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

Mark Jenkins // 28 MAY 21

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.

*Beth Collar's 'Basher Dowsing' runs until June 6 2021*