

H.M., 2009, c-type print,
76 x 76 cm, edition 2 of 5
+ 2 AP. Courtesy 1301PE,
Los Angeles



Kerry Tribe is known for curiously probing the hazy limits of human perception, existence, memory and their phenomenological intersections. In past film and video projects, she has asked hired actors to recount the memories of her family, meditated on the life narratives of the elderly, staged a talk show featuring UFO witnesses and recreated multiple versions of her own experience of a near car accident. Each of these undertakings has resulted in artwork (be it time-based, text-based or photographic) that hovers between fact and fiction, leaving it to the viewer to draw parameters around the two. In a sophisticated and confident move, Tribe applies this logic to the objectivity of science in her recent exhibition and film installation, both titled *H.M.*

H.M. is arguably the most straightforward of Tribe's investigations into memory, perhaps because it is rooted in an important and well-documented scientific case. The two-channel, quasi-documentary film presents the story of Patient H.M., a man whose experimental brain surgery in 1953 left him without the ability to process and store long-term memories. The severity of his amnesia — only a 20-second recall — made H.M. an ideal subject for ongoing neuropsychological study at MIT, where many of these film's scenes take place. Equally heartwarming and heartbreaking, H.M.'s story unfolds through the intimate narration of one of the patient's closest doctors, fragments of interviews, historical photographs, 'on-location' footage, stock footage, animation, flashes of text and a recurring soundtrack. This single film is run through two side-by-side film projectors, and there is a carefully choreographed 20-second delay between the two channels of projection that subtly mimics H.M.'s cognitive lapses while weaving in the formal dynamics of repeating images and overlapping sound. Throughout the gallery, related photographs depict a portrait of the patient and certain bits of memory-testing equipment as they appear in the film (in addition to some striking drawings and letterpress prints that recall associated instruments and activities). But at the end of the film, the viewer learns that H.M. was never photographed or filmed, and that Tribe's work is in fact a kind of dramatisation.

It is this weighty plot-twist that ties *H.M.* to Tribe's ongoing project of using film to simultaneously reveal and fill in the gaps created by reality, or more specifically, linear time. But unlike Tribe's previous work, *H.M.* seems freed of hoary philosophical pretensions — the kind that encumber her 2002 video *Here and Elsewhere*, in which film critic Peter Wollen asks his ten-year-old daughter to describe, among other things, her existence in terms of space and time — and is allowed to exist as a theoretical text through simpler formal terms. The film is almost clinical in its approach towards such abstract ideas as anonymity, identity, amnesia, recollection and history. And when the existential puzzle that is the human condition becomes a fixed and quantifiable thing, we can carry on with ignorant (or amnesiac) bliss. *Catherine Taft*

Kerry Tribe

H.M.

1301PE, Los Angeles
14 March – 25 April