

## REVIEWS

vintage advertising. The result was a nuanced viewing experience that could decorously fit in either a union hall or on a gallery wall.

Condé and Beveridge's trademark style of recreating rather than documenting individual testimonies, by employing actors and using props, was a strategy first conceived to protect the workers they interviewed. In contrast, for *Burial at Oshawa (Part 6)* (2019), current members of Local 222 and union leadership play themselves. Commissioned by the Robert McLaughlin Gallery, *Burial at Oshawa* marks the closure of the GM plant in Oshawa, and documents—or more precisely, celebrates—the resistance to its closing. In Beveridge's words, "The workers are still standing up to the corporate elite even if the plant is closing. In our present political moment, the fact that resistance takes place is something you need to celebrate even if it is not necessarily achieving the desired result."

The work is a reimagining of 19th-century French painter Gustave Courbet's *A Burial at Ornans* (1849–50). When Courbet presented the painting at the 1850 Paris Salon, it received both strong praise and criticism. Considered a history painting in scale but indeed a genre painting in subject, it's an early attempt to bring the experience of rural life into the capital of France and into the most elite environment for the arts, to in effect heroicize the ordinary, heroicize common humanity. Condé and Beveridge's *Oshawa: A History of Local 222* received similarly mixed responses from the Toronto art world when it was first shown. Tuer points out that "The institutionalized nature of [Condé

and Beveridge's] artistic collaboration could lend itself to the production of 'official' images for the labour movement that [would] end up serving as a new cultural authority rather than as a grassroots mediation." She continues, "Restaging the issue of class as a cultural as well as economic and social category, Condé and Beveridge perform a difficult balancing act between criticality and intentionality, running the risk of slipping into cultural prescription and a reification of working-class struggles." Perhaps in this instance, the balancing trick is the distracted look the figures assume in *Burial at Oshawa*, another detail Condé and Beveridge borrowed from Courbet, to add a sense of ambiguity and contradiction to the narrative. —YAN WU

## JENINE MARSH

Centre d'art et de diffusion CLARK, Montreal

Jenine Marsh's "the dirt under my nails" was composed entirely on the floor: the installation of strewn gravel, train-pressed coins, flower bulbs, second-hand purses and rough-cast plaster hands was no more than five inches from the ground at its highest point. Steel arcs embedded into the gallery's concrete floor gently scooped the loose detritus of the installation into shallow groupings. This horizontal display presented a challenge for viewers: Do we step on it? How and where should we enter the installation, if at all? During the busy October vernissage, I watched tentative onlookers navigate the gravel-covered floor; most looked to others to lead the way, following suit while feigning caution and wide-stepping through loose pathways. Eventually, a sense of rule-breaking was established. The artwork, a typically precious and untouchable thing, was suddenly underfoot. The rubble that covered the floor was only spread farther as it was walked upon. By creating a scene to be entered rather than a site to be observed, Marsh made the artwork impossible to avoid, forcing her audience to trespass.

Given that Marsh's process included a trio of illegal activities (trespassing, obstruction of train tracks, destruction of currency), this air of illicit behaviour in the gallery felt appropriate. To create the flat, smooth coins, Marsh lined train tracks with coins of varying currencies and denominations and waited for the heavy cars' crushing effect. As the trains hit, the intended purpose and associated value of the coins was nullified, their markers of nationhood erased. Marsh performs a type of reverse alchemy by converting the "gold" of the currencies back into the base metals that adorned the installation's sandy floor with flecks of silver, gold and bronze. Through this process, a nostalgic childhood activity matures into conscious destruction and, perhaps, the symbolic derailment of notions of value in a capitalist economy.

References to money and consumerism were repeated, throughout, with the inclusion of gaudy purses sourced from local thrift stores throughout Montreal. Framed by bare white walls, the floor of the installation was mostly a muted concrete grey, save for the purses' garish pops of hot pink and sparkly gold—maybe a wink to the tackiness of greed? Some lay next to imprecise casts of plaster hands smudged with powdered pigment, which rested in varying gestures of holding, opening or displaying. One hand pinched a coin between its chalky fingers. Other purses were stuffed with earthy flower bulbs that read more as onions than something that might one day bloom. More bulbs, with purple and brown skins, lay in clusters on the sandy floor. These flowers-to-be, or "ugly little promises" as Marsh described them, existed as organic companions to the coins and spoke to types of intangible value based solely on a speculative future.

Marsh's arid environment had no obvious focal point and offered only clusters of small objects to gaze down upon, crouch by or step over. Viewers were forced to interact with the work in order to properly see it. By composing the exhibition this way, Marsh pronounced a clear rejection of the traditional rules of commercial art display. The art market, based as much on murky potential value as a bulb is on the promise of bloom, is fixed firmly within capitalism's grasp. By upending the audience's relationship to her artwork through a carefully controlled, or rather, carefully chaotic, viewing experience, Marsh reveals the follies of betting on uncertain futures. —EMMA SHARPE ■



Jenine Marsh *the dirt under my nails* (detail) 2019 Mixed-currency train-pressed coins, plaster with powdered pigment, second-hand purses, flower bulbs, bent steel, concrete and sand Dimensions variable COURTESY COOPER COLE PHOTO PAUL LITHELAND