

VIENNA



Marlie Mul, *Puddle (Green Tracks)*, 2013, sand, stones, resin, 3/8 x 33 1/2 x 35 1/2".

## Marlie Mul

CROY NIELSEN

The nature of a site is in the details: the way that this concrete floor maps a shape from white wall to white wall, or the way that the broad walls give way to narrower ones and another mounted with a bookshelf, or the way that the large, ground-floor window looks out onto a particular vista. Banalities like this year's extralong, snowy winter in Berlin also count among the specifics of a site and might even have come to mind at Marlie Mul's exhibition "Boneless Banquet for One," where the mixture of gravel and slush tracked around by pedestrians on the city's streets and sidewalks seemed reflected in the low-lying sculptures speckling the gallery floor.

Numbering six in all, the works that were shown consist of sand, stones, and resin, as well as a few stray plastic bags. Mul cast this mixture into irregular oblong shapes about the size of a manhole cover. Each lay flat on the floor. The sand and stones—some larger, some smaller—scattered haphazardly across the works' surfaces seemed whipped around by nature's whims. Here and there, the resin had collected into dark brown pools, some of which looked like the result of bicycle tires cutting curves across the breadth of the mottled surface. Each of the sculptures is titled *Puddle*, and bears a subtitle, such as *Green Tracks* or *Brown Passageway*; all are dated 2013.

To me, these gravel-strewn puddles echoed those in the streets outside; however, Mul told me she envisions them as reminiscent of a suburban setting. Either way, though, their ability to recall a real stretch of road follows their depiction of no place in particular—and the bright white gallery's ability to emphasize this sense of placelessness. Likewise, Mul's puddles don't boil down to concrete symbolism but allow their presence (the artist's presentation of these specific materials and their ability to evoke associations in this form) to constitute most of their significance. In a way, the same could be said for her recent series of wall-mounted sculptures *Air Vent/Butt Stop*, 2012: The rectangular metal sheets, perforated with slits plugged with cigarette butts and assorted trash, suggested the fixtures of indeterminate use found on city streets and in subway stations that are sometimes repurposed by lazy but resourceful individuals as trash receptacles.

Mul's *Puddles* are thus another example of her ability to pinpoint familiar sites of tedium and distill from them an uncanny reflection of the things we do and see but rarely discuss. Reliant as the works are on an aesthetic of poor materials and simple forms—though brilliantly managed, making for curious and compelling constructions—their subjects aren't glorified by Mul's attention or her translation of them into artworks. The artist's insistence on thinking small and working with the quotidian doesn't mean she's squandered a chance to say something momentous or that she's advocating for a right to be lazy; instead, it coincides with a sense that little possibility exists today for expressing difference, for instigating change, for asserting agency in a highly regulated society. With the winter dragging on longer than it should have, these works could be seen as reminders that people often talk about the weather when they have nothing else to say—when they want to fill the space between them, to experience some sense that they are overcoming the divide.

—John Beeson