

New York City museum and cultural workers protest Israel's Gaza genocide

Protests at MoMA, Jewish Museum

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On the eve of Israel's bloody invasion of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, hundreds of artists, writers and cultural workers have called to account leading cultural institutions in New York City for their support of the ongoing mass murder.

Protests have taken place in recent days at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) and the Jewish Museum. In addition, several open letters have been issued, denouncing the Israeli genocide and the complicity of various museum trustees and others.

On Monday, about 20 predominantly Jewish protesters demonstrated at a discussion at the Jewish Museum in Manhattan featuring Ukrainian-Israeli artist Zoya Cherkassky. The latter was speaking about her *7 October 2023* series of paintings, now on exhibition at the museum and soon to be added to its permanent collection.

Protesters called out to the meeting: "As cultural workers, as anti-Zionist Jews of conscience, as New York City residents, we implore you to confront the reality."

As Writers against the War on Gaza noted in its Twitter/X feed, "The talk was touted as 'an open forum for dialogue'—so protesters were ripped from the auditorium as soon as they began to speak."

Under the circumstances of a mass extermination of an oppressed people, Cherkassky's paintings represent nothing more than war propaganda. The works, which depict the deaths of Israelis on October 7 in a cartoonish manner, entirely exclude images of the nearly 30,000 Palestinians, including tens of thousands of women and children, murdered by the Israeli war machine. Nor, of course, is there any reference in the works to the decades-long history of Israeli oppression

and, specifically, the transformation of Gaza into an open-air prison.

Worse still, some of the paintings deliberately borrow images from Pablo Picasso's 1937 painting *Guernica*, about the Spanish town of the same name that was leveled by Nazi and Italian fascist bombers in support of Gen. Franco's Falangists during the Spanish Civil War. An honest "updating" of the Picasso work would place the Israel Defense Forces in the role of the Spanish fascists and their German and Italian accomplices.

Hyperallergic quoted Max Levin, a former staff member of the Jewish Museum who resigned in protest over the Cherkassky show last month, "To me, it's a pro-war show. It's trying to stir up revenge and retaliation."

An anonymous leaflet distributed at the event called "The Zionist Artist at Work" noted, "In lieu of identitarianism, true art offers identification—not only with those who share our identities, but, perhaps more importantly, with those who do not."

On Saturday, as many as 800 protesters flooded the Museum of Modern Art's lobby. The protesters unfurled banners that read, "Ceasefire Now," "Cultural workers stand with Gaza" and "Free Palestine from the River to the Sea!"

A leaflet distributed by protesters, in the form of a mock museum program, stated, "In this crucial moment, we refuse art as a smokescreen for genocide and demand the immediate removal of board members with direct ties to genocide, apartheid and settler colonialism."

Among the trustees, protesters called out Leon Black, the billionaire art dealer who resigned as chair of the

Board because of his ties with Jeffrey Epstein; Larry Fink, the head of BlackRock, the world's largest investment firm, and a major Democratic Party operative; Ronald S. Lauder of the Estée Lauder fortune and president of the Zionist World Jewish Congress; and Marie-Josée Kravis, the Vice-Chair of the far-right imperialist think tank the Hudson Institute, a virulent supporter of the Gaza genocide and proponent of war with Russia, Iran and China.

MoMA was shut down after about 3:30 p.m. Photojournalist Alexa Blair Wilkinson noted on her Instagram account: "Aside from a dozen uniformed officers and a couple of undercover cops coming into the atrium, no arrests were made and the sit in dispersed around 6 p.m. to continue a march up 5th avenue to Columbus Circle."

Also on Saturday, more than 100 New York museum and cultural workers released an open letter protesting "the disgraceful silence of our institutions as Israel commits genocide in Gaza with the military and financial support of the United States." The letter calls for "the immediate lifting of the siege on Gaza, the release of all Palestinian political prisoners, an end to Israel's occupation of Palestine, and an end to Western complicity in Zionism."

The public appeal goes on to point out that the "genocidal project of Zionism did not begin on October 7. Since the start of the Zionist occupation of Palestinian land by the state of Israel in 1948, Israel has enacted violent dispossession, violations of rights, and apartheid on Palestine. Since 2007, Israel has imposed an ongoing siege and blockade of the Gaza Strip, a continuation and escalation of its campaign against Palestinian life."

On Tuesday, a group of MoMA workers released a public statement about the refusal of the museum—one of the world's leading cultural institutions—to oppose the genocide in Gaza. The statement asserts that working "amidst the profound silence of our institution in the face of the ongoing crisis in Gaza has become increasingly challenging for us." The MoMA employees go on to argue that, as "individuals deeply committed to the values of justice, empathy, and human rights, the silence amplifies the sense of urgency we feel in addressing the unfolding events."

The workers insist that "Zionism is neither synonymous with nor representative of Judaism,

therefore a critique of the violence enacted in the name of Zionist rhetoric is in no way a suggestion of antisemitism. As museum and cultural workers, we condemn the heightened cases of both Islamophobia and antisemitism that have resulted as direct collateral of Israel's crimes in Gaza."

The statement ends with a call to "amplify the urgent appeal from the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions in Gaza calling on trade unions in relevant industries to stop arming Israel."

However, providing an indication of the false perspective of those leading the protest, the statement asserts that, as "museum and cultural workers, many of whom are members of the United Auto Workers Local 2110, we applaud the International UAW's call for a ceasefire."

That call was a political fraud. It was adopted by the UAW officialdom under immense pressure from below and intended, in fact, to block the development of a movement among rank-and-file auto workers against the Biden administration and its alliance with genocide. The UAW resolution refused to condemn Israel for mass murder, blandly distributing guilt to all parties, and it offered no criticism of the White House. Instead, it ludicrously called on Biden to "push" for a ceasefire. The Israeli massacre of Palestinians is *only possible* because of the vast financial and military support provided by the US. The UAW statement did not commit the union to doing anything, nor did it support the appeal of the Palestinian trade unions.

The auto union's "ceasefire" resolution was meant to deflect opposition and smother it. This was proven by the subsequent decision of the same UAW bureaucrats to endorse "Genocide Joe" for president in 2024, essentially a pledge that the union would do nothing to prevent the shipment of American arms to Israel or fight for an end of the Nazi-style killings. At the recent UAW CAP ("Community Action Program") conference in January, UAW president Shawn Fain set his thugs on UAW members who were demanding a ceasefire.



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