

A flash of near-totalled recall

Kerry Tribe's look at memory's slipperiness focuses on a brush with highway danger
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VISUAL ARTS

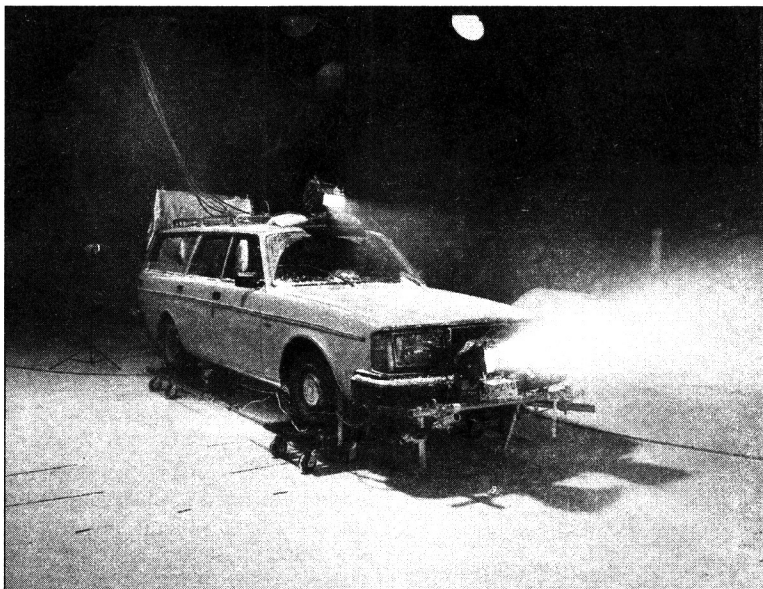
NEAR MISS: KERRY TRIBE

At Artspeak until January 12

◀ Somewhere in the shifting, oceanic layers of memory, representation, and subjectivity, Kerry Tribe locates her art. An American based in Los Angeles and Berlin, Tribe works in a range of media, notably video, film, and sound. *Near Miss* is based on her recollection of a driving incident that occurred many years ago.

The work has three distinct components, the first consisting of text in white lettering on Artspeak's front window. This is a first-person account of driving alone at night during a blizzard. The storyteller recalls following the taillights of the car ahead in near whiteout conditions, watching that vehicle fishtail and correct itself, then hitting the same patch of ice, spinning out of control, and coming to rest facing in the opposite direction.

Inside the darkened gallery, the second part of *Near Miss*, a film projection shot from the point of view of a passenger inside a car, delivers what looks like the same scenario three times. Each take follows the same script, but they all differ in subtle, almost imperceptible ways. Blinding snow races towards us; a couple of white road markers and a large green sign slide past on the right; the lights of the car ahead swerve and shimmy; the barely visible world spins by; a great clump of snow is thrown up against the windshield; more spinning; and then stillness and another road marker. Throughout, the windshield wipers move back and forth across our limited view, their steady *mmm-whump mmm-whump* composing each take's rhythmic soundtrack.



As one part of *Near Miss*, this photograph captures not only the mechanics of filmmaking but also the artifice behind the stories we tell about our own lives.

The third component of *Near Miss* is a large colour photograph (a production still) framed and mounted in a small back room. It depicts an old Volvo station wagon sitting on a large wheeled platform in a film studio. Remnants of artificial snow and fog linger around the car. Lights, wires, sandbags, bubble pack, and other tools and materials signal the contrivance that stands behind the recreation of the remembered event.

The text in the front window, it turns out, was not written by Tribe but by one of the members of her film crew. It's someone else's recollection of the artist's memory—a memory she described repeatedly to her co-workers during the shoot. In her various installations of *Near Miss*, Tribe inserts different versions of the story, told by different crew members. Her own text version is never presented.

In an interview with Artspeak director-curator Melanie O'Brian in the current issue of *X-Tra Contemporary Art Quarterly*, Tribe observes that each crew member remembers her story in a slightly different way. She also says that, in her own head, the memory of making *Near Miss* has displaced the original memory that the artwork represents.

In *Near Miss*, collective representation seems to usurp individual memory. That process—whether literary, filmic, or photographic—is like the telling of history. It's a lovely reflection on the unreliability of what we believe we remember—a point worth considering during festive family dinners, when everyone argues with everyone else about what happened when and how all those long years ago.

> ROBIN LAURENCE