



**WASHINGTON, DC AND
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA**
Mia Feuer

Transformer Gallery and
Arlington Arts Center

Two recent installations in the Washington area, *Suspended Landscape* at the Transformer Gallery and *Evacuation Route with Rubies* at the Arlington Arts Center, showcased Mia Feuer's bold, chaotic work. Forms evoking industry and its perils hung from ceilings, snaked around floors, and forcefully—yet whimsically—invaded the personal space of visitors, who ducked under and circled around the sprawling pieces. The young artist, a native of Winnipeg, Canada, spent time in the Middle East traversing checkpoints between Israel and Palestine and moved to DC following a residency at the Vermont Studio Center, so she knows about obstructions of various sorts. She draws inspiration from the manmade urban environment and its annoyances, including barriers, construction cranes, and traffic jams. On first glance, Feuer's work looks like an intersection of Mark di Suvero's commanding red steel-beam constructions and Maya Lin's topographical landscape installations. Feuer's innovation lies in her choice of material—because her installations are made of foam, they can hang from the ceiling, their weight and mood lightened in equal measure.

Suspended Landscape filled the small Transformer Gallery with a tangle of industrial stalactites—



Top: Mia Feuer, *Suspended Landscape*, 2010. Styrofoam, enamel paint, and steel, dimensions variable. Above: Mia Feuer, *Evacuation Route with Rubies*, 2010. Styrofoam, paint, FGR, aircraft cable, and automotive brake lights, dimensions variable.

scaffold and truss forms cascaded from the high skylight, sinking to only a few feet above the floor. Portions of the sculpture resembled chunks of steel cranes, bridges, and other construction equipment joined by a web of plates, nuts, and bolts. Though seemingly as solid as manufacturing equipment, the painted foam chunks were light enough to facilitate gymnastic dangling—an effect that only heightened the artificiality. The textural foam peeked through gaps in the haphazardly applied red and blue paint; fluores-

cent orange aircraft cable, a legitimately tough material, held the work aloft but also draped around it like a child's jump-rope.

In *Evacuation Route*, bold, red-and-blue-painted Styrofoam boards formed chunks of a disjointed grid that hung from the ceiling, caught mid-explosion. Rounded blue pieces, like remnants of a monumental ribcage, could have come from a tunnel, boat, or airplane. Parts of the grid were tiled with flat foam squares—additional tiles were attached in layers to fall in jumbled

groupings on the floor, like a deck of cards tossed around. Knots of flickering and blinking red brake lights plugged into a nearby outlet also wound across the floor below the bulk of the sculpture. Inspired by a traffic jam in a tunnel outside DC, Feuer's orchestrated chaos avoided direct literalism, yet the sense of immersion was palpable, as were the frustration and subsequent yearning for escape that cause bored drivers to honk their horns, crank their radios, and otherwise vent their anger. Feuer's placement of each element forced viewers to weave their way through this dynamic composition.

Both installations sought to invade visitors' comfort zones, reflecting Feuer's concern with the impact of industry on the natural world and on the people it is supposed to serve. The primary colors and exuberant construction, however, belied any overly sinister message. Drawn to techniques that physically impose, Feuer creates ambiguous work: its colorful, ambitious forms are appealing, but it warns of the daunting confusion of modern urban life. Viewer responses in the galleries mirrored real-world confrontations with engineered obstructions, with the difference that Feuer's scenarios could dispel unease—those glimpses of foam felt like a cheeky rejection of the world's weightiness.

—Elizabeth Lynch
