

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Avram Finkelstein, *Something Terrible Has Happened (Corpus Fluxus)*

[Gallery One]

February 22-April 27, 2025

Opening Reception: Sat. February 22, 6-8PM

Smack Mellon is thrilled to present *Something Terrible Has Happened (Corpus Fluxus)*, the first major exhibition of personal artworks by artist Avram Finkelstein in NYC. The exhibition brings together multiple interconnected bodies of drawing works that span the narrative of his own coming out to a reconsideration of the layered nature of accessibility based on his increasing disability. The exhibition will feature a series of freestanding and moveable drawings, large-scale digitally-printed works on fabric, and wall-mounted drawings that unearth significant moments in the artist's personal history. Activating a full loop—both temporally through his life story and in the spatial choreography—the exhibition offers a beginning, moves to the current moment, and back again.

The focus of this exhibition is the body, in its physicality, metaphysical ideations, and shape-shifting porosities—the *corpus fluxus*. In addition to figures from his memories, these bodies also take the form of what he refers to as golems. Rooted in Jewish folklore, golems are mutable beings often animated to life from clay or dust. They are vessels for a variety of metaphors—carriers of light, those deemed dirty or “unsophisticated,” or representations of divinity—depending on the source and context. Here, Finkelstein captures the ambiguity of these forms. The “mud” that he uses is his own mark making, in gesso, pencil, and oil pastel, made through gestures that highlight his increasing loss of mobility through the marks' gradual drift away from tight renderings over time.

The free-standing drawings are mounted to wheeled metal structures that also function as weight-bearing mobility devices for Finkelstein to move around his studio. These drawings appear on both sides of the works—dualities that both are separated and bound by their multiple viewing perspectives. In *Golem (Don's bath)* (2024), one side presents a gessoed abstraction, forming a “ghost” in the approximate size and shape of a body, while the other reveals a drawing of the first partner the artist lost to AIDS emerging through the marks as if from the surface of water.

Also on display are a series of drawings that reference the artist's attempt to come out at the age of fifteen in 1967, two years before the Stonewall Riots, leading to a psych evaluation involving a Thematic Apperception Test. Similar to Rorschach testing, the artist was shown a number of images and asked to describe them in order to determine his mental wellness. Finkelstein has

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replicated some of these images from memory, which hang alongside other scenes he experienced during this time. In a scale and material shift, the large-scale hanging works softly interrupt the gallery space, creating pathways for and moving in tandem with viewers' bodies. Digitally printed on translucent fabric, these works activate dual encounters of vision in how the material simultaneously obscures and reveals. This duality alludes to the often invisible nature of disability that occurs beneath a body's surface, as well as how, in a world ill-equipped to care for those not fully able, those bodies are actively erased by lacking the means to participate.

The exhibition's title evokes a vague sense of doom and a shift in the state of the body. Could this terrible thing be related to the waning social and political support for difference, possibly forcing the now "out" queer community back into the closet? Or maybe it is the state of the world in general? And yet, it could also mean the slow deterioration and loss of mobility of an individual body, something that often goes uncared for in public. Throughout the story, Finkelstein reminds us, the body is always in flux.

Avram Finkelstein is an artist and writer living in Brooklyn, a 2024 Creative Capital and 2023 Pollock-Krasner grant recipient, and a founding member of the Silence=Death and Gran Fury collectives. He is featured in the American Artist oral history project at the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art. His book, *After Silence: A History of AIDS Through its Images*, is available through University of California Press, and was nominated for an International Center of Photography' 2018 Infinity Award in Critical Writing and Research, and a 30th Annual Lambda Literary Award in LGBT Nonfiction. He has work in the permanent collections of MoMA, the Whitney, the Metropolitan Museum, the New Museum, the Smithsonian, the Brooklyn Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the New York Public Library, and his work has shown at the Whitney Museum, The Shed, the Metropolitan Museum, the New Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, the Hirshhorn Museum, the Cooper Hewitt Museum, Grey Art Gallery, the Migros Museum, the Museum of the City of New York, and the Leslie Lohman Museum. He has had numerous public commissions and residencies, including the The Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program, Pioneer Works and The Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics.

Finkelstein has been interviewed about art in the public sphere by international publications including *The New York Times*, *Frieze*, *Artforum*, *Bomb*, *NPR*, and *Interview*, and for multiple film and oral history projects, including *After Silence*, *Let The Record Show*, *Silence Opens Doors* and the *ACT UP Oral History Project*. He has been invited to speak about art, political activism, LGBT politics and cultural production, the American Left, and art and intellectual property by Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Princeton, NYU, Exit Art, Fordham, RISD, MassArt, the New School, Parsons, and the Arts and Labor working group of Occupy Wall Street.

His practice also includes an experiment in political art-making, the "Flash Collective," a workshop centered on the creation of a one day collective to produce a single art intervention in a public space. Finkelstein has been invited to conduct dozens of Flash Collectives by institutions

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including Yale, New York University, Concordia University, The New York Public Library, The New School, Visual AIDS, GMHC, Broadway Cares, and The Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, and has spoken about them at The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Yale, The New School, SUNY and Visual AIDS. The work of multiple flash collectives has been show at the Migros Museum in Zurich, Kunsthal KAdE in Amersfoort, NL, the New York AIDS Memorial, and La MaMA Galleria, they have been covered by Slate and the Vice Creators Project, and are the subject of a documentary, *After Silence*, by Vincent Gagliostro.

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