

A Golem for Protest: Julie Weitz's *My Golem*

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In Jewish mythology, a golem is a creature made of clay that assumes human or anthropomorphic features to realize the mission of its creator. Since 2017, Los Angeles-based artist Julie Weitz has been revisiting this tradition of Jewish folklore in her long-term multimedia, visual, and performance project *My Golem*, an activist alter ego that engages in social justice protests, summoning up the Jewish values of *tzedek* (justice) and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world).

My Golem tackles issues of racial injustice with a mix of humor, sensuality, and spirituality. While acknowledging the growing antisemitism in the United States as well as how Ashkenazic Jews benefit from whiteness, Weitz interrogates the active role that Jewishness and Jews can play in practices of social justice. Her interventions summon her fellow Jews to join the fight to undo the patriarchal structures of oppression that enable the multiple ways in which white supremacy manifests—from race- and nationality-based violence to environmental damage.



Julie Weitz as *My Golem*. Her face is covered with porcelain clay. On her forehead, she carries the Hebrew letters *aleph*, *mem*, and *tav* that traditionally bring a golem to life and form the word *אמת* (*emet*), "truth." By emphasizing eyebrows, eyes, and mouth with blue paint, Weitz accentuates *My Golem's* corporeal expressivity as a strategy of visibility in sites of protest and as a vehicle of affect.



Image (detail) from Julie Weitz's performative ritual service *Tashlich*, where *My Golem*, wearing shtreimel and tallit, uses the tzitzit as a tool of interconnection. *My Golem* often wears white tights and a leotard together with items traditionally associated with religious men: the shtreimel becomes her crown, the tallit a solemn cape, while the tzitzit and the tefillin wrap her chest and arms, transforming her into a Hasidic ancestral and futuristic superheroine. The emphasis on and recontextualization of Jewish religious symbols strengthen Weitz/*My Golem's* Ashkenazic Jewish identity in order to reframe Jewish spirituality for the purpose of protest.

Tashlich. Performance with small gathering. Los Angeles, CA, 2019.
Photo by Aaron Farley.

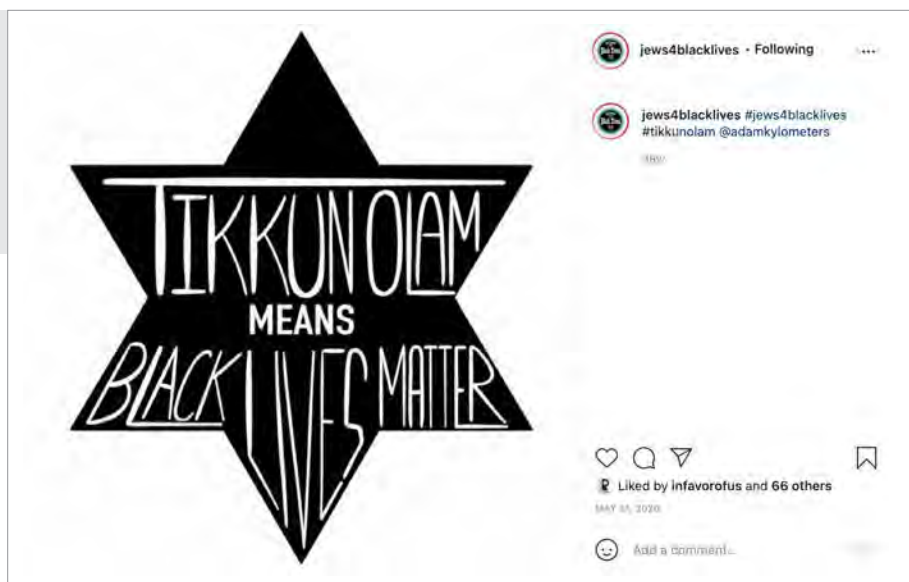
Still from Julie Weitz's *The Great Dominatrix* (1-channel HD video, 5:40m, 2018). Here, *My Golem* is wrapping tefillin around her hands, and eventually arms, chest, and pelvis, repurposing a (traditionally) male religious symbol into leather straps for bondage. Weitz references BDSM culture to parody and flip oppressive practices of political domination and affirm *My Golem's* sensual, liberating role(-playing) as spiritual dominatrix.



Still from the film *No More Torches of Hate* (2017). In her first appearance on Instagram, in October 2017, *My Golem* presented herself naked, wearing only a necklace with the Star of David, announcing the end of white supremacy by blowing off the flames of the “torches of hate,” represented by two prosthetic penises. As announced on the Instagram account @mygolem_is_here, the initial mission of *My Golem* was “to end white supremacy” by undoing its structures and logic through performative protests.

One of the primary sites of Weitz's activist intervention is immigration rights. In the actions now documented in “*My Golem* Protests: In Defense of Immigrants' Rights” (2019–2020), *My Golem* calls for the abolition of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency.

A screenshot from the Instagram account @jews4blacklives, established by Julie Weitz in May 2020 when the protests of the Movement for Black Lives started.



In a video protest on Instagram, *My Golem* shows the sign “GOLEM AGAINST I.C.E.,” with a large smile and raised eyebrows, accentuated by blue paint on her mouth and eyes. With klezmer music playing in background, *My Golem* meticulously fills a bowl with ice, and pours boiling water in it, with the jovial expressions of a TV cook host that invites her audience to do the same, proudly showing how the ice effectively melted. Like Charlie Chaplin’s *The Tramp*, *My Golem* allows Weitz to call out the injustices and horrors of humanity with sardonic humor and without the restraint of social norms. Direct performative metaphors are probably *My Golem*’s most crucial protesting strategy, which also allow her to draw a powerful comparison between Jewish history and the current immigration crisis in the United States.



Here *My Golem* participates in a protest organized on May 5, 2020, in front of the Geo Group ICE Detention Center in Adelanto, CA. Wearing a large tallit as a superheroine cape and priestess-like dress, *My Golem* manifests by holding signs saying “CLOSE THE CAMPS” and “NEVER AGAIN MEANS FREE THEM ALL.” *My Golem*’s protesting body acts as a cross-reference between stories and histories. By conferring sacredness to her humorous, performative persona through costuming and physicality, *My Golem* bridges the history of the Holocaust with that of contemporary immigration at the US-Mexico border, and the stories of the victims of the Holocaust with those of incarcerated immigrants and families separated at the border.

Photo by Molly Tierney.

By embodying a Jewish supernatural creature able to feel, acknowledge, and tackle injustice, Weitz creates cross-temporal sites of solidarity. By embodying *My Golem*, Weitz reframes Jewish mythology in a contemporary context, affirming the urgency of Jewish ancestral ethics and setting a Jewish agenda for the present.

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Sources to know more about Julie Weitz/*My Golem*’s actions:

IG: @mygolem_is_here

IG: @jews4blacklives

<http://www.julieweitz.com/>