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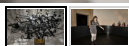
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## Mia Feuer's 'An Unkindness' at the Corcoran Gallery of Art



CAPTION

By Maura Judkis, Published: November 7 | Updated: Monday, February 7, 4:42 PM [E-mail the writer](#)

While Washington sculptor Mia Feuer was touring the tar sands of northern Alberta in 2011, the most startling thing she noticed was the trees. Not only were they dead, they also were upside down, roots akimbo in the air, and nested with ravens.

The upside-down trees were the result of an unnatural chain of events: After petroleum had been extracted from a tar-sands site, the topsoil was put back in place; but nothing could grow in the sickened earth except for wheat, a "remedial" plant thought to purify the dirt. But mice came and ate the wheat. So, as Feuer's tour guide told her, engineers responsible for reclaiming the land installed the upside-down trees so that birds of prey would come to perch and eat the mice. Problem solved, right?

### Mia Feuer: An Unkindness

**Details:** Nov. 2, 2013-Feb. 23, 2014

#### Corcoran Gallery of Art

500 17th St. NW, Washington, DC 20006

"This one moment, to me, was so heartbreaking, because it felt like I was waiting this whole time for this guy to show me something that would make me feel better — like, 'Yes, there is an exit strategy to this,'" Feuer says. "When I was there that day, he said, 'Mia, we've reclaimed the land; isn't it beautiful?' He actually believes that they've reclaimed the land."

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personal experiences visiting sites where oil is extracted and transported.

“Even just the word ‘tar sands’ — maybe because I’m a sculptor and I have this relationship to materials, but there was something very material about the word ‘tar sands,’” Feuer says. “In my mind it was something I could manipulate.”

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It was this topsy-turvy landscape of tar and feathers, wheat and trees, and the slick darkness of one of the Earth’s most controversial substances — oil — that inspired 32-year-old Feuer’s exhibition “An Unkindness,” her meditation on the global petroleum industry as well as her solo debut at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. Feuer, a professor of sculpture at George Mason University, is the first local artist to be included in the Corcoran’s NOW series of emerging young artists.

“An Unkindness,” the term for a gathering of ravens, also is the title of Feuer’s ominous, 30-foot-wide sculpture hanging in the Corcoran rotunda. It’s a tangle of scaffolding, pipes and trees covered in tar paper and joined with shredded tires and feathered black wings. The sculpture is lighter than it looks — the pipes and trees are actually made of foam — but the concept is heavy stuff. Feuer became interested in the petroleum industry’s global implications when she was in Egypt for a 2011 residency, watching oil tankers squeeze through the Suez Canal.

“I was thinking about what I was looking at and the heaviness of that little man-made artery of water,” Feuer says. “I started thinking about global-oil political issues.”

That led her to look to her native Canada, where she charmed her way into a tour of the highly restricted tar sands by chatting up an employee via their mutual interest in art. She grew up in Manitoba, a few provinces east, but found that the tar sands were inextricably linked to everything in Canada — even the arts grants she received from the government. Still, Feuer says, she’s not trying to make a political statement with her art. Rather, she’s reflecting upon her

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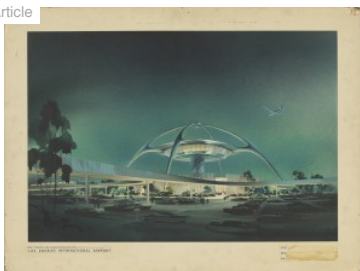
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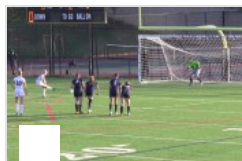
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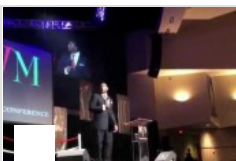
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