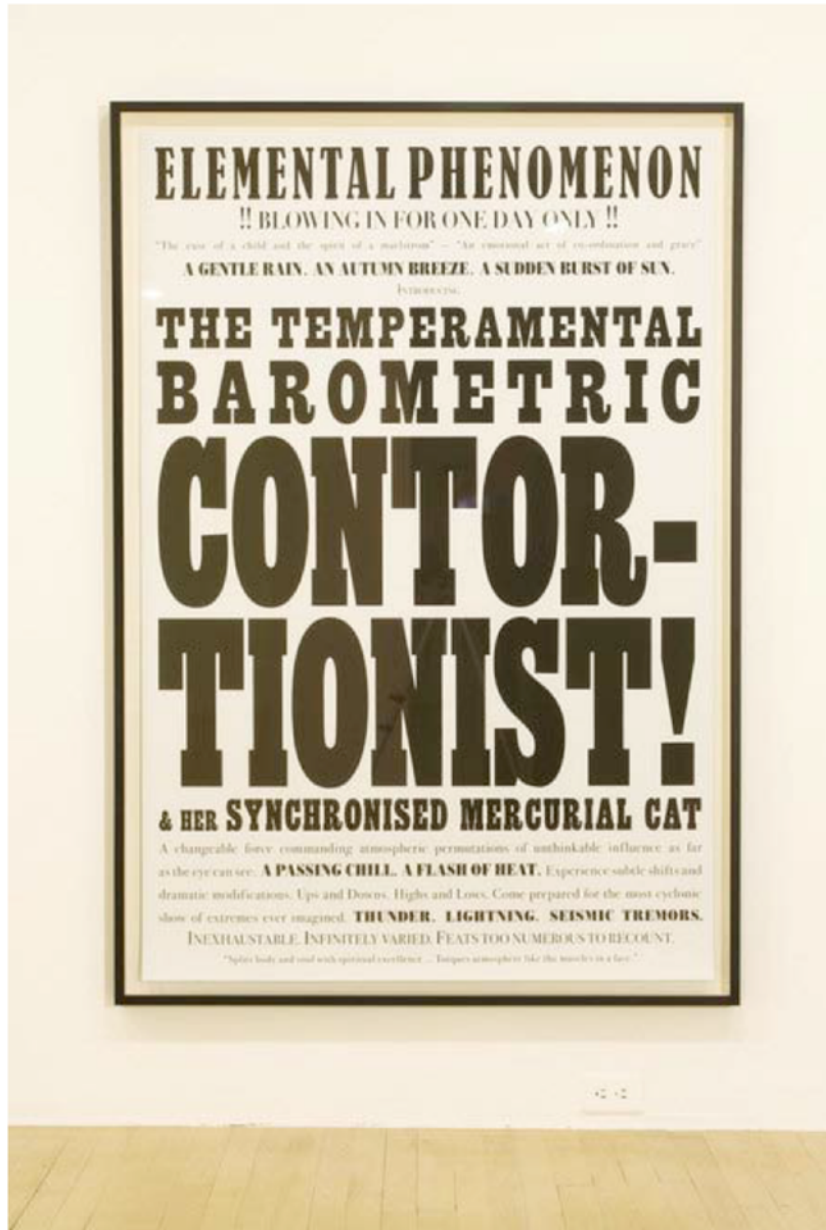


Janice Kerbel: Spectacular Promises, and Subtle Gambles

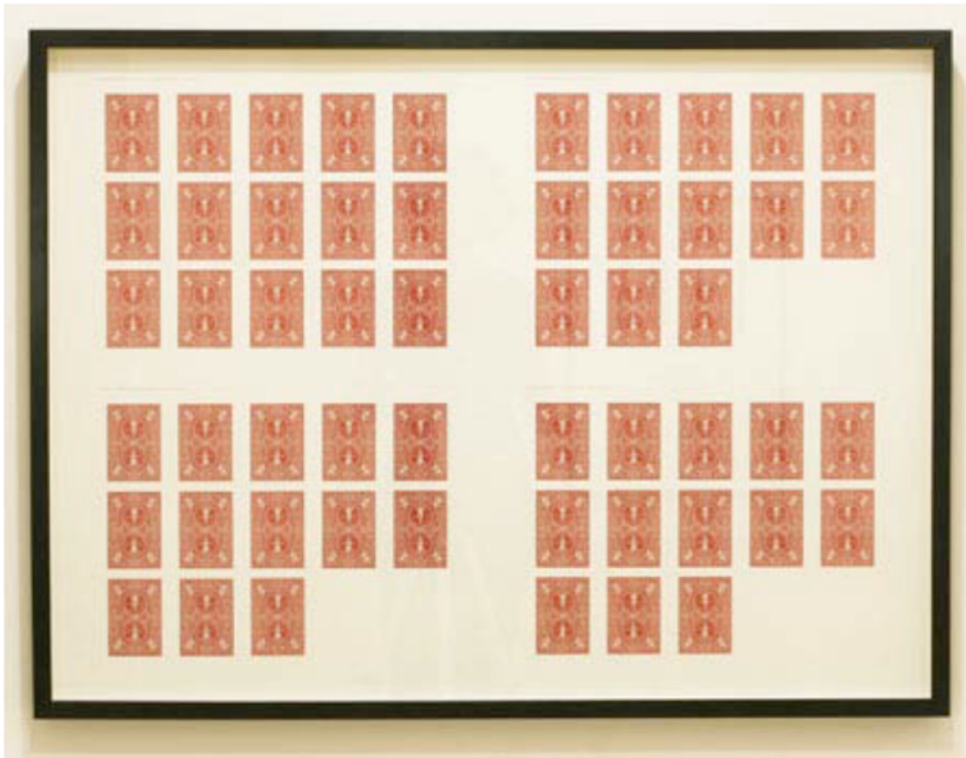
OPTICA, MONTREAL SEP 6 TO OCT 11 2008



Janice Kerbel *Remarkable: The Temperamental Barometric Contortionist* 2008
photo Bettina Hoffmann

London-based artist [Janice Kerbel](#) is best known for her meticulously researched and highly detailed conceptual projects that open up subversive or even dangerous possibilities for the viewer. In her 1999 book project *Bank Job*, for instance, the artist created a step-by-step instruction manual for the perfect robbery at an upscale possibilities for the viewer. In her 1999 book project *Bank Job*, for instance, the artist created a step-by-step instruction manual for the perfect robbery at an upscale

London bank. In the 2004 series of *Home Fittings* drawings, floor plans from public institutions like cultural centres and museums were altered to map out places where one could stand without being seen or heard. Kerbel's works function as a kind of dare for the viewer, providing everything necessary to execute these covert projects except the bravery and will to see them through.



Janice Kerbel *Three marked decks, Bicycle Riderback* 1999 Detail
photo Bettina Hoffmann

Kerbel's current exhibition at Montreal's Optica gallery. Alluding to high-stakes casino gambling and the prohibited practice of counting cards, *Three Marked Decks* is a large-scale print presenting the backs of three decks of seemingly standard playing cards. While at first glance the patterns on the cards seem identical, closer inspection reveals slight alterations in the motifs that would differentiate card value for the experienced player. The effect is the creation of a double entendre trick: the marked cards could be used to cheat in a round of poker, but the uninitiated viewer also becomes an unknowing bystander to the potential deception.

Kerbel's other project in the show, *Remarkable*, is a series of circus-style typographical posters announcing astounding acts and fantastical feats performed by an unknown woman. Originally prepared for and exhibited at London's Frieze Art Fair, Kerbel's sideshow posters emphasize and spectacularize the act of looking. Parallels between the spectacle of the circus and the exploits at a commercial art fair are obvious, but recontextualized in the gallery space, the posters also draw attention to cycles of expectation outside of the art world. In an era of overwhelming visual advertising that continuously offers possibilities that will never be fulfilled, Kerbel's works operate as self-fulfilling prophecies where conceptualization and execution are conflated and the promise of action is just as potent as its realization.