

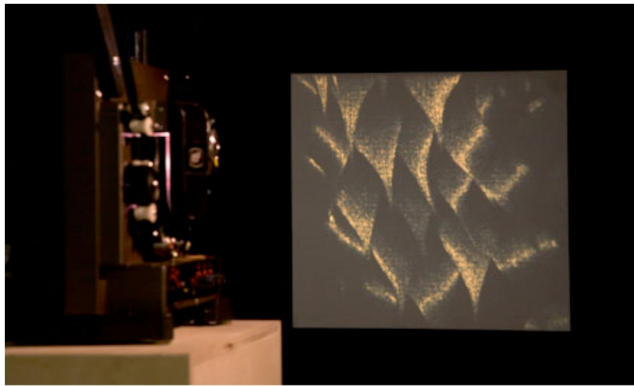
Artist of the week 139: Kerry Tribe

The shifting, nebulous nature of memory, and its influence on our notions of self, runs through this young American artist's films



Skye Sherwin
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Wavering back and forth... installation view of Kerry Tribe's *Parnassius Mnemosyne*, detail, 2010. Photograph: Courtesy the artist and Camden Arts Centre

Do you move in space or time? Is there an old you and a new you? Are you playing yourself or being yourself? Do photographs record the past, present or future? These questions, key to our notions of self, time and memory, arise in one of [Kerry Tribe's](#) earliest videos, *Here and Elsewhere*, from 2002, where they are directed at a red-headed child. "You can only remember what you see, feel, touch and taste," she says at one point, wise beyond her years though looking doubtful.

Throughout this young American artist's gripping work, scientific rigour is forever collapsing in the face of the wobbly permutations of individual minds. In one recent film, *Parnassius Mnemosyne*, an homage of sorts to butterfly expert [Vladimir Nabakov's](#) memoir, *Speak, Memory*, a magnified film of a butterfly wing looks more like jellyfish swimming in the ocean or brainwaves pulsing than a stable form: what we see and remember is as nebulous as the wing's shifting forms.

This idea is brilliantly played out in *The Last Soviet*, one of the videos featured in her riveting UK debut. Here Tribe collides the topsy-turvy experience of space travel with a government's grand-scale manipulation of cultural memory. Her subject is cosmonaut [Sergei Krikalev](#), who, as the Soviet Union crumbled, was left orbiting the planet aboard the Mir Space Station, literally cut adrift from time and space and far removed from events unfolding in his home country.

Back on Earth, aside from bizarre rumours that his shuttle was being manned by a KGB dwarf agent on a suicide mission, he was largely forgotten. None of this is related in Tribe's film by Krikalev, but at a remove, by an actor playing a cosmonaut witnessing

events from the ground.

The layering is typical of Tribe. She throws us back on personal experiences and projections, not least our own, so that the question of what we see and what's really there forever wavers back and forth.

Why we like her: For the compelling Milton Torres Sees a Ghost, featuring an interview with the American RAF pilot sent to shoot down a UFO in 1957. Torres's weird tale, censored for more than 50 years, plays round and round as a strip of black audiotape loops through two reel-to-reel decks, recording and then erasing the interview, in a constant cycle of forgetting and remembering.

Loving the alien: UFO sightings recur in Tribe's work. The closest she's personally come to a close encounter was as a teenager, on a night-time drive with friends, freaking each other out with stories about alien abduction. Instead of flying saucers, they caught a glimpse of the northern lights. Their contradictory memories of the event feature in Tribe's work, *Episode*.

Where Can I See Her? Kerry Tribe's *Dead Starlight* is at Camden Arts Centre, London until 10 July.