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Shotgun Reviews

- January 12, 2014 Written by [admin](#)

[Mia Feuer: An Unkindness at the Corcoran Gallery of Art](#)

Shotgun Reviews are an open forum where we invite the international art community to contribute timely, short-format responses to an exhibition or event. If you are interested in submitting a Shotgun Review,

please [click this link](#) for more information. In this Shotgun Review, Blair Murphy reviews Mia Feuer: An Unkindness at Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.



Mia Feuer. Installation view, *An Unkindness*, 2013. © Mia Feuer, courtesy of the Corcoran Gallery of Art and CONNERSMITH. Photo: Paul Bothwell

[*Mia Feuer: An Unkindness*](#) provides the rare opportunity to view a young artist creating on a scale previously unattainable while maintaining an impressive singularity of vision. Drawing on Feuer's explorations into the oil economy—including visits to the Alberta oil sands, the Arctic Circle, and the Suez Canal—the work in *An Unkindness* is terrifying, yet eerily beautiful, a nightmarish manifestation of ongoing environmental degradation.

The titular installation, *An Unkindness* (all pieces are from 2013), presents a massive, black jumble of objects—ladders, stuffed crows, tree branches—suspended above a small, working ice-skating rink with a surface made of black acrylic. The installation responds to the corrupted landscapes left in the wake of tar-sands remediation, but Feuer's process involves fields of wheat planted to leach toxins from the soil, interspersed with dead trees installed upside down with the branches buried in the ground, which host the crows that control the mice attracted by the wheat. In this way, a vanished ecosystem is replaced with a perversely logical yet wholly manufactured “circle of life.” Visitors can skate on the rink one at a time, but only after signing a waiver and donning a pair of skates provided by the museum. The black ice and threatening mass overhead make the normally joyful experience of gliding across a rink apocalyptic.

While the skating rink has garnered the most media attention^[1], the exhibition's other pieces more fully evoke the terrifying, dystopian landscape created by the oil economy. *Boreal*, a large sculptural piece

consisting of a cascade of logs, seemingly suspended mid-collapse, and a large black tree suspended parallel to the ceiling, is displayed in a cold blue light. The work's size and the surrounding blue lighting draw the viewer in, reaffirming a relationship between the audience and the terrifying landscape signified by the work. *Dog Sled*, constructed entirely from trash salvaged from the Arctic Sea, is the show's most approachable piece, referencing one of the region's iconic modes of transportation while hinting at which tools and skills might be necessary for survival in a potentially apocalyptic future.

For all its nihilism, *An Unkindness*'s politics remain fairly nuanced. Feuer acknowledges that her art is built with materials created from the very systems it aims to critique. We're all complicit, the artist included, a fact she acknowledges in statements about the show. There's no specific call to action here, no solutions put forward—just a series of unsettling encounters, evoking the horrifying landscapes that are hidden from view, even as our civilization continues to rely on and contribute to their increasingly unregulated growth.

Mia Feuer: *An Unkindness* is on view at the Corcoran Gallery of Art through Feb 23, 2014.

Blair Murphy is a writer, curator, and arts administrator who recently relocated to New York City from Washington, DC, where she worked for a number of local arts organizations, including Washington Project for the Arts, DC Arts Center, and Provisions Library. Find out more at www.blairmurphy.com.

[1] Kriston Capps, "The Gas Menagerie," *Washington City Paper*, November 1, 2013, <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/articles/45007/the-gas-menagerie/>; Brandon Wetherbee, "Art Itinerary: Mia Feuer 'An Unkindness,'" *BrightestYoungThings.com*, November 7, 2013, <http://brightestyoungthings.com/articles/art-itinerary-mia-feuer-an-unkindness.htm>; Sophie Gilbert, "Art Preview: 'Mia Feuer: An Unkindness' at the Corcoran," *Washingtonian*, October 30, 2013, <http://www.washingtonian.com/blogs/afterhours/art/art-preview-mia-feuer-an-unkindness-at-the-corcoran.php>

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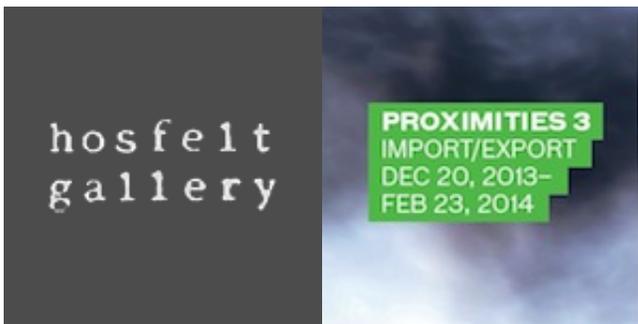
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