

PLASTIC MEMORY

AN INTRODUCTION TO DEAD STAR LIGHT

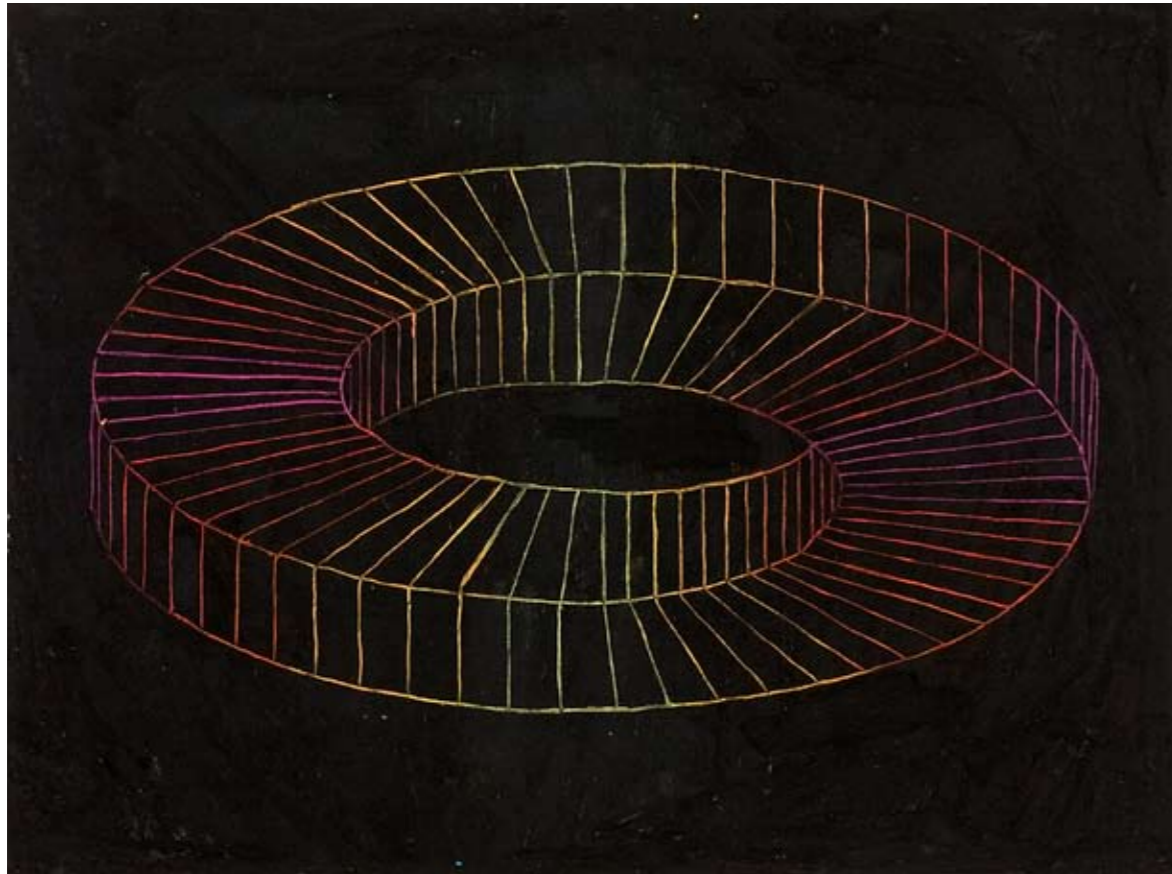
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Kerry Tribe has been developing her practice around the subjective and phenomenological attributes of memory for a number of years, which has culminated in a complex, multi-faceted body of work. Her practice is highly explorative, looking to interpret the unstable, elastic nature of memory through structurally rigorous installations. The experiential aspect of the work figures significantly, implicating us in situations where we are asked to consider the organisation of our own memory.

Each work is a brand new investigation for Tribe. Though there are often thematic and aesthetic links between works, individually they are meticulous, stand-alone creations. For this new commission entitled *Dead Star Light*, Tribe has focused on creating a constellation of new works that together develop upon her exploration of memory from a number of perspectives. Three new works – *Parnassius mnemosyne*, *The Last Soviet* and *Milton Torres Sees a Ghost* (all 2010) – look to structurally engage with their media in innovative ways, and each uses its material form to interact with questions of memory and its converse, forgetting. These new works resonate with one another, and also with Tribe's previous works. A number of associative threads appear, including notions of erasure, flight, portraiture and the role of the viewer.

The title of the project, *Dead Star Light*, is evocative of time, entropy and celestial grandeur, yet the main connotation in this instance is the trace and register of something that no longer exists: the light of a star perhaps already long dead. *Milton Torres Sees a Ghost* pits the subjective experience and personal conviction of one individual against a hegemonic need to monitor, even manipulate "official" or national memory. *The Last Soviet* imagines a reversal of that paradigm of official censorship and erasure – simple techniques of visual simulation are used to create images of a historic yet undocumented personal event in the life of a national icon. Despite the historical and political backdrop of these works, which includes US-Soviet relations, the Cold War, and the memoirs of writer Vladimir Nabokov, it is not necessarily the "big" issues around nationhood, identity, and propaganda that are Tribe's main concern. Rather, these works turn on more nuanced questions of idiosyncratic personal experience, motivation and doubt.

Within the series, recurring themes emerge: flight for example, as a universal human aspiration (a common dream), and as a vehicle for national pride (young boys who dream of flying for their country).



Ambiguous Möbius, 2009
Wax crayon and oil pastel on paper

Parnassius mnemosyne, 2010
(Installation view: Arnolfini)
16mm mobius film loop

Over:
Parnassius mnemosyne, 2010
(Installation view: Arnolfini)
16mm mobius film loop

Nabokov's butterfly *mnemosyne* flaps its wings in slow motion. Milton Torres was a fighter pilot, and Sergei Krikalev – “the Last Soviet” – a cosmonaut. Portraiture is another, more traditional representational device in this instance, following the lineage of Tribe's previous works such as *Here & Elsewhere* or *Untitled (Potential Terrorist)* (both 2002). Portraiture surfaces in various forms in the *Dead Star Light* project, both directly and abstractly offering partial biographical representations of Krikalev, Torres and Nabokov.

Also presented here, as a kind of precursor to the *Dead Star Light* project, is *H.M.* (2009), which looks at amnesia from an individual, neurological perspective. This film installation, an experimental documentary about an anonymous amnesiac known within the scientific community simply as patient H.M., simultaneously thematises and requests short-term recall on the part of the viewer. *H.M.* offers a sort of puzzle or test for questioning one's own memory, an experience that occurs in much of Tribe's practice. An earlier work, *Here & Elsewhere* (2002), tests its viewers in a different way: the video is a revisitiation of *FRANCE/TOUR/DETOUR/DEUX/ENFANTS* (1978), an experimental television series by Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, but curiously takes its title from a different collaboration between Godard and Miéville, *Ici et Ailleurs* (1976). A conscious duality typifies Tribe's approach to making art, in which the aesthetic and the structural, the didactic and the experiential work together to generate what the artist has referred to as a kind of “structural synaesthesia.”

Content, structure and experience are triangulated in Tribe's practice, producing multiple perspectives from which to approach the cluster of stories and ideas that constitute *Dead Star Light*. Within this, the notions of memory and forgetting, register and erasure, act as mutual figure and ground, as if forming a möbius strip which one can enter at any point. This book charts the emergence of the project, capturing the first installations of these works, and offering insights into their development in relation to the trajectory of Tribe's wider practice to date. It is documentation that provides a snapshot of the network of ideas within these new works, as well as previous works, and looks to focus in on a number of the thematic, aesthetic and scientific readings.

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