

Riot police attack anti-genocide protesters at Brooklyn Museum in an “unprecedented show of force and violence”

David Walsh
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On June 1, some 1,000 people, outraged by the ongoing Israeli mass murder in Gaza, protested inside and outside the Brooklyn Museum in New York City.

A small group was able to occupy the lobby around 4:30 p.m. Hundreds of others, reported *ArtNews*, prevented from entering the museum, “plastered posters to the doors ... climbed the steps to its exterior mezzanine and upward [to] its glass ceiling, finally unfurling a banner across the museum’s neoclassical cornice that read ‘Free Palestine—Divest From Genocide.’”

The demonstrators held up other signs reading, “Silence = Death,” “No Normalization of Settler Colonialism,” “Brooklyn Museum: No Silence on Genocide.” One demanded the ouster of Neil Simpkins, an executive at Blackstone Inc., the investment management company, from the museum’s board of trustees.

Eventually, as *Democracy Now!* reported, at least 34 people “were arrested during the protest ... New York police officers were again filmed using violent tactics to arrest the protesters. A captain of the Strategic Response Group [SRG], who was identified as Christopher Carlson, was seen punching at least two women at the protest.”

Inside the Brooklyn Museum, “one of the leading activists with the group Within Our Lifetime, Nerdeen Kiswani, was violently tackled by New York police officers, who then arrested her as her hijab came off.”

In a statement issued June 2, the organizers of the protest, the Cultural Front for Free Palestine, a collective of artists and cultural workers, explained that the hundreds of protesters had shown up, “with the intention of holding an Art and Cultural Assembly

inside the museum. This action coincided with the establishment of the new Gaza Solidarity Encampment at Columbia University and the walkout of thousands of NYC high school students.”

The organization highlighted the response of the authorities, calling it an “unprecedented show of force and violence, the likes of which has never been seen before in the long history of museum protests in New York City.”

Various reports indicate that New York Police Department (NYPD) Deputy Commissioner of Operations Kaz Daughtry, one of the department’s highest-ranking officials, was on the scene, directing the suppression of the protest. One commentator on X/Twitter observed that after “being confronted by pro-Palestine protesters & reporters on Friday ... Daughtry fled as he usually does. He hopped into an unmarked NYPD vehicle.”

A police helicopter circled overhead during the event. (Daughtry’s official police biography credits him, among other things, “with spearheading technological innovations within the NYPD, such as the expansion of the Drone Program in all five boroughs.”)

The protesters handed out material Friday demanding that the museum publicly acknowledge Israel’s action as genocide “and divest from companies and donors with ties to the Israeli military,” according to an account in *Hyperallergic*. The Cultural Front for Free Palestine, in a statement, asserted that the museum “relies heavily on subsidies from the City of New York, along with the granting of the land it sits on, and so its financial doings should be publicly accountable.”

An email from the Cultural Front argued that

the ongoing pillage of housing and livelihoods proceeds through the economic violence of investors and developers, many of whom sit on museum boards while the ongoing trauma comes at the hands of armed police whose primary mission is the protection of property and the repression of dissent. Free Palestine. Palestine is everywhere.

ArtNews points out that the museum has been the subject of previous protests over Gaza since the massacre began in October. On December 8, “around 20 protestors affiliated with the activist groups Decolonize This Place and Within Our Lifetime staged a guerilla action inside the lobby, echoing the calls of similar demonstrations to ‘disclose and divest.’”

The following day,

hundreds of protestors gathered at the museum as the starting point of a planned march that swept across the Brooklyn Bridge and ended at City Hall. Both protests called out the museum’s corporate partnership with Bank of New York Mellon, which has investments in Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems and has supported the Friends of Israel Defense Force Donor Advised Fund.

The anger and indignation of the Brooklyn Museum protesters is entirely legitimate. The crimes of the Israeli regime and its accomplices to murder in Washington, London, Paris and Berlin are monumental. The real death toll, which continues to mount daily, may never be known. Some 130,000 people are dead, wounded or missing. Fifteen thousand children have been killed in Gaza since October 7 by the Israeli military. Doctors in Gaza report that up to 10 women a day are losing their unborn children.

How to oppose these war crimes and their perpetrators? There are political and social questions that need to be addressed.

The Cultural Front says nothing in its statements about the Biden administration and Democratic Party

politicians such as Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other endorsers-enablers of “Genocide Joe.” It says nothing about the University of California academic workers’ strike over Gaza, now in its third week, which has shown the way forward despite the efforts of the UAW bureaucracy to contain and isolate it.

At best, these omissions are parochial. At worst, they become a means of covering up, deliberately or not, for the Democrats and those who refuse to break from them. The anger and energy displayed by the protesters at the Brooklyn Museum raise questions beyond the issues of the museum’s policies and “divestment.”

The demand that museums and other institutions become benevolent, that they stop being intertwined with the ruling elite and its financial and political operations, can become a frustrating diversion. The turn must be to the working class, to transit, healthcare and city workers, to teachers, to immigrant workers, to the vast numbers in New York who oppose the Gaza war crimes.

As the WSWS has argued:

The working class, which creates society’s wealth, must intervene to force an end to the genocide and the attack on free speech, including through industrial action to halt the shipment of supplies and weapons to Israel.



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