

Art in America

September 2004

Kerry Tribe at L.A.C.E.

L.A.-based artist Kerry Tribe often uses the conventions of the film documentary to critically engage commonly held assumptions about what constitutes ethnographic knowledge and historical understanding. Tribe's recent installation at Los Angeles Contemporary Editions, titled *Florida* (2003), consisted of a DVD projection, audio recordings and photographs. The gallery visitor first confronted a wall covered with five color offset posters depicting underwater views of a swamp in central Florida. The images were abstracted to the extent that they resembled cloud formations or views through the dirty lens of a microscope. The posters were accompanied by an ambient soundtrack featuring rustling leaves and the sounds of birds and crickets.

Turning the corner into the main space, one was faced with a wall-filling screen showing a 20-minute video of Steadicam footage of the Florida landscape, focusing especially on views, both aboveground and submerged, of lush forest and humid swamp. The camera meandered through the landscape at the pace of a leisurely stroll. The presence of cushioned seating in the gallery encouraged the long-term

viewing this piece required.

Running concurrently with the video was a 45-minute audio track containing fragments of interviews Tribe conducted with elderly residents of nursing homes and retirement communities in the Florida counties of Marion and Sumpter. The interviewees provided some dry facts, such as when and where they were born or when they moved to Florida, but mostly dwelled on idiosyncratic details of their lives and beliefs—hunting and fishing stories, religious sentiments, mental and physical maladies, and other preoccupations, including death. The casual wandering of the conversations intersected with the laid-back pace of the imagery: one woman's struggle to recall a name from her distant past was heard while the camera scanned murky underwater vegetation. Another subject provided a fragmentary account of his experience with macular degeneration, while an extraordinarily picturesque scene of cypress trees appeared on the screen.

Tribe's work engages with the established practices of "oral history" while simultaneously, and productively, subverting them by straying into more meditative territory. —Dan Adler

View of Kerry Tribe's *Florida*, 2003, DVD, sound; at L.A.C.E.

