

View of Janice Kerbel's installation
Ballgame (Innings 1-3), 2009, loudspeaker,
75 minutes; at Greengrassi.



INTERNATIONAL LONDON JANICE KERBEL GREENGRASSI

The conditions surrounding Janice Kerbel's *Ballgame (Innings 1-3)*, 2009, the single work in her recent show, could hardly have been further from the kind of major league sports spectacle to which it curiously refers: no hype, a tiny audience, a lack of visual or kinesthetic incident, and a general absence of anticipatory tension. In fact, it is uncompromisingly spare. On entering the bright, airy exhibition space, the viewer was confronted by a lone loudspeaker mounted on a stand and stationed several feet from the back wall. A 75-minute looped track of baseball commentary echoed around the otherwise bare room. The piece constituted something of a wager: in contrast to the furious promotion of the sports industry, there was very little here to draw you in. But once the visitor was engaged, attention was rewarded.

Baseball is subject to more intense statistical scrutiny than perhaps any other sport. With individual contributions valued over team efforts, each player's performance—all the at-bats, home runs, strikeouts, on-base percentages, slugging percentages, ground-ball-to-fly-ball ratios, walk-to-strikeout ratios, etc.—is quantified with extraordinary zeal. Kerbel's commentary, which gives a play-by-play account of the first three innings of an imagined game, is composed of statistical fictions. Every detail, according to press materials, was determined by calculating

the average figures or most frequently occurring events from the last 100 years of baseball's history: runs scored, batting averages, dimensions of the field, even the players' names. Phrases fetishizing special talents ("Ace" Anderson possesses "immense physicality"; his opposite number, White, "could pitch into a tea-cup") are exceptional precisely because they are so common.

This reduction to the average certainly contrasts with what Frank Stella admired in the legendary hitter Ted Williams. As Stella told Michael Fried, Williams had the extraordinary ability to see the stitches on a ball whizzing over the plate at 90 miles an hour. While Stella's account of Williams became emblematic of a certain way of seeing art, it is not primarily the eyes that Kerbel puts to work here. The effective dynamics are almost entirely internal, mnemonic and associative.

Sports commentaries are premised on conveying the action as it happens; here, each detail and each "instant" of play instead aggregates a century of quantification. History and the present are kept in tension, as are the poles of fiction and fact, spectacle and nonevent, perceptual encounter and imaginative reconstruction, incompleteness and looped infinity.

—Ed Krčma