

frieze

Eliza Williams: *Janice Kerbel*, www.frieze.com, London, October 4, 2009

Janice Kerbel

GREENGRASSI, LONDON, UK



'Every baseball carries with it the history of the game, in a mysterious way that you don't find in football or tennis or basketball.' So remarked novelist Don DeLillo in an interview with *The New York Times* in 1998 about the significance that a particular baseball – Bobby Thomson's missing home-run ball from 1951 – played in the writing of his epic tome *Underworld* (1997). There is indeed a old-worldly romance to baseball that sets it apart from many other sports, a mystique that is pertinent to Janice Kerbel's new greengrassi exhibition, for which the Canadian artist is exhibiting a sound-piece centred on the game.

Ballgame (Innings 1-3) (2009) initially seems to be a simple proposition: a recording of a sports commentator narrating the events of a baseball game as they occur. His commentary is littered with jargon – 'curve ball', 'bottom of third, one all, nobody out' – and entering the space one is assailed with the feeling that accompanies walking into any sports match mid-play – a sense of confusion and mild disorientation. This sensation is especially apparent within a gallery that – aside from the large speaker displayed at its centre – is entirely empty.

Visitors	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO	PO	A	E	Home	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO	PO	A	E
Johnson (2), cf	2	0	1	1	0	1	2	0	0	Wright (17), 2b	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Wilson (8), 2b	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	Bell (26), ss	2	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0
Baker (22), rf	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	Young (16), 3b	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Martinez (19), lf	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Sullivan (14), rf	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Walker (15), 1b	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	Davis (7), lf	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Brown (4), 3b	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	Garcia (35), 1b	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Clarke (9), c	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	Smith (2), cf	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Williams (6), ss	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	Jones (3), c	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Anderson (12), p	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	White (10), p	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Totals	11	1	2	1	0	3	8	3	1	Totals	13	2	4	1	1	1	6	3	0
VISITORS	001									-1212									
HOME	101									-2403									
Temp: 78.1°F Wind: SE																			

Janice Kerbel, *Ballgame Boxscore (Innings 1-3)* (2009), silkscreen on paper

Despite its plausibility as a live event, *Ballgame (Innings 1-3)* is in fact a dramatic monologue – the twists and turns of the game have all been constructed by Kerbel, and she has created the perfect (and perfectly ordinary) version of a ball game. This unusual analysis of a sports event calls to mind Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno's 2006 film *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*, which followed the French football star Zinedine Zidane throughout a match with 17 cameras, offering an entirely new (and surprisingly affective) perspective on a well-known sport. Yet Gordon and Parreno's film still relied on real events for its narrative arc; Kerbel is in control of how events turn out, and instead of choosing the dramatic, she has settled for the average.

Kerbel has dissected the codes within events in this way before – when commissioned to create a new piece for Frieze Projects in 2007, she created a series of print works ('Remarkable') that advertised imaginary characters and attractions within the fair in traditional letterpress style. Other works have seen the artist create a plan for a feasible way of robbing a central London bank, and a map of a town designed for ghosts. All of these works explore the blurry line between reality and fiction: by using accepted systems of logic and research, Kerbel examines the illusory in rigorous terms.

A similar technique is at play in *Ballgame (Innings 1-3)*. In the UK, baseball is a largely unfamiliar game, beyond its representation in movies and novels, where it is often set in the past, most commonly the 1950s. With her use of a specialized sports vocabulary and her choice of an actor whose voice sounds like it was plucked from '50s America, Kerbel draws on these associations to create a text that is simultaneously confusing yet comprehensible. The game she has constructed may lack the drama and mystery that DeLillo refers to, but by using a set of familiar signifiers she hints at a world rich in detail beyond the pitch and play of the ball game.

-- Eliza Williams