

BETH COLLAR



Beth Collar
Born 1984, Cambridge UK
Lives and works in Berlin

EDUCATION

2010-2012 MA Sculpture, Royal College of Art, London, UK
2009-2010 Postgraduate Diploma in Drawing, The Princes Drawing School, London, UK
2004-2007 BA(Hons) Fine Art, London Metropolitan University, London, UK

RESIDENCIES

2020 British School at Rome, Rome, IT
2015-2017 University of Bristol History Department, 'The Figure of the Witch' research group
2015 RUPERT centre for Art and Education, Vilnius, Lithuania
2013-2014 Detroit, Bristol, UK
2012 The Woodmill GP, Bermondsey, London, UK

Solo Presentations

2021 *Basher Dowsing*, von ammon co, Washington, DC, USA

2017 *Seriously*, Mark Tanner Sculpture Award, Standpoint, London, UK

2015 *11/50*, Fig-2, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, UK
Probably, Like a Melon Rolling Off a Table: Part II, solo performance for Saturday Live, Serpentine Galleries, London, UK
Depression, Happy Birthday Gallery, London, UK

2014 SOME CHTHONIC SWAMP EXPERIENCE, Tintype Gallery, London, UK

2013 *The Brackish Seas of the Triassic*, performance as part of Art Licks Weekend festival at the old chapel, Maughn Library, Kings College, London

2012 *ANCIENT BRITAIN*, solo exhibition and performance, The Woodmill GP, London, UK

Group Exhibitions

- 2022 *Beth Collar, Rhea Dillon, Niklas Taleb, Marina Xenofontos*, Sweetwater Gallery, Berlin, Germany
- 2017 *A rock that keeps tigers away*, Kunstverein München, Munich, Germany
Performance event with Hannah Still, Kunstraum, London, UK
Household Values, exhibition and performance, Yvonne Lambert, Berlin, Germany
- 2016 *Tale Tales*, touring exhibition at Glasgow Women's Library, Glasgow, Scotland
Vordemberge-Gildewart Award exhibition (shortlisted), Annely Juda Fine Art, London, UK
Preserves and Presences, a sculptural performance, IMMA, Dublin, Ireland
Tarantallegra, Hester, New York, USA
Tall Tales, touring exhibition at Freud Museum, London, UK; Touchstones Gallery and Museum, Rochdale, UK; Glasgow Women's Library, Glasgow, Scotland
Secret Surface, where meaning materialises, KW, Berlin, Germany
Secret Agents, Guest Projects, London, UK
A Million Lines, Bunkier Sztuki Gallery of Contemporary Art, Kraków, Poland
- 2015 *The Pump*, Royal College of Art, London, UK
Tall Tales and Wayward Narratives, performance event, Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham, UK
Secret Agents, Finnish Museum of Photography, Helsinki, Finland
SSHHHH, sounds like vernacular architecture, performance event, Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, Netherlands
The Spirit of the Staircase, The Sunday Painter, London, UK
Bob Cobbbiiiiiiiiing Live, performance event as part of Speaking Parts, Raven Row, London, UK
The Cipher and the Frame, performance and exhibition, Cubitt, London, UK

- 2014 *Anatomy of Anxieties*, exhibition and performance, Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong, China
PALIMPSEST, performance collaboration with William Cobbing at Hayward Gallery Project Space, London, UK
The flow between the thing and the word, Performance as Publishing at Modern Art Oxford, Oxford, UK
Field Broadcast, live performance broadcast at www.fieldbroadcast.org
Let's Make Another Possible Now, performance event as part of ANTIKNOW directed by Jakob Jakobsen, Flat Time House, London, UK
- 2013 *From script to performance to exhibition to performance to print*, performance and exhibition curated by Rowing and Performance as Publishing, Rowing, London, UK
Wendel! Open Your Door, a Woodmill project, CPG, London, UK
The Everything and Nothing Problem, performance event, Jerwood Space, London, UK
Lore of the Land, performance event, Dorchester Abbey, Dorchester-on-Thames, UK
We Object, Aid and Abet, Cambridge, UK
- 2012 *Whitechapel London Open*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK
- 2008 *Bloomberg New Contemporaries*, Liverpool Biennial and Rochelle School, London and Liverpool, UK

Awards

- 2017 Arts Foundation 'Live Art' award, Shortlisted
- 2016/17 Mark Tanner Sculpture Award
- 2011 Gareth Watkins Memorial Bursary, associated with Kettles Yard, Cambridge, UK

Bibliography

Tate Etc Magazine, Micro Tate artist page, Autumn Issue. Print/Digital.

Form IV, issue 6, 'Obstruction', formiv.com, Jul 2016. Digital.

unMagazine, artist pages. Issue 9.2, Oct 2015. Print/Digital.

Performance as Sculpture, a Performance as Publishing publication. Sept 2015 Print.

Transactions of the Duddo Field Club, William Cobbing, - the appendix artist pages – Sept 2015 Gallery Copy, commission to accompany permanent collection at David Roberts Art Foundation, 2015

"Decorative Grammar." Her Eyes, My Voice, vol 3. 2014. Print

Neru Phuyt, vol 1, 2014. Print

To Arrive Where We Started, publication accompanying What We Have Done, What We Are About To Do at the CCA, Glasgow. 2012

Temperate Tastebuds (from temperature to temperament), System Publications, 2012

ARTICLES

Pippa Koszerek, "Q and A with... Beth Collar, Artist." a-n online. Aug 2016. Digital.

Catherine Wood, "'the year in performance,'" 'Best of 2015.' Artforum. Dec 2015. Print/Digital

Orit Gat. "The Spirit of the Staircase." Frieze. Issue 173, 2015. Print/Digital.

Lizzie Homersham. "Depression." The Aorist. Issue No. 1, 2015. Print.

Lizzie Homersham. "Performance as Publishing." Frieze. Issue 160, 2013. Print/Digital.

Beth Collar

Basher Dowsing

01 May - 13 June 2021

Washington DC: von ammon co is pleased to announce its eleventh project at 3330 Cady's Alley, *Basher Dowsing*, a solo show by Berlin-based multidisciplinary artist Beth Collar. The exhibition's namesake is William "Basher" Dowsing, an English Puritan iconoclast whose mandate was the destruction and removal of idols and objects of superstition from buildings in Cambridgeshire and Suffolk in the middle of the 17th century.

The most prominent adjustment to von ammon co (a former grocer's warehouse completed in 1904 and adjacent to the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, whose construction was completed in 1850) is the painting of the gallery's structural columns from white to black, in order to evoke the two-toned siding of timber-framed homes of the English countryside and suburbs. Similar to Oliver Cromwell's residence (and likely that of Mr. Dowsing), this quaint style of architecture was pragmatic in essence during the Tudor period but resurfaced as a popular faux style in the mid-20th century, as England became industrialized and the middle class gravitated towards a synthetic suburban experience based on nativism and nostalgia.

On the upper segments of eight columns hang narrow vertical tablets wrapped in various linen and wool fabrics. This second intervention alludes to the modern amplification systems in churches. Easily overlooked, the referent devices crackle with the activity of the altar, whether that be sermon or simply the ambient murmur surrounding the microphone. This adjustment reconsiders the peculiar architecture of the grocer's warehouse gallery as a church nave with no altar, its ambiance defined by eerie absence.

Installed on the gallery's rough hewn columns (some of which are made of unshaped tree trunks) is a series of objects carved from linden wood using traditional methods. The subject of each object, whether it be a vignette of veiny skin, or a realistic body part, or a gush of liquid frozen in time, is the human circulatory system and the blood that flows through it. Collar's sculptures cite the Crucifixus Dolorosus, or forked cross. Often the site or container for relics, the Crucifixus Dolorosus began appearing in the Gothic Period, tracking closely with the Black Death, and depicted a shockingly corporeal representation of the Christ, his arms either nailed splayed in a Y-shape to a cross, or, frequently, to a Y-shaped construction that represented the forked branches of a living tree (The Tree of Knowledge, charged with bringing sin to the earth). These lurid manifestations of sensitivity and pain belied Christ's commonly assumed role as the conqueror of death, and instead allude to the frailty and fallibility of the human body under strain.

Collar's installation is made of objects, but its primary strategy is to refocus the attention of the viewer to the peculiar character of the space, and to form a nexus of sensitivity, pain, and longing using the structure of the gallery as its basis. In this sense, Collar is working inversely to Dowsing: while Basher sought to purify parochial spaces of their sense memories; Collar's strategy is to not only revive the consciousness of the space but to encode it with a new intelligence, a logos borne out of personal and collective trauma. Drawing on her memory of visiting the whitewashed sacred spaces of Cambridgeshire and Sussex, Collar uses the gallery's space as a similar type of void, and reinscribes it with a new prosthetic iconography.

Beth Collar (b. 1984, Cambridge) is a multidisciplinary artist based in Berlin. She earned a Master's degree in Sculpture from The Royal College of Art, a Postgraduate Diploma in Drawing from The Prince's Drawing School, and Bachelor's Degree in Art from London Metropolitan University. She has exhibited and performed widely in the UK, Europe, and The United States. *Basher Dowsing* marks Collar's first solo exhibition in Washington DC and with von ammon co.



Basher Dowsing,
von ammon co,
Washington, DC
01 May - 13 June 2021

















Not Yet Titled, 2021
carved linden (lime) wood
6.69 x 4.13 x 2.36 in. / 17 x 10.5 x 6 cm





Spurt I, 2021
carved linden (lime) wood
8.27 x 4.72 x 4.72 in. / 21 x 12 x 7 cm

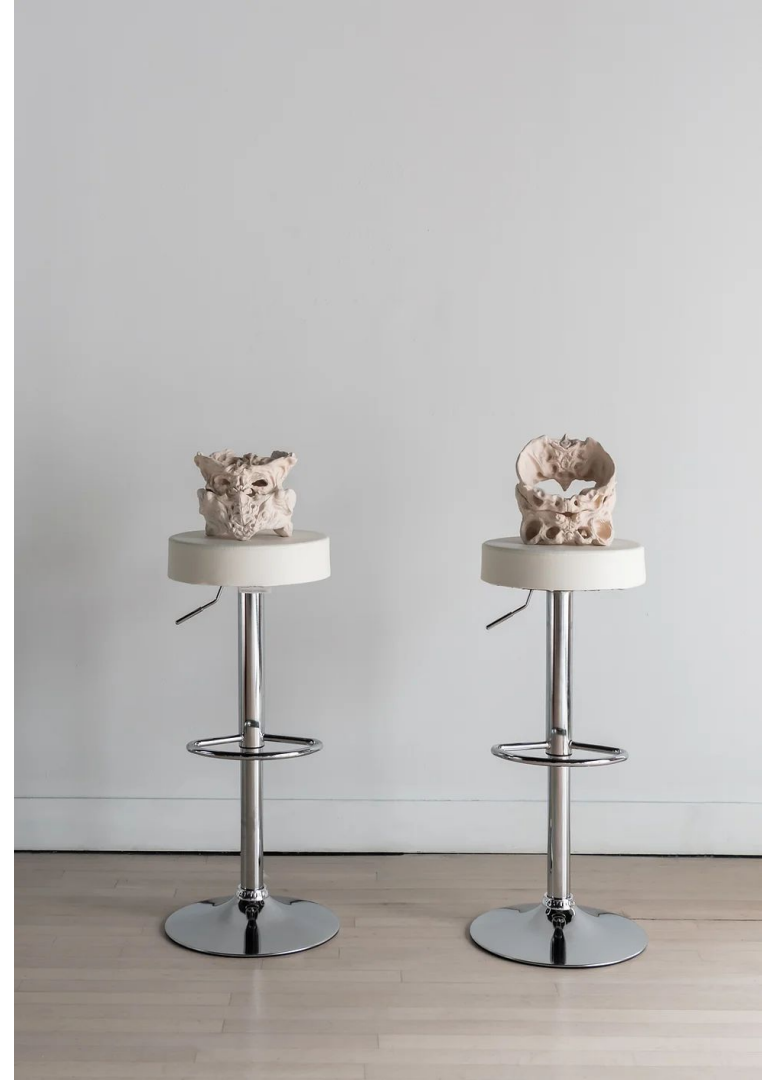




*Transparent Man. Split Tongue. Pre-paid. I used to run my finger down the dry, taught threads, breaking every stitch., 2021
linen, pine, beech, pins
41.34 x 3.74 x 4.33 in. / 105 x 9.5 x 11 cm*



FOCUS GROUP 3
von ammon co.,
Washington, DC,
17 July - 31 August 2022











Pelvic Antichrist, 2019
fired ceramic, barstool
Dimensions variable





Pelvic Antichrist, 2019
fired ceramic, barstool
Dimensions variable





Beth Collar at
Sweetwater,
Berlin, Germany
11 November - 17
December 2022







Spurt IV, 2021
carved linden (lime) wood
8.07 x 3.15 x 5.71 in. / 20.5 x 8 x 14.5 cm





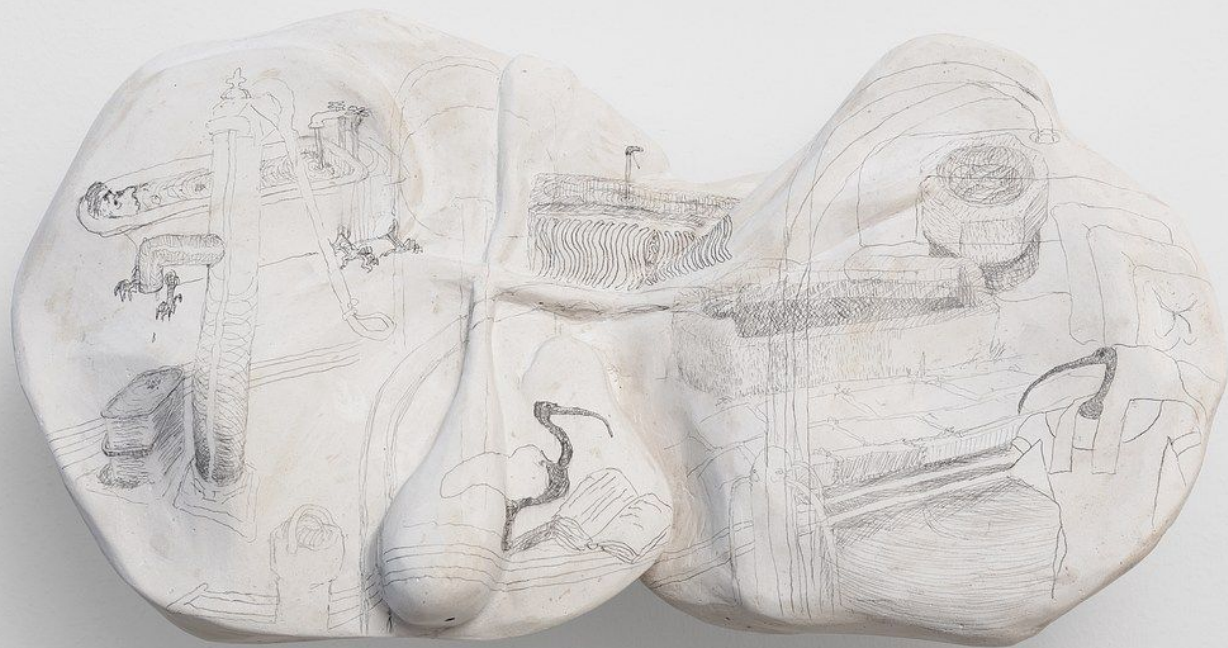
Spurt II, 2021
carved linden (lime) wood
10.63 x 4.72 x 4.92 in. / 27 x 12 x 12.5 cm





The Unforgiven
Sundy, London, UK,
09 October - November 19
2022





Double Yellows, 2022
Pencil on plaster
7.48 x 12.60 x 1.97 in
19 x 32 x 5 cm





Salvation, 2022
Pencil on plaster
7.48 x 12.60 x 1.57 inches
19 x 32 x 4 cm





Ängste, 2022
Pencil on plaster
7.87 x 11.81 x 1.77 inches
20 x 30 x 4.5 cm





Facedown in a Ditch
GUTS, Berlin, Germany,
22 May - 4 June 2022







Face Down in a Ditch, 2022
limewood, mistletoe, found fixings
Dimensions variable

*Ominous Tales of a
Dreaming Wrinkle*
Sherbin,
Berlin, Germany,
20 May - 5 June
2022





*Dad with an Upset
Tummy, 2017*
Unfired clay,
Dimensions variable



Léopoldine
Sans titre (2016),
Paris, France
29 November 2018
- 11 January 2019







Tureen, 2018
ceramic

9½ x 16¾ x 6¼ in. / 24 x 41 x 16 cm

*Thinking Here Of How
The Words Formulate
Inside My Head As I Am
Just Thinking*, at the
Matthew Gallery,
New York, US,
7 September - 4 October
2018









*Thinking Here Of How The Words Formulate Inside
My Head As I Am Just Thinking (4), 2016-18*
lime-wood, cosmetics
6 1/4 x 8 1/4 x 3 inches / 16 x 20 x 8 cm

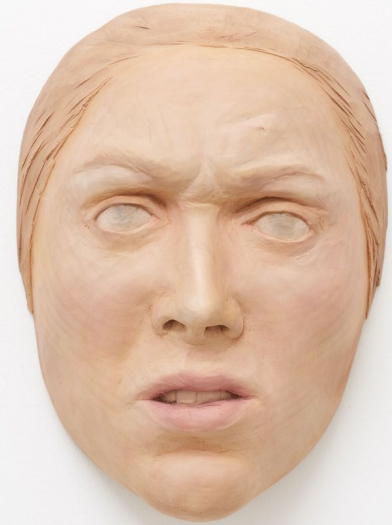
*Thinking Here Of How The Words Formulate Inside
My Head As I Am Just Thinking (1), 2016-18*
lime-wood, cosmetics
6 x 9 x 3 3/8 inches / 15 x 22 x 9 cm





*Thinking Here Of How The Words Formulate Inside
My Head As I Am Just Thinking (5), 2016-18
lime-wood, cosmetics
7 x 9 1/4 x 3 inches / 18 x 23 x 8 cm*

*Thinking Here Of How The Words Formulate Inside
My Head As I Am Just Thinking (2), 2016-18*
lime-wood, cosmetics
6 x 8 1/4 x 3 1/8 inches / 15 x 20 x 8 cm



Seriously at Mark
Tanner Sculpture
Award Show,
London, UK
21 April - 27 May
2017



















Seriously, 2018
painted ceramic
dimensions variable



Seriously, 2018
painted ceramic
dimensions variable



Seriously, 2018
painted ceramic
dimensions variable



Seriously, 2018
painted ceramic
dimensions variable



Seriously, 2018
painted ceramic
dimensions variable



*11/50, Fig-2, at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, UK
16 - 22 March 2015*









*Probably, Like a Melon
Rolling off a Table, Part II,*
at Serpentine Galleries,
London, UK,
31 January, 2015
[https://vimeo.com/12061
2856](https://vimeo.com/120612856)



SOME CHTHONIC SWAMP EXPERIENCE, at Tinytype Gallery, London, UK, 12 February - 8 March 2014







NEC



The Washington Post



Beth Collar's "Basher Dowsing" exhibition places small sculptures almost out of view with minimal lighting.

Built in 1904 as part of a warehouse, the space occupied by Von Ammon Co. is distinctive no matter what art is on display. But Beth Collar's "Basher Dowsing" calls particular attention to the multi-columned room. The Berlin-based British artist did that by having the whitewashed wooden pillars painted black and by placing her small sculptures almost out of view in barely lighted spots. The pieces, mostly carved from light-hued wood, lurk behind posts or nestle above eye level, leaving empty the gallery's skylighted area.

While the space is a major inspiration, that doesn't explain everything. It helps to know that William "Basher" Dowsing was a 17th-century Puritan who set out to strip ornamentation he found improper from buildings in southeastern Britain. Collar's minimalist sculptures emulate features of such structures, but also the loudspeakers found in contemporary churches and parts of the body, including spurts of blood. The corporeal imagery draws from Gothic-era Christian art, whose depictions of physical torment were likely inspired by the Black Death.

Where that art is lurid, Collar's style is studiously cool. "Basher Dowsing" both accentuates and denatures the gallery's architecture. There is a personal element, however, to the show. Dowsing was active in the area where, some 300 years later, Collar was born and raised. In a roundabout way, Collar's temporary remake of Von Ammon Co. is a homecoming.
- Mark Jenkins, 28 May 2021

MOUSSE



Beth Collar, *Dad with a tummy upset*, 2017, *Plural melts - Household Values*
installation view at Yvonne Lambert, Berlin, 2017
Courtesy: the artist and Yvonne Lambert, Berlin. Photo: Philippe Gerlach

A Heart Perpetually Awake: Beth Collar



“Alas, the heart is not a metaphor—or not only a metaphor.”
—Elizabeth Hardwick, *Sleepless Nights*, 2001

In the midst of the autumn’s strange syncopation, an internal rhythm split between pure waiting and errant expectations, I descend into a somnambulant state, near stasis. Life shimmers at a distance as though I had caught it from what Anne Carson once called “the sleep side”: drifting, hidden, unknown. I descend into the dream to see what crosses over. Blind sleep stares back at me in the winter pale of a foreign city. It is a library of sighs and tears, silent smiles, screams, someone’s respiration. Semaphores pointing to some inexorably approaching disaster, or just an anxiety dream. I fall through fugue states and fantasies like a wet snowflake. Intersections are animated in the underground hum of quiet commuters. A gossamer light refracts a distracted inner space from between two discordant towers. Apple adds the anatomical heart to the catalog of emoji, as if to acknowledge Elizabeth Hardwick’s sleepless lines: *the heart is not a metaphor—or not only*. Night plunges in, exposing the contrafactions of broad daylight. I dream of libraries filled with clay pigeons; the books are all dead. (Language skips, flutters, out of breath; I follow its *lines of flight*.)

I court instances where the signified heart is tried for meaning, as T. J. Clark would whisper—instances in which “the present ecstasy of the virtual and non-verbal is put to the test of *form*.” Think to the Tin Man’s daisy-chained moral compass as it ticks toward love. Robert Gober’s radioactive cardiac muscle as it glows from the gutters of the Fondazione Prada’s Haunted House. A cartoon heart placed into the corolla of a garden Marguerite for safekeeping in Pierre Sala’s *Petit Livre d’Amour* (ca. 1500). I chase the torrents of my nocturnal mind by pressing an ear against the stagnant brag of the prefab heart’s fixed idiolect. An image steeped in the conditional. It quips for—what, exactly? Perhaps (a marvel from the mouth of Beth Collar, whom I caught on the phone from Rome):

“That thing coming—”

Which is? Not imminence as such, but expectant emotions and their sometimes-errant movements. Anticipation of what has already arrived. Disasters that do not await us because they have by definition escaped the possibility of experience (at least “escaped on the wings of adjectives,” like words fleeing Hardwick’s mind into insomnolent epistles written in the perpetual twilight of grief and posthumousness). Like catching glimpses of the incognito (the “I” or “other” seen from an odd angle) in the shadows of a bad dream. Something caught asleep, like unsuspecting Ariadne. Her slumber signifies the disaster of her fate; in her image we see the catastrophe that awaits upon her waking. It is what Maurice Blanchot forges as “this silent passive, this dead eternity”: a temporal form given to what nothing (“neither knowledge or un-knowledge,” he admonishes) can adequately designate.

Blanchot fumbles in the darkness of disaster to understand how we might inhabit what threatens infinitely; he invokes a question regarding what can possibly be drawn from the unmentionable. Slipping through these fragments, I think to “that thing coming,” a grave weight seen for example in the suffocating speechlessness of snow-choked nimbostratus in Vija Celmins’s drawings, or the sleeping beauties lost and left voiceless in a midair alpine limbo in Giovanni Segantini’s *Il castigo delle lussuose* (The Punishment of Lust, 1891). Depictions of things that sleep without the slightest movement until a catastrophe precipitates or recedes. Elsewhere, as in Collar’s own oeuvre of skullcaps and heels and heads sunken into baseboards—that is, seen dipping beneath the pale of consciousness—are encounters with what threatens (the self, the ideal) etched into the breathless expressions of the petrified. Like the pierced heart and hysteric hurt of Niccolò dell’Arca’s Magdalene in the *Compianto sul Cristo morto* (Lamentation Over the Dead Christ, 1463–90), or Robert Gober’s hole-y saints, pour of tears and broken stone. Or death pronounced in the countenance of a sprinting man, suspended in motion, in Nicolas Poussin’s *Paysage avec un homme tué par un serpent* (Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake, 1648). From Poussin’s letters, an *essai* at designation:

“*Moy qui fais profession des choses muettes*” (I, who make a profession of mute things)

Like so, Collar's work converses with tongue-tied things, trying to untwist. *That thing coming, those choses muettes*, is an address to the glittering voicelessness of a sleepless night—in other words, a discourse among the restless, as articulated by Blanchot's night-mind: "Not the work of arguments bumping against other arguments, but the extreme shuddering of no thoughts, percussive stillness." Like the lithographic coccyx, emaciated rib cage, hand holding knotted bark, and love writ into the skin of a conifer in Collar's 2020 exhibition "*End Quote*" (all works made in 2020) at stadium in Berlin. Drawn forth from places of muteness, barely emergent from the sonorous dark, is an iconography forged in the clouds of prolepsis.

These are images of anticipation. Cathedrals of bones and tumescent mallets courting what the catastrophizing mind craves to pry apart: the body's shyest territories, contorted forms and colorless bones, twisted positions and contoured hearts, that have come to stand in for some speechless sentiment. Grief, maybe. The so-called lost object and its sleepy reticence. Something Ludwig Wittgenstein would speak to in a language of signs. But above all, like a medieval bard dazzled by a castle's *ouvraiges ingénieux*, Collar's muteness calls from deep within the mind's dream-woods. She continues the anxious sleeper's work of finding verisimilitudes to an unapproachable *idée fixe*: not the event of the disaster, not "merely" what is consequently lost. Certainly, not the loss as such, but what is recuperated in the mind a priori. That is, what for present purposes I will call *Love*: an experience animated in the states of anticipation and delay, recursions and suspensions of the charged heart's quotidian catastrophes. ("It really goes," Sylvia Plath writes, astonished.) Collar's mute things—the disembodied bones, frightened limewood faces caked with makeup, thorn-tacked drawings channeling teen spirit (a collaborative dream drafted with Eoghan Ryan), cut-off arms, Crusaders, and cloaked men—are represented as stuck in states of (be)coming, as if caught up in the breath before it all breaks down. Her artistic qualms are those of the bad sleeper. Cue Haytham El Wardany:

"Catastrophe is the point at which the whole nature of the conflict changes and becomes a conflict of another kind, one which requires another kind of resistance. In this sense, catastrophe is not an extension of the conflict but the instant of its radical transformation, in which it loses all connection to what came before. [. . .] Freightened with brokenness and surrender, [sleep is] the shadow of catastrophe, its doppelgänger, without which it cannot recede.

To mitigate the impact of all manners of impending doom, like anticipating a loved one's death or being crushed by the canon, Collar's work ciphers what the mind cannot possibly hold. She is doing dreamwork for those of us with calamitous dispositions. Her objects are culled from the manifest calm of millpond dreams; their essence is the unmentionable. Go in the direction of these dreams, and lurking, like Martin Sheen in the rivers of *Apocalypse Now* (1979), you will find involutions of the self. Figures fragmented in the torment of personal relation, asymmetries of affection, blown-up, hysterical "female" emotions, the unstable shimmers of the mind, death, heartbreak, stomachaches, apathy, awkward silence, sudden frailty. Bodies barely there, speechless. Misshapen selves are bound by a poetic restraint, a kind of meter; in her words: "Pressing through the holes perforating the tailbone, [. . .] the light hits the flat irises under huge glazed bubbles of ice, pinholes in the center of seething red discs, [. . .] a sliver of pink-whip tongue [. . .] mist encircling the hamlet [. . .] mistletoe, sand and sawdust soaking up blood, tarmac, mistletoe [. . .] the vents, the veil, my first kiss."

Paramount in these lines is Collar's use of asyndeton, that relentless conjunction of *things coming*, as a nod not only to the dark theater of respiration, one breath after another as signified by a set of protruding lungs in bony frame, but also to whatever is caught in the delicate fan of the rib cage's caesura. A *rêlache* of the breath, the inexorable abandon of being. The building of a world is countered in the drawings by an equally meticulous closure. Bodies snap shut like seashells. Extremities stretch into spindly threads, as easy to snap as a lifeline. Figures are mirrored by the architectural structures they are set against. Where the signifiers of a specific self are absent, these creatures find meaning—or subjectivity—in an asyndetic order. Cue Collar's closing salvo:

"Endless, great, endless, on the scale of one to ten, sometimes, I feel, very sad."

Listen closely, too, to Collar's refrain, the repetition of "mistletoe," and "endless." Though as images these are absent from the drawings (how to represent the "endless," anyway?), the double mistletoes are two kisses interspersed in the verse to amp up the mechanical brag at the heart of her work. Collar's repetition of words concerns the often masochistic machinations of the mind, its "disavowal, suspense, waiting, fetishism and fantasy. Not the doubling per se, not merely the reprise, but the contorted motions and rhythmic melancholy that make up the specific constellations of her subjects and motifs. In "*End Quote*," as well as elsewhere in her oeuvre, scenes of solitary cruelty (or some downward spiral) transpose the real into romantic fantasy by alluding to *that thing coming*—the disaster, the thing denied, mortal silence, the dead bell, the hell inside your head. Collar's work is filled with such anxiety dreams, dissociative states, doubles, mirages, marvels, miracles—of the medieval sort—and figments of the imagination, its false cognates. Measured against the canon's dead weight, her scopic impulse courts sights of grim Death, or at least its anaphoric approximations in art; let's call them skins, masks, mirrors, monsters, living machines. As Carson writes in her ode to the sleep side, "It is the emptiness of things before we make use of them, a glimpse of reality prior to its efficacy."

Perhaps:

“Et les merveilles, les deduis,
Les ars, les engins, les conduis,
Les esbas, les estranges choses”

(The marvels, the delights

The artifices, the mechanical devices, the piped-in water

The diversions, the strange attractions)

In Guillaume de Machaut’s poem *Rémede de fortune* (Remedy of Fortune, ca. 1341), the self-contained loops of marvels, artifices, amusements, and living machines call for a poetics of restraint that mirrors the bondage of bodies in Collar’s oeuvre. The *Rémede* commences in the lovelorn strains of a medieval trouvère, acknowledging the inexorable compulsion to sing—qua “I have to sing this because . . .”—as a symptom of love’s soporific sickness. He strolls across pastures and vales, seeking solitude from his sullen state while droning lamentations on love in a strophic form that stretches as far as the landscape he is lost in. His monophonic complaint turns its proto-sludge melody around and around a single line for thirty-six or so full stanzas before the poet finally finds himself in the gardens of the Castle of Hesdin in northern France. Fortune has failed the mooning lover. He is alone with his dead march and its already-démodé lyric form. But amid the rote mechanics and self-enclosed motions of the castle’s “engines of entertainment,” our Prince Charming of the sad ballad begins to feel his misery not only modeled but mediated by the elaborate shocks and special effects of this fourteenth-century fantasyland. “Within these shocks,” as Norman M. Klein writes on technological marvels, “an allegory emerges.”

Which is what? Love is a cruel trick that sets off states of anxious anticipation in slow motion; the poem a machine of amusement imagineered with the dark ride of courtly romance in mind. In the strange thrills of mirror mazes and distorting lenses, statues that shift position, automata bound to singular gestures of violence (sadistic, if you can call machines that), and various tableaux vivants, the poem’s bound intimacy, closed corners, refrains, and fixed images find apposite form. Collar’s sculptures and performances mirror the rhythmic emptiness of the poem’s stilled images. I am thinking about the furrow-browed alien heads that floated in the floorboards of Standpoint, London, in Collar’s exhibition *Seriously* (2017), all stalled in states of ominous emergence. Or the flights of feet and flora in *Daddy Issues* at Dilston Grove, London (2019), in which, as the exhibition’s text read, “parasitic plant life and human tissue [are] connected through dream logic. Skin and cloth become indivisible—rendered anatomically alike, connected or fused.”

Her skullcaps and pointed toes, dissected trees, tailbones, and alien brows are caught between the anxiety of an arrival and the relief of implied momentum. The weight of the sculptural canon is countered by the featherweight mien of objects about to sprout or sprint. Kicking heels are paralyzed with the amazing fact of love. A tree stays tree, trapped with life. Time feels plastic, as Collar writes. But I suspect she means for us to read into “plastic time” the times we *feel* plastic: malleable, pliant, spinning thoughts of our own artifice.

In the presence of Collar’s mute things, I fall asleep into the static of dreams and awake expecting chaos. In them, the potential of something catastrophic is unveiled in slow motion. A last image flashes to mind. Set the stage to an evening in a gallery. A tacit group crowds Collar. She is ambling in a circle with binoculars in hand. Looking into the near-far of her heart, perhaps. Or looking for proof of the heart, beyond metaphor. A laptop lies open on the ground to a series of auto-reply emails. She trips over a glass of volcanic-looking wine. It spills to the ground in a rush of deep red. Against a window is a sleeping figure: a miniature of her father. She calls to him through her magnifying lenses: *Dad?* The sleeping sculpture shuts out the world. Her audience stares, maybe speculates on the frail serenity of the figure. When I ask about *Dad with an upset tummy* (2017) over the phone, Collar talks to me about the realization of her father’s physicality. In a foreign city, both of them sick, she is forced to consider—what? “That thing coming,” the concordance of what’s to come. The presentence of a heart perpetually awake. – Sabrina Tarasoff, 25 January 2021

Beth Collar (b. Cambridge, England, 1984) is an artist living in Berlin. She thinks through sculpture and performance, making things, drawings, and installations. Her solo shows include “End Quote,” stadium, Berlin (2020); Daddy Issues, Dilston Grove, London, commissioned by Matt’s Gallery and Southwark Park Galleries (2019); Retrogression, a collaboration with Eoghan Ryan, 427 gallery, Riga (2019); Thinking Here Of How The Words Formulate Inside My Head As I Am Just Thinking, Waldo at Mathew Gallery, New York (2018); Cloaked Output Vol 2: Spirals of Focus, Primary, Nottingham (2018); Seriously, Standpoint, London (2017); and 11/50, Fig2 at ICA, London (2015). Performances have taken place at CentrumCentrum, Szczecin (2020); Camden Arts Centre, London (2020); Bob Shop, Berlin (2019); Cafe Oto, London (2017); Glasgow Women’s Library (2016); and Serpentine Galleries, London (2015). Recent group exhibitions have taken place at Regatta 2, Düsseldorf (2020); Kunstverein Kesselhaus, Bamberg (2020); Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki (2019); Marlborough Contemporary, New York (2019); Bärenzwinger, Berlin (2019); Cell Project Space, London (2018); Kunstverein München (2017); and KW, Berlin (2016). Since 2015 Collar has been an associated artist with the charity Waterloo Uncovered. She has a solo show forthcoming at von ammon co. in Washington, D.C., in 2021.



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Beth Collar, Daddy Issues, 2019, installation detail, Dilston Grove, London. Courtesy: the artist, Matt's Gallery, London, and Southwark Park Galleries (formerly CGP); photograph: Damian Griffiths

Daddy Issues: Whose Emotions Are Being Milked?

A new work by Beth Collar, commissioned by Matt's Gallery and CGP London, pulls apart female hysteria

A terracotta corpse is broken into fragments and scattered across the floor of Dilston Grove, like a body spat from a peat bog. The eight mud-brown pieces, collectively titled *Daddy Issues* (2019), look shrunken in the vaulted gallery – a former church – but they are life-size body parts. Dismembered limbs lead towards a raised stage where an altar must have once stood. A leg, bent like that of an athlete ready to sprint, has been butchered at the thigh; another is cut at the calf. Collar evokes the spectre of other bodies by sculpting five feet in total, which are all shod in the same leather shoe: the pointed and wrinkled slipper of a dancing jester.

Beth Collar's provocative titling dares me to read the piece confessionally, as autobiography – that irritating fate of so many women's works. Though it's tempting, I refuse to. In any case, she names a spiritual daddy who presides over the show – an early renaissance sculptor named Niccolò dell'Arca, whose terracotta diorama, *Compianto sul Cristo morto* (Mourning over the Dead Christ 1463–90), obsessed her for many years. She finally visited Bologna last November to see the work up-close: six life-size figures that circle the corpse of Jesus in various states of emotional distress. Dell'Arca's men are tearful but dignified, while his women are the tools of melodrama. Mary Magdalene, in particular, appears to have burst into the scene on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Her dresses are billowing, her hands splayed out in shock, her mouth open in a giddy scream.

Renaissance art, like pop culture, employs women as empathy machines. Dell'Arca's depiction of female agony made him famous; his critics were suitably gripped by his renditions of spiraling biblical celebrities. (His Mary is a kind of Renaissance Britney.) The use of clay for serious art was novel. Considered pedestrian – the material of domestic objects, of pots and bricks – clay was revived in the 15th century by sculptors like Dell'Arca because of its malleability. Supple and yielding, it could be used in the service of a new kind of realism – to depict softer drapery or faces in sensational expressions of pain. (Two centuries later, artists would deploy ivory teeth, glass tears and human hair for the same effects.)

Near the pulpit at Dilston Grove is a pelvis. From certain angles, it looks like a carnival mask: whorled and owlsh. A few steps on I find the torso, face down with something strange growing from its back – a gothic flower made of bones, a bloom of clay ribs and joints. Like Dell'Arca, Collar leaves her sculptures unglazed, burnishing their surfaces with the back of a spoon before firing. The wet, leather-brown complexion her process gives to the material has an odd, macabre realism.

'Daddy, I have had to kill you,' writes Sylvia Plath in her hypnotic poem 'Daddy' of 1962. Plath expresses the kind of extreme emotions that Dell'Arca sought in his terracotta faces, as he milked female grief for spectacular effects. But Plath's daddy is full of harshness and hatred and she possesses an unsettling elation when it comes to his death. Her words are alive with hurt and pain, but also excitement, control and triumph. 'They're dancing and stamping on you / They always knew it was you / Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through', read the poem's victorious closing lines. There is no clay-softness to Plath's passion, only a grinding rage. In Collar's work, there's also an atmosphere of vengeance. She takes satisfaction in the sacrifice, in patricide, in the ugliness of her ghastly dead daddy. I leave with the sense that it's Dell'Arca's body that's been milked, exhumed and exhausted. - Izabella Scoot, 29 April 2019



Wewiora & Booth – Curatorial Projects



Beth Collar, Furrowed brow, 2015 Lime wood, MAC cosmetics, installed at the Freud Museum as part of Tall Tales touring exhibition

A Spotlight on... Beth Collar

12 OCTOBER 2016

This month we hear more from Tall Tales Curator Liz Wewiora on how she first came to discover Beth Collar's work and her journey through the Tall Tales programme.

"I first had the pleasure of discovering Beth Collar's work after a performance, Like Valhalla, at Rowing in London. We knew we wanted to invite a London/ South based artist to take up residence in Glasgow Women's Library, whilst Glasgow based Ruth Barker headed down South and after seeing the performance at Rowing I just knew it had to be Beth. For me her work centres around pulling apart and piecing back together remnants of others' stories. She plays with the line between truth and fiction within these tales, until she finds her own collective narrative to share. The work tends to present itself somewhere between a performance and sculpture, with the sculpture often becoming the 'prop', the single object which guides the action/s of her performance. With this playful approach to both medium and story-telling, her response to the archives at Glasgow Women's Library was one that filled me with curiosity and delight.

In the Summer/ Autumn of 2014, Beth began her Tall Tales residency at Glasgow Women's Library working over a 2 phased period, with a simple and open brief to respond to the Library and its collection in some way. With a hugely rich and diverse archive and a talented team of women at its helm, it is no wonder when Beth Collar started her residency at it was hard to know where to begin. I remember the first meetings with her in the library and email correspondences between us both, and how there were so many potential lines of investigation for her to explore further through the GWL archives. Where to start? Where to hone in?

Conversations and investigations around LGBT zines, feminist articles and the women's suffrage movement emerged with peaks and troughs of interest but what seemed to retain Beth's attention throughout was a series of early feminist books including Naomi Woolf's *The Beauty Myth* from 1990. I still smile when I think of Beth first mentioning the book, as I recall my own second year at art school reading the very same writing, which drove the focus and entire approach to my work created that year.

Beth was struck by its topics, which although were raised by Woolf over 3 decades ago, are still very much relevant today. There is a lot of reference to the idealised look of a female in society, the importance of smoothness of a woman's face and the cosmetic industry pushing for this fictional perfection that only beauty and youth will demonstrate a 'true women'.

Woolf's book also reminded her of a really strong rumour that was in circulation when she was a child; that a certain skin-care brand contained aborted fetuses. A horrible idea indeed, but this rumour actually connected to previous research Beth had been looking into around witches and the age old story that witches ate babies. A rumour now that when you search on-line has its own life of stories, whether true or not, creating its own narrative of interest in society. This idea that the rumour becomes the story, rather than historical fact itself, is of particular interest to Beth and often underpins the core themes running through her work.

Upon reflection and inspiration of her time with the Glasgow Women's Library, for the Tall Tales tour, Beth has created a new sculptural, *The Furrowed Brow*, which has already exhibited at the Freud Museum London and Touchstones, Rochdale before finally making its way to its home of inspiration – Glasgow Women's Library this October.

The work consists of two wooden carved sculptures of women's faces; they're almost like masks. They hang on the wall at eye level, peering outwards and directly at the viewer. The facial expression is of a furrowed brow, with wrinkles on the forehead and if you have ever met Beth in person you would certainly suggest one might be a representation of the artist herself. Contemporary cosmetics are then used to smooth the surface of the face, however it is interesting to note the deeper lines of the lime wood used stubbornly show through – an interesting visual nod to this idea what we mean by surface expression, and facial expressions as meaning.

The furrowed brow is often attached to an idea of the brooding hero in popular culture – a James Dean-like expression of thought but when appearing on a woman’s face, it doesn’t hold those connotations, but has a completely different set of meanings. This double standard the expression represents and double meaning conveyed within this shared expression was of particular interest to Beth.

Alongside the Furrowed Brow sculptures, Beth will return to Glasgow Women’s Library bringing the project full circle, with a new performance. The piece will be performed on the opening evening, Friday 21st October at 7pm. The performance is set to respond specifically to and for the Glasgow Women’s Library, with particular references to their archive, a collection which resonates dearly in Beth’s mind.

In a recent interview with a-n Beth mentioned ” Having undertaken it a couple of years ago, almost everything I have been producing since then has in some way been influenced by the literature that I discovered during that residency. That’s been the nice thing about the project being long term”.

We can’t wait to bring Beth and her work back to where it all began, to Glasgow Women’s Library this October.

Beth Collar studied at London Metropolitan University and the Princess Drawing School before completing her MA at the Royal College of Art in 2012. In March 2016, she won Standpoint Gallery’s Mark Tanner Sculpture Award 2016-17.