

Weathering in Absence: Beverly Buchanan at Haus am Waldsee

by Lars Holdgate // Nov. 25, 2025

This article is part of our feature topic [Ghosts](#).

There is not much we can do to control processes of weathering. Landscapes and humans are subject to and defenseless against it. It cannot be mimicked, it can only happen. It exists in a state of being, not becoming. It is like a singular sentence that speaks volumes even without knowing what sentences, paragraphs or books precede it.

'Weathering' at Haus am Waldsee focuses on Beverly Buchanan's 'Ruins' and 'Shack' works. The former are blocks of cement installed in "natural" environments—exposed to the elements and far away from urban life. Against this backdrop they seem immovable and everlasting. The shacks—dwellings visibly made by hand using planks of wood and whatever might be lying around—are the polar opposite. Both, in their own ways, are responses to and symptomatic of their environments, whatever the connotations of that word might be.



Beverly Buchanan, 'Weathering' with Ima-Abasi Okon, installation view at Haus am Waldsee, 2025 // Photo by Julian Blum

The theme of shaping and responding to environments extends to Ima-Abasi Okon's contributions to the exhibition, which range from the all encompassing 'Sex,' a site-specific installation that covers the space's interior, thereby filtering Buchanan's work, down to Haus am Waldsee's external environment, with a new path that has been drawn to access the lake. Okon picks up narratives in Buchanan's work and expands on them, figuratively and literally creating new paths in places already trodden.

Whether it is the person that lives in the shack or the wind that spits against the rocks, the subject in 'Weathering' exists only in its absence; the ghost that cannot be seen but is felt. The first room seems to be empty, bar seven small shacks standing on a shelf: all of them similar with their red brownish panels and dark roofs. Given the space's splendor, these could easily be mistaken for decorations. I start to think of the song 'Little Boxes' by Malvina Reynolds.



Beverly Buchanan: '7 Houses,' 1997, background: Ima-Abasi Okon: 'Sex,' 2025, installation view 'Beverly Buchanan. Weathering' with Ima-Abasi Okon, Haus am Waldsee, 2025 // Photo by Julian Blum

But the room isn't empty. Ima-Abasi Okon's 'Sex' is pervasive. It illuminates not just the interior of the room but also the entire building: Okon (re)frames Buchanan's work. Every wall glows in a warm throbbing yellow that is welcoming and joyful. In certain parts, the pollen has been applied in layers so thick that it clumps together. Elsewhere, the faint shadow of the paint roller's path mirrors the vastness of a (poorly mown) football pitch.

In the next room, against the same backdrop, Okon has curated 14 of Buchanan's 'Flower' works. Pastel drawings mingle with the pollen on the walls. The act of hanging a depiction of something over its own residue creates a cheeky contrast; perverted would be too strong of a word. At this point, the exhibition's environment-narrative takes shape, preparing you for the next room, where we find a table carrying a miniature village of shacks, an assemblage of discrepancies.



'Beverly Buchanan. Weathering' with Ima-Abasi Okon, installation view at Haus am Waldsee, 2025 // Photo by Julian Blum

One shack has this, the other that. One is tiled with buttons while another is made of steel. But the majority are made of wood, patched together. You cannot quite see in through the holes and crevices—but maybe someone is looking out at you. Each dwelling's unique shape and form tells a different story about different people—these, however, are all absent and this absence takes up more space than the works themselves.

Of the models here, many are drab in colour except for the church, which radiates with its bright stripes. While in this small village the church is a minority, taken in the context of the exhibition as a whole, it conforms. Buchanan's shack drawings are bright, joyful and full of vitality. Some are naive and innocent, injecting the space with the kind of admiration and awe

that you could only ever really capture as a child—a sense that is reflected back at you by the pollen on the walls.



Beverly Buchanan: 'Lamar County, GA,' 2003, oil pastel on paper, 56×76 cm // Courtesy of the Estate of Beverly Buchanan and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York

The shack models appear in different sizes, growing from room to room. The largest one on display might almost be large enough for a person to sit in—it entices and it teases as you ponder the possibility of entering it or even sitting on the table and chair next to it, which would surely implode in comic-book-like fashion.

I can't help but return to the smaller shacks. In comparison, they start to look like architectural models. Their slighter size legitimizes the existence of the full size version that they imitate or preclude or reference. Their existence suggests, if not explicitly states, an intentionality that seems different to that involved in the creation of the "real life models" and the material's essence proudly reflects that, despite lacking functionality. I ask myself, what purpose do these objects fulfil?



'Beverly Buchanan. Weathering' with Ima-Abasi Okon, installation view at Haus am Waldsee, 2025 // Photo by Julian Blum

Speaking of the shacks, Buchanan says: "I knew what they would look like but I did not know what they would feel like." It follows that Buchanan's ability to present a finished shack seems to have been a process of getting to know how to feel the shacks, by existing in them and getting to know the people who do. It is probably then for this reason that Buchanan conceives of the shacks as portraits, as she claims that "when you look at these structures, you could get an idea of who might live there."

In this way, the shack comes to be symbolic on an individual level. But for us to understand this symbolism, it operates on a more general cultural level. Shacks are a form of dwelling: a material invocation of people's culturally mediated responses to their environments, my rough interpretation of Tim Ingold's definition. These buildings, homes and houses feel inextricably linked to humans despite none being present and the proportions being off. The shack's composition indicates that it has been built by the hands of an individual, guided by particular competencies, bodily capacities and needs. The shack is the materialized cultural response to an environment. The ghosts of the people that inhabit these structures stir up a sense of alienation, as I balance concurring feelings of distance and proximity.



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Part of the intrigue behind the shacks is the mystery of not knowing who lives inside but having enough clues to create a profile. The dwellings speak for themselves and on behalf of their creators, like skin that has been shed. Yet at the same time, there exists a line of demarcation between the viewer and the shacks. It is physically impossible to enter this object that is made for the sole purpose of existing in it. One shack that has a sign saying "keep out" reminds you that there is a barrier that we cannot pass.

This dualism of presence and absence appears within the relic works, too: they are physically absent from the exhibition but virtually present. A slideshow of photographs details the process behind creating them as Buchanan comments on the sludge of bureaucracy, the forms, the fees and the waiting times involved in installing a cement block in "nature."



Beverly Buchanan: 'Marsh Ruins,' 1981, colour photograph, 9x13 cm // Courtesy of the Estate of Beverly Buchanan and Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York

The exhibition's presentation of biographical and contextual information offered an understanding of Buchanan not just as an artist, but as a person—like the letter written on personalized paper with the header “Beverly Buchanan – artist and diva.” But most if not all of the information stemmed from Buchanan's own words. Instead of pre-chewed interpretations, the texts that accompany the works are anecdotes or stories written by Buchanan personally. Most importantly, Buchanan acknowledges the viewer's position and empathizes with them. At times, the texts made me feel like Buchanan had a similar perception process to me or vice versa, which brought me closer to the work. But, at other times, when I felt distant from the works, her words brought me closer to her, as I read “I remember I HAD spent time in a house like this and I had the best fried chicken of my life, and saw stars through the roof.”



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The remnants, the traces and the relics are references to times and states of being that no longer exist. With the shack in the museum and the cement block on the cliff, Buchanan captures a certain weathered state while managing to engineer the act of weathering itself: a testament to the slowness of time. Maybe the same way Buchanan viewed her own work, 'Weathering' can be seen as a portrait, rather than a structure. It is a portrait that welcomes you. It is a portrait of a person whose absence offers a greater presence than the works themselves.

Exhibition Info

Haus am Waldsee

Beverly Buchanan with Ima-Abasi Okon: 'Weathering'

Exhibition: Oct. 2, 2025-Feb. 1, 2026

hausamwaldsee.de

Argentinische Allee 30, 14163 Berlin

