

## Review: In video art, Kerry Tribe works through Doheny mystery

By Sharon Mizota

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Since the 1950s, stately Greystone Mansion in Beverly Hills has been a popular shooting location for all manner of Hollywood films, including “The Big Lebowski,” “The Social Network,” “Eraserhead” and “National Treasure.”

But in 1929, it was the site of a different kind of shooting: Its owner, oil heir Ned Doheny Jr., and his secretary, Hugh Plunkett, were found dead in what was ruled a murder-suicide.

Local artist Kerry Tribe’s new video, “Greystone,” at 1301PE is a 30-minute speculative re-enactment of this shocking event. Although she consulted period accounts, Tribe lifted every word of the dialogue from movies filmed at the mansion. The result is a Frankenstein’s monster of a script — an annotated printout is also on view — that attempts to piece together a real-life story using only the heightened, artificial language of Hollywood fantasy.

Perhaps a bigger film buff than I could tease out all the sources; I only caught a few lines from “There Will Be Blood.” But even this small recognition caused scenes from that film to percolate through the surface of “Greystone,” if only in my mind’s eye.

Overall, the dialogue is both uncannily familiar and awkwardly stilted, as if the actors are skipping lines or reciting from different pages. Working against Tribe’s high production values, the script both propels the narrative and fractures the illusion, reminding us that we don’t in fact know what really happened.

The structure of the piece reinforces this uncertainty. It is divided into five sections that each give a different explanation for the murders. This episodic form, returning again and again to the scene of the crime, mirrors the repeated use of the mansion as a set.

Whether we recognize it or not, in film after film we return to the same house; each time it serves up a different narrative, while keeping its own secrets. “Greystone” is a reverse engineering of sorts, allowing the building to “speak,” as it were, through a sort of ventriloquism. The words uttered in the service of illusion end up (sort of) telling the real story.

Recycling and mutability are of course the stock and trade of Hollywood artifice. The back lot becomes an old Western town, the desert an alien landscape. But in giving voice to the real drama that transpired in the hallowed halls of Greystone, Tribe does trouble the line between reality and make-believe. In the end, perhaps we are all just actors on a movie set.

For its part, “Greystone” ends with a cover-up — a conspiracy between a family doctor, a discreet butler and an obliging maid who may have (who knows?) muddied the waters of history. Some things can’t be regained; they can only be re-imagined.

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