

Janice Kerbel

Gasworks (Upcoming)

In this clean-cut presentation, Janice Kerbel evokes a shadowy underworld of gambling and card sharks. Three different designs for packs of playing cards are each printed on a single sheet. Neatly grouped into suits, the 52 cards and two jokers create a pleasing arrangement of colour and form. The back of the 'Bicycle Rider Pack (Poker 808)' bears a florid motif that features a winged cherub on a bicycle. But annotations suggest that these are not ordinary cards. Labels reading 'Diamonds (extended twirl)', 'Clubs (double fat ends)' and 'Hearts (inverted leaf)' indicate that they are marked. It takes careful examination to discern the slight modifications that indicate a change of suit;

they include the loss of a tiny part of the ornament or the subtle extension of a curlicue. The removal of different petals from a decorative rosette even indicates the value of each card. Picking out these subtleties in an opponent's hand can't be easy; playing cards with a marked deck obviously requires finely tuned vision. An appropriate subject for an artwork, then, and Kerbel slyly draws together aesthetics and skulduggery. The eye of the connoisseur is no more sophisticated than that of the card cheat. Since these decks of marked cards are for fraudulent ends, does that make the visual appeal of these antiquated designs suspect? Is the integrity of the art called into question? Not exactly, but this fine show does remind you that looking at abstraction, in part, requires an act of trust. *Mark Currah*