

Artists protest Gaza genocide in Toronto and Miami

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The horror in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon persists, with Israeli-imperialist atrocities now mounting in Syria. Outraged protests by artists against the genocide and institutions with connections to the Zionist regime likewise continue. Among the more recent episodes were protests by artists and their supporters in Toronto and the Miami area.

Estimates vary on the massive loss of life, but the Cost of War project at Brown University estimated in October that nearly 120,000 Palestinians had been killed in Gaza and the West Bank in the course of the first year of the homicidal assault. The researchers calculated more than 52,000 direct deaths of Palestinians from violence and 67,000 indirect deaths (including more than 62,000 from starvation).

The report, like many others, is replete with terrible details. For example:

The direct and indirect death of mothers has especially severe consequences for the survival, health and well-being of infants and young children. Most of the upwards of 52,000 women who were pregnant in Gaza as of January 2024 have given birth outside of medical facilities, including in tents and even on the streets. Premature births increased by up to one third in the first month of the war alone.

Helping to produce these barbarous results has been unending and lethal assistance from the Biden administration. The Cost of War project argues that:

In just one year ... the U.S. has spent at least \$22.76 billion on military aid to Israel and related U.S. operations in the region.

The mass murder has opened the eyes of millions to the savagery of imperialism. Global public opinion has been

deeply, irreparably affected.

The death and destruction have shifted thinking, but of course this has not solved all the political issues. Many artists remain hemmed in by a perspective based on appeals to arts organizations and governments that are impervious to popular sentiment and, in fact, are quite deliberate and conscious allies of the Zionist murder machine. The resulting protests are sincere, but limited.

In Toronto on November 20, several artists disrupted the Mayor's Evening for the Arts to protest the Toronto Arts Foundation's ongoing partnership with the Azrieli Foundation. The foundation is the charitable arm of the Azrieli Group, Israel's largest real estate company.

The organizers of the protest, Artists Against Artwashing (AAA), on Instagram, pointed out that:

The Azrieli Group's assets include illegal settlement infrastructure in the occupied West Bank & East Jerusalem... The Azrieli Foundation is resourced by gains from ongoing colonization, occupation, and displacement in Palestine!

Outside the Evening for the Arts, held at the historic Art Moderne building The Carlu on Yonge Street, artists held a picket, providing information about the Azrieli Foundation. Inside, protesters interrupted the goings-on several times. According to the *Art Newspaper*:

When the TAF's director Kelly Langard and the chair of its board Sarah Diamond took to the stage for opening remarks, they were blocked by protesters holding a banner saying "Genocide and Land Theft Generously Supported by Azrieli Foundation."

Subsequently, a protester disrupted remarks by Toronto

mayor Olivia Chow, holding up a banner that read, “Cut ties with Azrieli Foundation.” A third protester did the same later in the program.

The *Art Newspaper* reports that the campaign against organizations receiving funding from the Azrieli Foundation “is tied to a broader ‘No Arms in the Arts’ initiative across the Canadian culture sector.” Groups involved in the campaign, in addition to the AAA, include Writers Against the War on Gaza, Labour in the Arts and Theatre Artists for Palestinian Voices.

Writers in Canada “have also been boycotting the Giller Prize literary award—which receives support from the Azrieli Foundation—in part to draw attention to the foundation’s links to illegal settlement infrastructure in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem and alleged violations of international law.”

According to AAA,

the Azrieli Foundations in Canada and Israel have “significant shares” in the Azrieli Group real estate company and profit from its operations. Its assets, says AAA, include “illegal settlement infrastructure in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, and shares in Bank Leumi (they own just over 4%), which several European pension funds have recently divested from, citing its violations of international law in financing settlements, extracting natural resources and building infrastructure in occupied territory.”

An AAA spokesperson told the media that the Foundation

is resourced by the gains from ongoing colonisation, occupation and displacement in Palestine. As the Israeli onslaught on Gaza continues, we are seeing in real time the impacts of Zionism in Toronto arts organisations. This includes the censorship of our work and the killing of our kin in Gaza, as well as across Palestine and now in Lebanon.

On December 7, a coalition of groups held a protest outside the Miami Beach Convention Center during Art Basel, the giant international art fair, to protest large-scale investments in Israel by the city of Miami and Miami-Dade County.

The protesters called on attendees to boycott the fair until

the city and county divest from their investments. The for-profit, privately owned art fair is staged annually in Basel (Switzerland), Miami Beach, Hong Kong and Paris. The Miami Beach event is one of the metropolitan area’s largest tourist attractions, drawing some 80,000 visitors in 2023.

Artist and technologist Cristina Rivera told *ARTnews* that protest organizers were using the art fair as a platform to amplify concerns about Israel’s war in Gaza. The artist said the anti-genocide groups also took issue, reports the same online publication, “with Miami Beach’s investment in Israel Bonds, which the city doubled to \$20 million last year” and were “framing the protest as a way to oppose policies they associate with the ongoing violence in the Middle East.”

The protesting organizations included South Florida’s Justice for Palestine chapter and a local chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). The action was part of the coalition’s “Break the Bonds” campaign, writes *ARTnews*, “which pushes communities and municipalities to divest from Israel bonds. (Palm Beach County has over \$700 million invested in Israel bonds, as of April. Miami-Dade County has \$76 million invested, as of October 2023.)”

Protesters unfurled a 50-foot banner reading “Let Palestine Live.” *ARTnews* reported “significant police presence,” although no arrests were reported.

Miami Beach officials responded earlier this year to protests against the Israeli crimes in Gaza by attempting to crack down on public opposition. Mayor Steven Meiner called for the city to set “parameters for reasonable time, place and manner restrictions” for protests.

According to the March 14 *Miami Herald*,

To support his proposal, Meiner cited pro-Palestinian protests at which he claimed “our laws have been violated.” During a public comment period, the mayor cut off one speaker who referred to the Israeli government’s war in Gaza as a “genocide” and suggested that Meiner’s proposal was aimed at restricting free speech related to Israel. “I’m not going to sit here and allow you to make accusations about the Israeli government,” Meiner said, calling the statements “antisemitic.”



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