

In Berlin, US artist Nan Goldin condemns both Israel and Germany for their role in the genocide in Gaza and Lebanon

Stefan Steinberg
24 November 2024

At the opening Friday evening of her new exhibition entitled “This Will Not End Well,” at the Neue Nationalgalerie [New National Gallery] in Berlin, US artist and photographer Nan Goldin condemned both Israel and Germany for their role in the genocide in Gaza and its extension into Lebanon.

At the start of her 14-minute speech to a packed audience (excerpts available here and here), Goldin called for four minutes of silence in remembrance of the victims of the conflict in the Palestinian territories and Lebanon, as well as civilians killed in Israel.

Referring to her own Jewish background, Goldin explained that “My grandparents escaped pogroms in Russia. I was brought up knowing about the Nazi Holocaust. What I see in Gaza reminds me of the pogroms that my grandparents escaped.”

Speaking one day after the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on suspicion of war crimes and crimes against humanity, Goldin noted that “the ICC is talking about genocide. The UN is talking about genocide. Even the Pope is talking about genocide.”

In Germany, however, anyone who spoke this truth, whether Palestinian, Jew or German, faced cancellation. “Yet we’re not supposed to talk about this as genocide. Are you afraid to hear this, Germany?” Goldin demanded to know.

Goldin went on to address directly the claim that criticism of Israel and Zionism amounted to antisemitism. “Anti-Zionism has nothing to do with antisemitism” she said to cheers, noting that the campaign to conflate the terms increasingly endangered

Jews who had previously regarded Germany as a refuge from antisemitism.

She went on to argue that Islamophobia was being ignored in Germany, the “home of the largest Palestinian diaspora in Europe. Yet protests are met with police dogs and deportation and stigmatization,” she continued.

She continued her criticism of Germany, which along with the US continues to provide weapons to Israel and give unstinting support to the fascist ranks of the Netanyahu government. To tremendous applause from the audience, Goldin declared that “Never again means never again for everyone,” referring to the phrase “Never again,” the central conclusion drawn in Germany from the Nazi annihilation of six million Jews in World War II.

Following Goldin’s speech, Neue Nationalgalerie director Klaus Biesenbach immediately sought to counter Goldin’s message. He took to the stage, claiming that while he respected Goldin’s right to express her opinion, the main responsibility for the suffering in Gaza rested with Hamas. His speech, however, was largely drowned out by audience chants of “Free Palestine.”

This is a major event.

Goldin is a prominent figure in the global art community. Indeed, in 2023, she was described as the most influential person in the art world in *ArtReview*’s “Power 100” list of such individuals.

The well-known photographer’s courageous speech in Berlin has sent shock waves through the political and cultural establishment in Germany and beyond. Like the boy in Hans Christian Andersen’s tale who blurts out that the emperor has no clothes, Goldin in her

speech at one blow exposed all the main lies and odious slanders developed by the Israeli and German governments to cover up the massacre of Palestinian men, women, children and babies taking place in Gaza.

Already prior to the opening of “This Will Not End Well,” a lifetime retrospective of Goldin’s work, the Berlin museum, fully aware of the artist’s stance on Israel and Gaza, had organised a symposium clearly aimed at damage control.

Without Goldin’s knowledge, the museum proposed a symposium talk with the title “Art and Activism in Times of Polarisation: A Space for Discussion on the Middle East Conflict” (at a later date changed to the nebulous title ‘Vagueness and Avoidance in Times of Genocide’).

In the event, when it became clear that the symposium panel would include prominent pro-Israeli and pro-Zionist supporters, Goldin expressed her opposition to the symposium and a number of planned speakers pulled out.

Once again, in ritual fashion, political Berlin issued its denunciations following Goldin’s remarks Friday. Germany’s Culture Minister Claudia Roth, a leading figure in the official campaign to gag opponents of genocide, condemned Goldin for her “unbearably one-sided political views.” Roth, who is clearly not appalled at the mass murder of civilians in Gaza and Lebanon declared she was “appalled” at the way people in the audience chanted slogans like “Free Palestine.”

Roth’s comments were echoed by Berlin Senate culture minister, Joe Chialo, who along with Roth has been in the front lines of cutting funding to anti-Zionist artists and is currently overseeing massive cuts to the culture budget in Germany’s capital.

Green Party leader Roth is part of a government complicit in the genocide and war crimes—crimes deemed recently by the Human Rights Watch group to amount to ethnic cleansing—committed in Gaza.

When asked if the German authorities would comply with the arrest warrant issued last Thursday for war criminal Benjamin Netanyahu by the ICC, to which Germany is one of the most important financial contributors, a spokesman for chancellor Olaf Scholz (Social Democratic Party, SPD), made clear that the German government would refuse. He responded, “I find it hard to imagine that arrests could be carried out in Germany on this basis.”

Goldin’s intrepid comments on Friday reflect the outrage of masses of people across the globe shocked by the images of utter devastation and suffering that emerge on a daily basis from Gaza—with tens of millions having taken to the streets in protests and demonstrations worldwide.

For decades young people in postwar Germany were instructed, in the wake of the Holocaust, that the intentional and systematic annihilation of an entire people could not and would not be repeated. “Never Again!” was the clarion call. This, however, is exactly what is taking place in Gaza with the full complicity of the US, Germany and numerous other governments. Only the mass mobilisation of the working class on an international scale, based on a socialist program, can put an end to the capitalist system, the root source of genocide and fascism.



To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)