

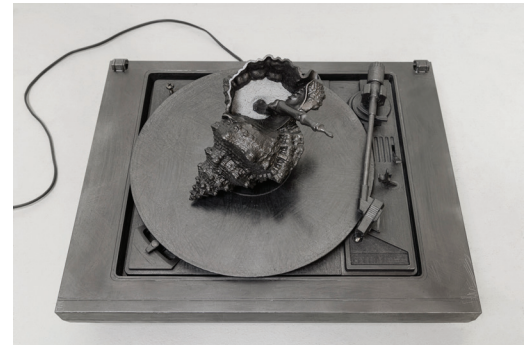
# Smack Mellon

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Diana Shpungin, *Always Begin At The End*

January 15 - February 20, 2022

Opening Reception: Sat. January 15, 5-7PM



*Always Begin At The End* uses common iconography to address loss, memory, empathy and failure between the private and public, personal and political spheres. The exhibition centers around a marble tiled arena covering a significant portion of Smack Mellon's 4,000 square foot main gallery floor. A felled chandelier, a record player, seashells, chairs, chain link fencing, cast body parts, doors, cardboard boxes, a reconfigured American flag, and loose change add to the range of quotidian objects that the artist has carefully scattered throughout this sprawling stage and across the gallery walls. Displayed together at Smack Mellon for the first time, this new body of work has been made within the past five years, encompassing two polarizing presidential elections and the most extreme lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This exhibition features many objects made from cast paper, alongside combined found objects that the artist alters, construction materials, and a single hand-drawn pencil animation metaphorically smashed by rocks. Much of Shpungin's works can be seen as "drawings" in the sense that they are literally covered in drawing's most ubiquitous medium: graphite pencil. This material marks, delineates, coats, and covers the surfaces and crevices of her objects, transforming them into solid shadows. Graphite itself is a dynamic medium that amasses darkness as well as reflectivity the more it is layered onto a surface. Shpungin painstakingly covers each object but does not obscure it, in a process that both masks and gives depth. She also uses drawing to sketch and to plan, outlining the possible future incarnations of a thing—an object, a building, an idea. Shpungin's self-reflexive works are their own loops that construct, mark, and imagine through the process of their own creation.

Shpungin's objects often begin as symbols from the artist's personal history but are disguised within their own common representations. The works come together as an archive, a futile and heroic attempt to chronicle absolutely everything in the world. Her works are led by a heartstrong conceptualism based on personal and collective memories and formed through careful intersections of familiar objects and materials. In some cases the works are embodiments of literal metaphors, and, in others, their meanings are embedded in the actions that caused their creation, such as *Paper Weight (Win)*, (2016), a graphite covered brick crushing a sheet of drawing paper. The exhibition's title *Always Begin At The End*, and its acronym *ABATE*, signal to the way that time can loop, how stories can start in unexpected places, and how a journey's end might be less than its imagined start. At the end, afterall, the material we will have had to work with is all already there.

# Smack Mellon

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## BIO

Diana Shpungin is a Brooklyn based, Latvian born American multi-disciplinary artist who has been exhibited extensively in solo and group exhibitions in both national and international venues including: The Bronx Museum of Art, Bronx, NY; Sculpture Center, Long Island City, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tucson, AZ; Bass Museum of Art, Miami, FL; Locust Projects, Miami, FL; Franconia Sculpture Park in Minneapolis, MN; Futura Center for Contemporary Art, Prague, Czech Republic; Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo, Japan; Invisible Exports, New York, NY; Marc Straus Gallery, New York, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami, FL; Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY; and The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT. Shpungin was awarded the 2019/20 Pollock Krasner Foundation Grant and the 2017 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Sculpture. And has also been the recipient of awards, fellowships and residencies from The Foundation of Contemporary Art, The MacDowell Colony, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, CEC Artslink, Dieu Donne, Bronx Museum AIM Program, and Art Omi. Shpungin's work has been reviewed in publications such as *Artforum*, *Flash Art*, *New York Magazine*, *Art in America*, *Sculpture Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *Timeout London*, *Connaissance des Arts*, *Le Monde*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*, among others. She received her MFA from the School of Visual Arts, New York, NY and is currently an Assistant Professor at Parsons: The New School for Design in New York City.

Artwork image: Diana Shpungin, *Business As Unusual*, 2022. Hand-applied graphite pencil on functioning turntable, vinyl record, seashell, and cast skeleton finger, with concrete, pedestal, and bricks, 10 x 14 x 18 inches. Image courtesy of the artist. Photo: Etienne Frossard.

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