nengudi’s work, friendship has stakes beyond the personal and artistic. John Bowles asserts friendship and collaboration as a model antithetical to the “emotional paucity of modernist criticism.”³⁴² For where modernist terms maintain a critical distance between the object and the viewer, friendship pushes the two together, forcing confrontation and exploration of these new terms. These new terms, however, are not boundless. Critically, Bowles recognizes that the performance made possible through Nengudi and Hassinger was not fully available for everyone, for the contours of their particular intimacy we will never know. Through documentation of these activations, and other performances like *Ceremony for Freeway Fets* (1978), contemporary viewers are offered merely a window. The works’ documentation “engage[s] our desire to know more about the work while obstinately guarding its secrets.”³⁴³ Both opaque and vulnerable, friendship as praxis opens up onto a new womanist politic.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

³⁴² Bowles, 404.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 411.

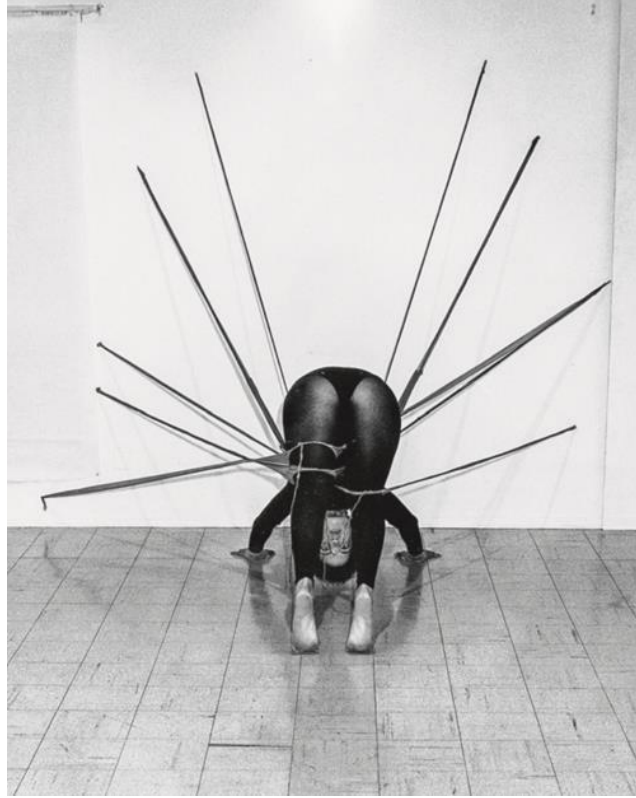


Figure 3.9

As one viewer of a 2023 activation of Nengudi's *R.S.V.P.* sculptures at the Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal, Germany described, the audience was left alone with the sculpture at the end of one activation. The performer exited the performance area, making space for a moment of culmination wherein the audience was able to quietly examine if there were any palpable changes to the sculpture and the space, if the "landscape had shifted," physically or emotionally.³⁴⁴ Had the sculpture resumed its original form completely? Did the sculpture withstand the force enacted by the performer? Did the sculpture reflect any of these

³⁴⁴ I extend my heartfelt thanks to my sister Clara Superfine for her attendance at this exhibition when I was unable to travel to Europe, and for her deeply thoughtful and thorough report after witnessing activations of Nengudi's sculptures. Clara's decades-long expertise in dance, as both a professional ballet dancer at the Dutch National Ballet, and also as an activist, organizer, choreographer, critic, and writer, has had profound influence on my life and on my scholarship. I thank her for everything.

manipulations? This viewer described one performer who began her choreography by tugging on her tight shirt—painfully, dramatically, the dancer started at her sternum, moving across her entire torso, to her stomach, back, elbows, arms, and neck.³⁴⁵ As if the dancer needed to activate her own touch sensorium through her own understanding of her fabrics against her body, she only turned to the sculpture afterwards, casting these feelings towards the object. Pulling the fabrics and then manipulating the pantyhose struck in the viewers a sense of fighting gravity’s power on sagging skin—working against the lift and tautness that is so prized in modern skincare, refusing legible signs of wear and age. But the performance ended with a mutual understanding and coalescence, a respect and choreographic beauty established between dancer and object. When there is no performer activating Nengudi’s sculptures, the viewers encounter a static piece whose undulating forms threaten to free themselves from their wall sutures. Stretched geometric lines meet bulbous sacks. Abstraction slides into the figurative. Yet, before the figure coheres, the minimal forms dominate once again. But the specter of the figure, like the specter of the laboring bodies of Buchanan’s tabby constructions, persists and is indelible to encounters with the sculptures.

When Mendieta described that the women artists in *Dialectics* faced “struggles [that are] two-fold,” accounting for both gender and race, she set forth a challenge to the predominantly White communities and politics of second-wave feminism.³⁴⁶ Around the same time in the early 1980s,

³⁴⁵ This is Clara describing a video recording of a performance that took place at the same museum a few days prior to Clara’s experience of a live performance, on 15 January 2023. The video documentation was of Ophelia Young performing and Justyna Niznik playing the violin.

³⁴⁶ Mendieta (1980).

Walker would deem this perspective *womanism*. By the 1990s, Kimberlé Crenshaw, writing from a legal framework, would famously term the coalescence of multiple vectors of marginalization *intersectionalism*.³⁴⁷ Buchanan and Nengudi, instead of arriving at a feminist politics situated at the intersection of race and gender, claim through their works, methods, and materials that they have always already existed there. Further, the artists evinced how these vectors of identity were never siphoned off or mutually exclusive; instead, they were always already and irrevocably assembled together.

³⁴⁷ Crenshaw (1989).

CODA:
RUINS, OR THAT WHICH REMAINS

The artistic practices of Beverly Buchanan and Senga Nengudi are twinned in their commitment to historical and experiential specificity, abstraction and the possibilities of haptic engagement, and their skepticism of feminist and nationalist politics. Where Beverly Buchanan chose tabby concrete for its nexus with histories of labor and resilience, Senga Nengudi chose pantyhose for their familiarity and ability to approximate corporeal fluctuations. Nengudi's deployment of *remains*, or what the artist called "artifacts" of performance, is akin to Buchanan's interest in *ruins*. Both artists were invested in their own brands of feminism—a politics that centered women of color who were largely left out of second-wave feminist concerns that focused on the economy of equal wages. Similarly, both artists engaged abstraction to heighten sensorial forms of experienced touch and knowledge production, just as they pondered the ability of the body to both betray and be betrayed.

For Buchanan, the gallery space was unable to produce the very contexts the artist wished to evoke and so she moved to nature and placed her sculptures outdoors to bear the burden of nature's cycles. Paradoxically, Nengudi never intended for her objects to endure as precious commodities—they were always meant to be interacted with—this was an inherent part of their politics. That both of the artists always intended for their objects to be touched, even when that touch was denied by the formalities of exhibition spaces, is a crucial link between their practices. Both artists shied away from the fetishization of objects, yet institutionalization of their works has revealed an insistence upon protecting them. In Nengudi's case, all *Water Compositions* and *R.S.V.P.* works on view in contemporary exhibitions are remakes of their original iterations and cannot be touched unless under specific permissions and instructions. Buchanan's earliest experiments with cast concrete are also unavailable to audiences today—whether they were lost,

destroyed, or exist camouflaged as unremarkable stones in gardens and graveyards across the U.S. South. The artists activated their sculptures in the service of counter memory, ushering forward and underscoring marginalized histories. Through touch, whether real or imagined, the artists acknowledged sensorial pleasure and pain as epistemological and communal experiences.

Nengudi's devotion to *remains* encounters Buchanan's investment in *ruins* perhaps most literally in the artist's 1981 performance *Rapunzel*. One day in Los Angeles, Nengudi encountered a derelict building that was immediately memorable for her. She wrote in a notebook that "a [C]atholic school building was being demolished. It was a wonderful sort of Ivy League-type brick architecture which has been in the neighborhood for years. A real beauty. Upon seeing this I could not bear to let it die so unceremoniously."³⁴⁸ Nengudi's concern about the building's ruination, and its eventual end in death, links to Buchanan's late 1970s small monuments to ruined architectures. Buchanan, in her productions of structures inspired first by dilapidated sites in the Northeast U.S., demonstrated interest in maintaining the architecture's form by casting their surfaces. Upon her relocation to Georgia, her practice shifted to placing tabby constructions in natural sites, only to be taken over by mud and water, embedding themselves in earth. Uri McMillan has described this as "[envisioning] aesthetic possibility, cosmic richness, and a [B]lack quotidian in the derelict and decrepit sites of urban decay and economic devastation."³⁴⁹ Superficially, these sites are irrevocably doomed. Buchanan and Nengudi, in the face of the inevitable, excavate the many lives of the building, attuned especially towards their textures and contours, thus honoring, and casting forward their memory. The artists

³⁴⁸ Box 1, Senga Nengudi papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

³⁴⁹ McMillan, 110.

attached a biological impulse towards the sites, as if externalizing experiences of exhaustion and trespass, capacity, and joy, relocating these memories and feelings into the physical material.

In *Rapunzel*, Nengudi became at once uncomfortable by the architecture's demolition, and also inspired by its position in the corporeal cycle of life and death. Compelled to activate the structure, Nengudi called upon her friend and fellow artist Barbara McCollough to document the performance. Video of the action does not exist, however this extant photograph [figure 4.1] reveals details about the site, and Nengudi's positioning within the architecture. She leaned her head out of a window, her "hair" extended by a headpiece fashioned of pantyhose, which served as the connecting tissue between two long wires covered in bits of hair.



Figure 4.1

Nengudi evoked the titular folkloric story of a child, willed, and realized by her parents through the conditional services of a witch, who remanded the girl in a tower. As if her cell was crumbling, Nengudi obscured her face, her hair tumbled forward, and unlike the Grimm Brothers' fairytale, the ground was devoid of someone trying to reach the imprisoned. Used bodies meet used buildings.

Both Buchanan and Nengudi were compelled towards touch as a primordial, visceral, and critical component of the body's sensory apparatus. Buchanan memorialized the texture of entropic sites in the late 1970s, before shifting her focus to the casting material itself to be the pulse of her work. Tabby concrete utilized the massive oyster piles of the U.S. Southeast, activating the legacy of the localized construction material in communities of formerly enslaved people. That the material is porous and cannot endure limitlessly was critical for Buchanan, as her works resembled the anthropological cycle. Similarly, Nengudi used previously worn pantyhose precisely for their ubiquity and their relationship to the body, and though they are flexible and capacious, pantyhose rip, run, and sag. The artists casted questions into the future about bodies' abilities to adapt, to endure in the face of eventual ruination, offering communal practices of memory as a way forward.

This research has been scaffolded by the author's long-time interest in conceptualist and feminist practices in the 1970s across the Americas. Earlier rounds of this project included a chapter on the Colombian artist Feliza Bursztyn (b. 1933 Bogotá, Colombia; d. 1982 Paris, France) whose practice confronted the relationship between erotics, precarity, and theatricality through titillating movement and sound, activated by her sculptures made of various cast-off materials. In Bursztyn's *camas* (beds) (1972-1974), first exhibited in Bogotá in 1974, the artist disallows visual access to her gyrating metal sculptures by concealing them with swaths of silk,

an overt gesture of refusal similar to Buchanan's placement of her sculptures in sites that cannot guarantee consistent viewership. Bursztyn's audiences are unsure if the sounds and vibrations are bodies or objects, pleasurable or precarious, consensual or unrequited: this elision between knowledge and assumption and between violence and erotics, is central to the artist's work. The experienced tensions of her work reflect the national unrest of the "Colombian conflict" between the government and guerrilla groups that began in 1960s and continued through the 1990s in which tens of thousands of people were forcibly during the national internal war. As a child of immigrants who fled Poland in the Jewish diaspora who later studied in New York and Paris and died in exile, movement, both geographic and embodied, is a defining feature of the artist's practice. It was precisely through movement, akin to Nengudi's insistence on movement, that Bursztyn levied her critiques and projected her alternate epistemological models. The artist's *camas* become sites of sensorial experimentation: the visual is partially denied, the haptic is heightened, and the sonic is dominant. Bursztyn's sculptures approximate the choreographies of the corporeal to provoke and meditate on the possibilities of movement and its iterant experiences of belonging and displacement, pleasure and intrusion. Despite the resonances between Buchanan, Bursztyn, and Nengudi, especially through this dissertation's central concern with materiality, it became clear that Buchanan and Nengudi were more closely linked than anticipated at the outset of this research, and that their work required this dissertation's full commitment. Future studies will move beyond the United States, to put pressure on the way "America" is defined, operating on an expanded-continental notion of "America" as both north *and* south, as the United States *and* "Latin America." By pushing on the geographical and political boundaries that contain "America" as traditionally White and north, future versions of

this project will excavate the ways in which the narrative of American art is a political and geographical fallacy limited in its scope.

To return to 1966 where we began with Lucy Lippard's provocation of *Eccentric Abstraction*: the curator would update and expand her original manifesto five years later in 1971 on the occasion of the publication of her book *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism*, a compendium of the critic's writings.³⁵⁰ In this updated version of *Eccentric Abstraction*, Lippard clarified that "eccentric abstraction is based on the reconciliation of different forms, or formal effects, a cancellation of the form-content dichotomy."³⁵¹ In the case studies explored in this dissertation, this "cancellation" occurs because the deployed materials become the content and the *affect* of the sculptures themselves. Tabby concrete for Buchanan and pantyhose and sand for Nengudi contain "wholly sensuous, life-giving element[s]" which are laid bare to witness as they "reject the arbitrary" in favor of elemental specificity.³⁵² Through their sculptural activations of the haptic sensorium, in both physical and emotional registers, Buchanan and Nengudi offer touch as a mode of transmitting knowledge and connecting across time.

³⁵⁰ Lippard's updated version of *Eccentric Abstraction* was the result of public lectures, conversations, and debates that arose in the wake of the 1966 exhibition. She notes that she felt compelled to provide an update to her original manifesto as the exhibition ended up receiving "an unjustified amount of attention because several of the artists in it are now so well known." Lippard (1971): 98.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 100 and 110.

ARCHIVES

African American Performance Art Archive. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana. (Senga Nengudi papers, 1952-2021).

Ana Mendieta papers, 1948-1985, New York (Galerie Lelong, and Estate of the artist).

Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (Betty Parsons Gallery records and personal papers, 1916-1991; Beverly Buchanan papers, 1912-2017; Cinque Gallery records, 1959-2010; Fischbach Gallery records, 1937-2015; Eva Hesse papers, 1914-1970; Lucy Lippard papers, 1930s-2010; Senga Nengudi papers, 1947-2017; Robert Overby papers, 1959-1990; Jock Truman papers, 1952-2011).

Archives of the International Center for the Arts of the Americas, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas.

Exhibition archives, Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá, Colombia; and Colección de Arte del Banco de la República. Bogotá, Colombia.

Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University (A.I.R. Gallery Archives, 1972-2010, 2020-ongoing; Exit Art archive, 1979-2011; Creative Time archive, 1973-2006, Public Art Fund archive, 1966-2009).

Feliza Bursztyn papers, 1933-1982, Bogotá, Colombia.

Heresies Collective archives, *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*, 1977-1992.

Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. (Just Above Midtown archives and Linda Goode Bryant papers, 1974-1986).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alberro, Alexander. *Abstraction in Reverse: The Reconfigured Spectator in Mid-twentieth-Century Latin American Art*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

-----, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*. MIT, 2004.

----- and Sabeth Buchmann, eds. *Art after Conceptual Art*. MIT Press, 2006.

Amor, Mónica. *Theories of the Nonobject: Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, 1944-1969*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2016.

Anderson, Benedict R. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of*

- Nationalism*. New York and London: Verso, 1983.
- Annis, Elisa. ““An industry that lost its footing.”” *New York Times* (9 October 2006).
- Ansfield, Bench. “The Broken Windows of the Bronx: Putting the Theory in Its Place.” *American Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (January 2020): 103–27.
- Antin, David. ““Eccentric Abstraction”” Review of Exhibition. *Artforum* 5, no. 3, (November 1966): 56–57.
- Appadurai, Arjun. “Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value.” Essay. In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986: 3-63.
- Ashbery, John. “Beverly Buchanan at Truman Gallery.” Review. *New York Magazine* (2 October 1977).
- , “Young Masters of Understatement” Review of *Primary Structures* Exhibition at the Jewish Museum, New York. *ARTnews* (May 1966).
- Author, Elissa, and Senga Nengudi. Oral history interview with Senga Nengudi, 2013 July 9-11. Other. *Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution*, 2013.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994.
- Bagwell, Tyler E. “When Poet Sidney Lanier Made the Marshes of Glynn Famous.” Jekyll Island History, 2008, www.jekyllislandhistory.com/lanieroak.shtml.
- Barker, Jennifer M. *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.
- Bass, Chloë. “Can Abstraction Help Us Understand the Value of Black Lives?” *Hyperallergic*, 29 July 2016.
- Beckwith, Naomi. “A Conversation with Naomi Beckwith and the Artist Senga Nengudi: ‘It Was African and Kabuki-like at the Same Time’.” *Contemporary And*, 27 March 2013.
- Belcher, Max, Beverly Buchanan, William Christenberry, and Jock Reynolds. *House and Home: Spirits of the South*. Andover, MA: Addison Gallery of American Art, 1994.
- Bell Brown, Jessica. “Senga Nengudi: Of Gravity and Grace.” in *Senga Nengudi*, edited by Begum Yasar, 24-29. New York: Dominique Lévy, The Back Room, 2015.
- Benjamin, Tritobia Hayes. “Triumphant Determination: The Legacy of African American

- Women Artists.” *Bearing Witness: Contemporary Works by African American Women Artists*. Robinson, Jontyle Theresa, ed. Atlanta: Spelman College, 1996: 49–81.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Bethell, Leslie, ed. *The Cambridge History of Latin America. Latin America since 1930: Ideas, Culture and Society*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Bishir, Catherine W. *Southern Built: American Architecture, Regional Practice*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006.
- “Bladder, n.1”. OED Online. March 2022. Oxford University Press.
- Blanc, Paul D. *Fake Silk: The Lethal History of Viscose Rayon*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016.
- Blocker, Jane. *Where is Ana Mendieta?: Identity, Performativity, and Exile*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999.
- Blocton, Lula Mae, Yvonne Flowers, Valerie Harris, Zarina Hashmi, Virginia Jaramillo, Dawn Russel, and Naeemah Shabazz, eds. “Third World Women—The Politics of Being Other,” *Heresies* 2, 4 (1979).
- Bloemink, Barbara J., and Lisa Gail Collins. *Re/righting History: Counternarratives by Contemporary African-American Artists*. Katonah, NY: Katonah Museum of Art, 1999.
- Bowles, John P. “Senga Nengudi.” African American Performance Art Archive. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, October 6, 2010.
- , “Side by Side: Friendship as Critical Practice in the Performance Art of Senga Nengudi and Maren Hassinger.” *Callaloo*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2016, pp. 400–418.
- Bradley, Paige K., and Senga Nengudi. Senga Nengudi talks about her exhibitions in Denver. Other. *Artforum*, April 2014.
- Bradley, Rizvana. “Introduction: Other Sensualities.” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 24, no. 2-3 (2014): 129-33.
- , “Living in the Absence of a Body: The (Sus)Stain of Black Female (W)holeness.” *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, no. 29 (2016): 1-13.
- , “Stretched Infinity.” in *Senga Nengudi*, edited by Begum Yasar, 69-76. New York: Dominique Lévy, The Back Room, 2015.

- , "Transferred Flesh: Reflections on Senga Nengudi's R.S.V.P." *The Drama Review* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 161-66.
- , "Vestiges of Motherhood: The Maternal Function in Recent Black Cinema." *Film Quarterly* 71, no. 2 (2017): 46-52.
- and Damien-Adia Marassa. "Awakening to the World: Relation, Totality, and Writing from Below." *Discourse* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 112-31.
- Broadus-Garcia, Cassandra. "Images of Home Places: Beverly Buchanan." *School Arts: Essentials*, (Feb. 1998).
- Brooks, LeRonn P. *Dia Women: A Conversation with Linda Goode Bryant, Maren Hassinger, and Senga Nengudi*. Other. *Dia Art Foundation*, May 21, 2021.
- Bryan-Wilson, Julia. "Against the Body: Interpreting Ana Mendieta" in *Ana Mendieta: Traces*. Stephanie Rosenthal, ed. London: Hayward Publishing, 2013. 27-37.
- , *Fray: Art and Textile Politics*. The University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- "Business: Dear Silk." *TIME Magazine*, 19 February 1940.
- Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2006.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*. New York: Zone Books, 2011.
- Cabañas, Kaira Marie. *Immanent Vitalities: Meaning and Materiality in Modern and Contemporary Art*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021.
- Camnitzer, Luis, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss, eds. *Global Conceptualism - Points of Origin: 1950s - 1980s*. Queens, NY: Queens Museum of Art, 1999.
- Campbell, Andy. "'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): 1-35.
- Campt, Tina. *Listening to Images*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
- Carlisle, Prince M. "Japan sifts moves to combat nylon // will act to offset the thread to silk from new du Pont yarn, importers declare // to use three methods // improved quality, price cuts, duplication of synthetics are held probable." *New York Times*, 30 October 1938, 65.
- Carmen Ramírez, Mari. "Blueprint Circuits: Conceptual Art and Politics in Latin America" in Rasmussem, Aldo (ed.) *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1993: 156-169.

- Casey, Edward S. *Remembering, Second Edition: A Phenomenological Study*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.
- Cash, Stephanie. "Senga Nengudi at Thomas Erben." *Art in America*, March 2004. 123.
- Chave, Anna "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power." *Arts Magazine* 64, 5 (January 1990): 44-63.
- Cheng, Anne Anlin. "Skin Deep: Josephine Baker and the Colonial Fetish." *Camera Obscura* 13, no. 3 (2008): 35-79.
- Choi, Connie. Artist entry on Senga Nengudi. In *Now Dig This!: Art & Black Los Angeles, 1960-1980*. Kellie Jones, ed. Los Angeles, CA: Hammer Museum, 2011. 313-314.
- Cliff, Michelle. "Against Granite" in "Third World Women—The Politics of Being Other," *Heresies* 2, 4 (1979): 49.
- Cloues, Richard. "Architecture & Historic Preservation: House Types." New Georgia Encyclopedia, March 26, 2005. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/house-types>.
- Coker, Gylbert. "Ana Mendieta at A.I.R." *Art in America* 68, 4 (April 1980): 133-134.
- , "Senga Nengudi: She Twists, Knots and Pulls to Near Breaking What Other Women Fear Will Get Snagged and Run." *The International Review of African American Art*, 2016.
- Colby, Gerard. *Du Pont Dynasty*. Secaucus, NJ: Lyle Stuart, Inc., 1984.
- Cole, Michael. *Cellini and The Principles of Sculpture*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Collins, Lisa Gail. "The Art of Transformation: Parallels in the Black Arts and Feminist Art Movements." Essay. In *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, edited by Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford, 273–96. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008.
- Collins, Lisa Gail, and Margo Natalie Crawford, eds. *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008.
- Conwill, Kinshasha. *Testimony: Vernacular Art of the African-American South: The Ronald and June Shelp Collection*. New York: H.N. Abrams in Association with Exhibitions International and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 2001.
- Cooke, Lynne. *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art;

- Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- Coulter, E. Merton, ed. *Georgia's Disputed Ruins: Certain Tabby Ruins on the Georgia Coast, by Marmaduke Floyd; An Archaeological Report on the Elizafield Ruins, by James A. Ford; Observations on the Method of Planting and Cultivating the Sugar-Cane in Georgia and South Carolina, by Thomas Spalding*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989.
- Cutlip, Kimbra. "How Nylon Stockings Changed the World: The Quest to Replace Natural Silk Led to the Very First Fully Synthetic Fiber and Revolutionized the Products We Depend On," *Smithsonian Magazine*, May 11, 2015.
- D'Souza, Aruna. "Curating Difference." *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?*, A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY, 2018. 9-12.
- , "Early Intersections: The Work of Third World Feminism" in *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965-1985: New Perspectives*, 73-95. New York and Durham: Brooklyn Museum and Duke University Press, 2018.
- Dailey, Meghan. "Senga Nengudi at Thomas Erben." *Artforum*, November 2003. 191.
- Dana, Margaret. "Silk Stockings and How to Know Them." *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1938, 161.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (1981). Translated by Daniel W. Smith. London: Bloomsbury Academic, an Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017.
- and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980). Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983.
- Demos, T.J. "Sites of Collective Counter-Memory." Animate Projects, 2012.
http://animateprojectsarchive.org/writing/essays/tj_demos.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Athens, Still Remains: The Photographs of Jean-François Bonhomme* (1996). New York: Fordham University Press, 2009.
- Doss, Erika. *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Driskell, David C., ed. *African American Visual Aesthetics: A Postmodernist View*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995.
- "DuPont discloses new yarn details // nylon is name given to fiber made from coal, air, water //

- ends ten years' search // extremely fine filaments taking the usual dyes, have varied uses." *New York Times*, 28 October 1938.
- Fabius, Roxana, and Patricia M. Hernandez. "Dialectics of Entanglement." *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?*, A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY, 2018, 3–5.
- , Rachel Rakes, Aruna D'Souza, and Regina José Galindo. *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?* New York, NY: A.I.R. Gallery, 2018.
- Fabijanska, Monika. *The Un-Heroic Act: Representations of Rape in Contemporary Women's Art in the U.S.* New York, NY: Anya and Andrew Shiva Gallery, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2018.
- Fabre, Geneviève and Robert O'Meally, eds. *History & Memory in African-American Culture*. Oxford University Press: New York and London, 1994.
- Failing, Patricia. "Black Artists Today: A Case of Exclusion." *ARTnews*, March 1989.
- Federici, Silvia. *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, and Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2020.
- Finkel, Jori. "Q&A: Maren Hassinger and Senga Nengudi." Interview. *Los Angeles Times*, November 27, 2011.
- Finley, Cheryl. *Committed to Memory: The Art of the Slave Ship Icon*. Princeton University Press, 2018.
- Fisher, Jennifer. "Relationship Sense: Towards a Haptic Aesthetics," *Parachute* 87 (July-September 1997): 4-11.
- Fleetwood, Nicole R. *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Flomenhaft, Eleanor. *Beverly Buchanan Shackworks: A 16-Year Survey: April 10-May 22, 1994, the Montclair Art Museum*. Montclair, New Jersey: Montclair Art Museum, 1994.
- Foucault, Michel. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Frankel, David. "Beverly Buchanan at Andrew Edlin Gallery." Review. *Artforum*, October 2015.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History." *New Left Review* 56 (March/April 2009): 97-117.
- , *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*. New York, NY: Verso Books, 2013.

- Getsy, David. *Abstract Bodies: Sixties Sculpture in the Expanded Field of Gender*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2023.
- Ghent, Henri. *8 Artistes Afro-Américains' in Geneva, Switzerland*. Geneva: Musée Rath, 1971.
- Gibson, Ann. "Recasting the Canon: Norman Lewis and Jackson Pollock," *Artforum* (March 1992): 56-73.
- Gloster, Patricia C. "Interview with Beverly Buchanan—An Important New Artist in New York." New York: Cinque Gallery, 1972.
- Goode Bryant, Linda. "Senga Nengudi: Répondez S'il Vous Plaît (R.S.V.P.)." Essay. In *Senga Nengudi: Topologien / Topologies*, edited by Matthias Mühling and Stephanie Weber, 182-183. Munich: Hirmer, 2020.
- and Marcy S. Philips. *Contextures*. New York, NY: Just Above Midtown Gallery, 1978.
- Goodwine, Marquetta L., ed. *The Legacy of Ibo Landing: Gullah Roots of African American Culture*. Atlanta: The Clarity Press, 1998.
- Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
- Grabenhorst-Randall, Terree. "The Woman's Building," in "Women's Traditional Arts—The Politics of Aesthetics," *Heresies* 1, 4 (1978): 44-46.
- Green, Tyler, and Senga Nengudi. "No. 331: Senga Nengudi." Podcast. *The Modern Art Notes Podcast*. Modern Art Notes Media, March 8, 2018.
- Gritzner, Janet Bigbee. *Tabby in the Coastal Southeast: The Culture History of an American Building Material*. Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1978.
- Gubser, Michael. "Time and History in Alois Riegl's Theory of Perception." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66, 3 (July 2005): 451-474.
- Hall, Charles P. "Liquid Support for Human Bodies," U.S. Patent issued June 15, 1971.
- Hamilton, Thomas J. "Eight U.S. Blacks Exhibit in Geneva: 75 Art Works in First Show in Europe by Negroes." *The New York Times*. June 11, 1971.
- Handley, Susannah. *Nylon: The Manmade Fashion Revolution – A Celebration of Design from Art Silk to Nylon and Thinking Fibres*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*.

- Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013.
- Henderson, Harry. "Norman Lewis: The Making of a Black Abstract Expressionist, His Achievements and His Neglect," *International Review of African American Art* 13, no. 3 (1996): 58-64.
- Hermes, Matthew E. *Enough for One Lifetime: Wallace Carothers, Inventor of Nylon*. Washington, D.C.: American Chemical Society and the Chemical Heritage Foundation, 1996.
- Hockley, Rujeko. Linda Goode Bryant by Rujeko Hockley. Interview. BOMB Magazine, April 11, 2019.
- Holland, Sharon Patricia. *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity*. Duke University Press: Durham, 2000.
- Hounshell, David A., and John K. Smith. *Science and Corporate Strategy: Du Pont R&D, 1902-1980*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Hutchinson, Elizabeth. *The Indian craze: Primitivism, modernism, and transculturation in American Art, 1890-1915*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009.
- Hyacinthe, Genevieve. *Radical Virtuosity: Ana Mendieta and the Black Atlantic*. Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2019. 52.
- Ingold, Tim. "Toward an Ecology of Materials," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 427-442.
- Jay, Martin. *Downcast eyes: The denigration of vision in the twentieth-century French thought*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994.
- and Sumathi Ramaswamy. *Empires of Vision: A reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Johnston, Patricia. "A Critical Overview of Visual Culture Studies." Introduction to *Seeing High and Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture*, by Patricia Johnston, 1-24. Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 2006.
- Jones, Amelia. *Body Art/Performing the Subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
- . Interview with Senga Nengudi. Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibition Archive, October 2009.
- Jones, Kellie. "Beyond Reverie." Essay. In *Senga Nengudi: Alt*, 31-35. London, United Kingdom: White Cube, 2014.

- . "Black West: Thoughts on Art in Los Angeles." In *Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, edited by Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Natalie Crawford, 43–74. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008.
- . *Eyeminded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art*, 427–58. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.
- . "In the Thick of It: David Hammons and Hair Cultures in the 1970s." *Third Text* 12, no. 44 (1998): 17–24.
- . "Interview with David Hammons." *Real Life Magazine* 16 (Autumn 1986). Reprinted in Jones, Kellie. *Eyeminded: Living and Writing Contemporary Art*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011. 247–259.
- . *South of Pico: African American Artists in Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
- . "The World According to Z." Essay. In *Senga Nengudi: Topologien / Topologies*, edited by Matthias Mühling and Stephanie Weber, 58–65. Munich: Hirmer, 2020.
- , ed. *Now Dig This!: Art & Black Los Angeles, 1960–1980*. Los Angeles, CA: Hammer Museum, 2011.
- Jones, Lynette A. *Haptics*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018.
- Joseph, Branden W. *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2007.
- . "The Tower and the Line: Toward a Genealogy of Minimalism." *Grey Room* 27 (2007): 58–81. <https://doi.org/10.1162/grey.2007.1.27.58>.
- Kapsalis Terri. *Public Privates: Performing Gynecology from Both Ends of the Speculum*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Karl, Brian. "Beverly Buchanan: And You May Find Yourself... At Andrew Edlin." *Daily Serving*. 11 June 2015.
- Krauss, Rosalind. "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 30–44.
- Kwon, Miwon. *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002.
- Lash, Miranda and Trevor Schoonmaker, eds., *Southern Accent: Seeking the American South in Contemporary Art*. Durham: Duke University Press (2016).

- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Lax, T. J. . “Museums, Oh Museums,” In Lynne Cooke, ed. *Outliers and American Vanguard Art*. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018. 80-91.
- and Lilia Rocio Taboada, eds. *Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces*. New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2022.
- Lee, Chana Kai, ed. “The Lynching Project: Glynn County.” In *African American Experience in Athens*, University of Georgia, 2019.
- “Lesbian Art and Artists,” *Heresies* 1, 3 (1977).
- Levin, Kim. “Stretch Marks: Rediscovering ‘Legendary’ Senga Nengudi.” *Village Voice*, October 15-21, 2003. 94.
- Lewis, Samella S. and Ruth G. Waddy. *Black Artists on Art, Volume I*. Los Angeles: Contemporary Crafts Publishers. 1969.
- Lippard, Lucy R. “Eccentric Abstraction.” Essay. In *Changing: Essays in Art Criticism*, 98–111. New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, 1971.
- , “Memory Made Modern.” in *Women’s Caucus for Art, 2011 Honor Awards*, New York, NY.
- , *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*. New York: The New Press, 1983.
- , *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972; A Cross Reference Book of Information on Some Esthetic Boundaries*. Studio Vista, 1973.
- , *The Lure of the Local: Sense of Place in a Multicenter Society*. New York: The New Press, 1997.
- and John Chandler. “The Dematerialization of Art,” *Art International* 12, 2 (1968): 31-36.
- Lipsitz, George. “Weeds in a Vacant Lot: The Hidden History of Urban Renewal.” Chapter. In *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
- López, Miguel A. and Josephine Watson, “How Do We Know What Latin American Conceptualism Looks Like?” *Afterall* (Spring 2010): 5-21.

- “Making Doors: Linda Goode Bryant in Conversation with Senga Nengudi.” Hauser & Wirth: *Ursula* 1, December 1, 2018.
- Malagón-Kurka María Margarita. *Arte Como Presencia indéxica: La Obra de Tres Artistas Colombianos en Tiempos de Violencia: Beatriz González, Oscar Muñoz y Doris Salcedo en La Década de Los Noventa*. Universidad De Los Andes, Facultad De Artes y Humanidades, 2010.
- Marchán Fiz, Simon. *Del arte objetual al arte de concepto: Las artes plásticas desde 1960* (1972). Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 1988.
- Marks, Laura U. *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. University of Minnesota, 2002.
- Masotta, Oscar. *La teoría como acción*. México: Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo: 2017.
- McArthur, Park, and Jennifer Burris Staton. *Beverly Buchanan: 1978-1981*. Mexico City: Athénée Press, 2015.
- McMillan, Uri. “Sand, Nylon, and Dirt: Senga Nengudi and Maren Hassinger in Southern California.” Essay. In *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965-85: New Perspectives*, edited by Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockley, 97–118. New York, NY: Brooklyn Museum, 2018.
- Mendieta, Ana. “Introduction.” *Dialectics of Isolation: An Exhibition of Third World Women Artists of the United States*. New York: A.I.R. Gallery, 1980.
- Mercer, Kobena. “Black Art and the Burden of Representation.” in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, 233-58. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- , “Diaspora Aesthetics and Visual Culture.” in *Travel & See - Black Diaspora Art Practices since the 1980s*, 227-47. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). Translated by Donald A. Landes. London and New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Meyer, James. *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.
- Meyerowitz, Lisa Ann. “Exhibiting Equality: Black-Run Museums and Galleries in 1970s New York.” Dissertation, University of Chicago, Department of Art History, 2001.
- Miller, Daniel. *Materiality*. Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2006.
- Moor, Terry. “The South: Coastal Plains and Interior Uplands,” chapter in *Reinventing an Urban*

- Vernacular: Developing Sustainable Housing Prototypes for Cities Based on Traditional Strategies*. New York: Routledge, 2017.
- Morgan, Jennifer L. “‘Some Could Suckle over Their Shoulder’: Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770.” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (January 1997): 167–92.
- Morris, Catherine, and Rujeko Hockley, eds. *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965-1985, A Sourcebook*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
- , *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965-1985, New Perspectives*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.
- Moten, Fred. *In the Break the Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Musser, Amber Jamilla. *Sensational flesh: Race, power, and masochism*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014.
- , *Sensual excess: Queer femininity and Brown Jouissance*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018.
- “New Hosiery Held ‘Strong as Steel // 3,000 Women hail promise by Du Pont at Closing Session of Herald Tribune Forum // Foods due to aid beauty // other gifts of science extolled – Shirley Temple Addresses Gathering By Phone.” *The New York Times*, October 28, 1938. 24.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). Translated by Walter Kaufman. New York: Vintage Books, 2011.
- Noble, Kathy. “Senga Nengudi.” *Artforum International*; New York Vol. 53, Iss. 7, (Mar 2015): 291-292.
- “Nylon.” *Fortune Magazine* 22 (July 1940): 56-59, 114-116.
- “Nylon will avoid errors of rayon // Du Pont will invent generic terms for each weave and ban false claims // more hosiery tests due // silk stocking men scorn fear greater durability will cut per capita use.” *The New York Times*, November 3, 1938. 34.
- Odita, Odili Donald. “The Unseen, Inside Out: The Life and Art of Senga Nengudi.” *Nka Journal of Contemporary African Art* 1997, no. 6-7 (Summer/Fall 1997): 24-27.
- Oliver, Valerie Cassel, ed. *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art*. Contemporary Arts Museum, 2013.
- and Franklin Sirmans, eds. *Double Consciousness: Black Conceptual Art*

- Since 1970. Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, 2005.
- Perreault, John. "The Whitney Counterweight: Stretching It." Review of Senga Nengudi at Just Above Midtown. *Soho Weekly News* 4.25 (24 March 1977): 22, 27.
- Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1993.
- Piper, Adrian. "The Triple Negation of Colored Women Artists." Essay. In *Next Generation: Southern Black Aesthetic*, edited by Lowery Stokes Sims, 15–22. Winston-Salem, NC: Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, 1990.
- Pitts, Greg. "Body Language / Body Talk." In *Senga Nengudi: Improvisational Gestures*. Denver: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2015.
- , "Looking Back Forward at the Emergence of an Amer-I-Can—A-FREE-KA-N (Afrikan-American) Aesthetic—An A-Free-Ka-N Centered Discourse in the Key of G." Essay. In *L.A. Object & David Hammons Body Prints*, edited by Connie Rogers Tilton and Lindsay Charlwood, 64–75. New York, NY: Tilton Gallery, 2011.
- Powell, Richard J. *Going There: Black Visual Satire*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press in association with the Hutchins Center For African American Research, 2020.
- , *Black Art: A Cultural history*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2021.
- Purnell, Molly. "Senga Nengudi: Warp Trance." *Textile*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2008: 188–190.
- Quinton, Jared. "Beverly Buchanan." Review of *Beverly Buchanan: Ruins and Rituals at the Brooklyn Museum*. *The Brooklyn Rail*, December 6, 2016.
- Rakes, Rachel. "Agitation, Isolation, Abstraction." In *Dialectics of Entanglement: Do We Exist Together?*, A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY, 2018, 6-8.
- Rickey, Carrie. "The Passion of Ana." *The Village Voice*, 10-16 September 1980: 75.
- Riegl, Alois. *Late Roman Art Industry (Spätromisches Kunstindustrie, 1927)*. Translated by Rolf Winkes. Roma: Bretschneider, 1985.
- Roberts, Jennifer L. "Things: Material Turn, Transnational Turn," *American Art* 31, 2 (2017): 64-69.
- Rodney, Seph. "How to Embed a Shout: A New Generation of Black Artists Contends with Abstraction." *Hyperallergic*, August 23, 2017.
- Rosenberg, Karen. "The Architecture of Survival: Haunting 'Ruins and Rituals' Begins 'A Year

- of Yes' at Brooklyn Museum." Review of *Beverly Buchanan — Ruins and Rituals*. *The New York Times*, November 11, 2016.
- Rosenthal, Stephanie, ed. *Ana Mendieta: Traces*. London: Hayward Publishing, 2014.
- Rothman, Lily. "The War That Shaped Women's Legs." *Time Magazine*, October 24, 2014.
- Sandoval, Chela. "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," *Genders* 10 (Spring 1991): 1-24.
- Schneider, Rebecca. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2011.
- Schriber, Abbe. "'Those Who Know Don't Tell': David Hammons c. 1981." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 29, no. 1 (2019): 41–61.
- Schulman, Bruce J. *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2008.
- "Senga Nengudi: Critic's Pick." *Village Voice*, September 24-30, 2003.
- Shannon, Joshua. *The Disappearance of Objects: New York Art and the Rise of the Postmodern City*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.
- Shirazi, Sadia. "Returning to Dialectics of Isolation: The Non-Aligned Movement, Imperial Feminism, and a Third Way." *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 7, no. 1 (2021): 1–17.
- Sickels-Taves, Lauren B. *The Lost Art of Tabby: Preserving Oglethorpe's Architectural Legacy*. Southfield, Michigan: Architectural Conservation Press, 1999.
- Siegel, Robert. "Brief History of Nylon Stockings Since Their Introduction 60 Years Ago Today." Episode. *All Things Considered*, 2000.
- Simmel, Georg. "The Ruin" (1911). Reprinted in Kurt H. Wolff, ed. *Essays on Sociology, Philosophy and Aesthetics*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965. 259-266.
- Sims, Lowery Stokes. "Beverly Buchanan's *Runes/Ruins*." Atlanta: Heath Gallery, 1981.
- , "Threads: Textiles and Fiber in the Works of African American Artists." Essay. In *Threads: Textiles and Fiber in the Works of African American Artists*, 6–8. New York, NY: Eli Klein Fine Art, 2010.
- , ed. *Next Generation: Southern Black Aesthetic*. Winston-Salem, NC: Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, 1990.

- Sirmans, Franklin. "Searching for Mr. Hammons." In *David Hammons: Selected Works*. New York: Zwirner and Wirth, 2006.
- Spero, Nancy, "Tracing Ana Mendieta," in *Artforum*, April 1992.
- Stamatakis, Michael, Constantina Sargedi, Theodora Stasinou, and Konstantinos Kontzoglou. "Vesciovaginal Fistula: Diagnosis and Management." *Indian Journal of Surgery* 76, 2. (April 2014): 131-136.
- Stephens, Michelle Ann. *Skin Acts: Race, Psychoanalysis, and the Black Male Performer*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Stetson, Erlene. "A Note on the Woman's Building and Black Exclusion" in "Third World Women—The Politics of Being Other," *Heresies* 2, 4 (1979): 45-47.
- Stewart, Marilyn. "Beverly Buchanan: Symbols of Community." *School Arts: Essentials* (May-June 1995).
- Stillman, Nick. "Senga Nengudi's 'Ceremony for Freeway Fets' and Other Los Angeles Collaborations." *East of Borneo*, December 7, 2011.
- "Stores Reassured on Nylon Prices // Hosiery Producers Predict No Cutting, Cite Power to Select Outlets // Supplies to be limited // Initial total only 60,000 dozen pairs, percentage of seconds high." *The New York Times*, May 2, 1940. 42.
- Sullivan, Buddy. *Tabby: A Historical Perspective of an Antebellum Building Material in McIntosh County, Georgia*. Darien, Georgia: Georgia Historical Society, 1998.
- Tani, Ellen. "What You Missed: Senga Nengudi's Performed Objects." in *Senga Nengudi*, edited by Begum Yasar, 18-23. New York: Dominique Lévy, The Back Room, 2015.
- Taormina, Victoria Marie. *Bodies in Action: Senga Nengudi's R.s.v.p. Répondez S'il Vous Plaît (1975/2003)*. PhD diss., University of California, Riverside, 2016. Ann Arbor: ProQuest, 2016.
- Tapley, Mel. "About the Arts." *New York Amsterdam News*. March 26, 1977. D13.
- Tate, Greg. "Cult-Nats Meet Freaky-Deke: The Coming Age of the Post-Nationalist Black Aesthetic," *Village Voice*. December 9, 1986.
- , "Of Senga Nengudi and the Synthetic Tango Mystery School." In *Senga Nengudi: Wet Night—Early Dawn—Scat Chant—Pilgrim's Song*. Miami: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2018.
- Thackara, Tess. "Beyond Movements: Senga Nengudi's Art Within and Without Feminism, Postminimalism, and the Black Arts Movement." Thesis, City University of New

- York: Hunter College, 2020.
- Threadcraft, Shatema. *Intimate Justice: The Black Female Body and the Body Politic*. Oxfordshire, England: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Tilton, Connie Rogers, and Lindsay Charlwood, eds. *L.A. Object & David Hammons Body Prints*. New York, NY: Tilton Gallery, 2011.
- Tobin, Amy. "Heresies' Heresies: Collaboration and Dispute in a Feminist Publication on Art and Politics," *Women: A Cultural Review* 30, 3 (October 2019): 280-296.
- Traba, Marta. "Feliza Bursztyn." *Eco* 44, 267. 1 Jan. 1984, pp. 235–260.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon, 1995.
- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego, California: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.
- Wall, L.L. "The Medical Ethics of Dr. J. Marion Sims: A Fresh Look at the Historical Record." *Journal of Medical Ethics* 32, 6. (June 2006): 346-350.
- Wallace, Ian Edward. "Used Bodies." Essay. In *Senga Nengudi: Topologien / Topologies*, edited by Matthias Mühling and Stephanie Weber, 134-140. Munich: Hirmer, 2020.
- Wallace, Michele. "Afterword: 'Why Are There No Great Black Artists?' The Problem of Visuality in African-American Culture." in *Black Popular Culture: A Project by Michele Wallace*, edited by Gina Dent, 333-46. New South Wales: Accessible Publishing Systems, 2010.
- Walling, Rachel. *The Preservation of Tabby Ruins: Suggestions for the Future of Chocolate Plantation*. Master of Science diss., Clemson University, 2016.
- Weber, Stephanie. "Connections, Missed and Made—Senga Nengudi and Gutai." Essay. In *Senga Nengudi: Topologien / Topologies*, edited by Matthias Mühling and Stephanie Weber, 120-127. Munich: Hirmer, 2020.
- , "Dynamic Topologies: On Consistency and Transience in the Work of Senga Nengudi." Essay. In *Senga Nengudi: Topologien / Topologies*, edited by Matthias Mühling and Stephanie Weber, 36–51. Munich: Hirmer, 2020.
- and Matthias Mühling, eds. *Senga Nengudi: Topologien / Topologies*. Munich: Hirmer, 2020.
- Weheliye, Alexander G. *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

Wilson, Judith. "Ana Mendieta Plants Her Garden" in *The Village Voice*, 1980 (August 13-19): 71.

----- and Richard Powell. "Shades of Grey in the Black Aesthetic." Essay. In *Next Generation: Southern Black Aesthetic*, edited by Lowery Stokes Sims, 24–30. Winston-Salem, NC: Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, 1990.

Wolfe, Audra J. "Nylon: A Revolution in Textiles." *Distillations: Science History Institute*. October 2, 2008. <https://www.sciencehistory.org/distillations/nylon-a-revolution-in-textiles?page=3>.

Wood, Catherine. "Nengudian Woman." Essay. In *Senga Nengudi: Topologien / Topologies*, Matthias Mühling and Stephanie Weber, eds. Munich: Hirmer, 2020. 96-105.

"Women: No Panties?" *TIME Magazine*, 18 August 1941.

"Women's Traditional Arts—The Politics of Aesthetics," *Heresies* 1, 4 (1978).

Woytus, Amanda. "Synthetic Fabrics Inspired a Cultural Revolution." *JStor Daily*. July 19, 2017. <https://daily.jstor.org/synthetic-fabrics-inspired-cultural-revolution/>.

Yasar, Begum, ed. *Senga Nengudi*. New York: Dominique Lévy, The Back Room, 2015.

Yelton, Rick. "For the Love of Tabby," in *Concrete Producer* 25, 3. 2007.

Yonan, Michael. "Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies," *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18, 2 (Fall-Winter 2011): 232-248.