

Art Gallery of Ontario rejects acquiring Nan Goldin work because of her opposition to Gaza genocide: “Palestine is a great exception that doesn’t include freedom of speech”

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In an act of political censorship, a collections committee at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) rejected buying a work by photographer-artist Nan Goldin last year because several committee members found her denunciation of the Gaza genocide “offensive” and “antisemitic.”

The *Globe and Mail* carried the story January 21, and other media outlets have followed up with further information. The action against the Jewish-American Goldin led to the resignation of senior curator John Zeppetelli and two collections committee volunteers.

The AGO is one of the largest and most prestigious art museums in North America, with a collection of over 120,000 works. It already has three other Goldin works.

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

In her most widely publicized statement on Gaza, Goldin took the opportunity in November 2024 of the opening of an exhibition, “This Will Not End Well,” at the Neue Nationalgalerie [New National Gallery] in Berlin to condemn both Israel and Germany for their roles in the genocide in Gaza and its extension into Lebanon.

As the WSWS reported:

At the start of her 14-minute speech to a packed audience ... 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.”

Later in her remarks,

“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.

Some months later, the AGO determined to buy Goldin’s video work *Stendhal Syndrome* with the Vancouver Art Gallery and Minneapolis’s Walker Art Center.

According to *Artnet*,

Stendhal Syndrome, made in 2024, intersperses Goldin’s own photographs of friends and lovers taken over the last two decades with images of classical, Renaissance, and Baroque paintings and sculptures. It is named after the psychosomatic condition in which one faints or hallucinates when exposed to intense beauty.

However, what officials might have expected to be a formality, a meeting of the contemporary curatorial

working committee to vote on the proposal to purchase the Goldin work, became the occasion for slanderous denunciations of the artist as an antisemite.

A more recent article in the *Globe and Mail* provided additional details. The new piece reports that it was “philanthropic executive” Judy Schulich who spearheaded the opposition to *Stendhal Syndrome*. Schulich apparently led off the discussion. She proceeded to describe Goldin as “a liar” and “propagandistic” and “argued that committee members’ feelings were not included in the acquisition discussion.”

An unnamed person in the meeting, the newly revealed documentation also shows, likened Ms. Goldin to Leni Riefenstahl, the controversial Second World War-era German filmmaker who was a major contributor to Nazi propaganda.

The heated discussion that followed included support for Ms. Goldin from some committee members, who felt that refusing to acquire her work amounted to “censorship,” according to [a] memo.

The committee eventually voted 11-9 to not acquire the work, according to a source.

The *Globe and Mail* also notes that

Ms. Schulich is the executive vice-president of the Schulich Foundation, which bills itself as one of Canada’s largest private foundations, and which was seeded by her father, the billionaire entrepreneur Seymour Schulich. … Between 2019 and 2024, she and venture capitalist David Stein jointly donated at least half a million dollars to the AGO, gallery records show—outside of the foundation, which has also supported the gallery.

This is yet another desperate effort to suppress the truth about the Gaza horrors on behalf of the fascist Netanyahu regime and the global ruling elite, which backs the Zionist state to the hilt.

In an interview, Goldin told *Artnet*,

“It seems that Palestine is a great exception that

doesn’t include freedom of speech,” Goldin said in a phone call. “We were told that it was one board member who shut down the sale, maybe there was someone leading the charge, not 11 people who voted against it.

Significantly, Goldin also explained the professional consequences of her speaking out against Israel’s crimes:

“My sales went from selling very well with Gagosian [global network of art galleries] for basically the first time in my life to minimal sales for a while,” Goldin said. “There was a WhatsApp chain that committed to destroying all the artists that signed the *Artforum* letter. They committed to not buying us, not collecting us, not showing us, not reporting on us.”

[The “*Artforum* letter” refers to a protest by leading artists, including Goldin, after the magazine in question fired editor David Velasco for publishing a pro-Palestinian open letter in October 2023.]

Goldin has continued denouncing the crimes taking place in Gaza and the region. At the Rencontres d’Arles international photography festival in southern France on July 8, 2025, she described the slaughter in Gaza as “the first live-streamed genocide.”

The artist told *Artnet* that “I’m Jewish. I’ve always been Jewish. I’m still Jewish, and it’s part of my Jewish learning to show compassion.” She added, “The idea that not supporting the policies of a nation can be called anti-Semitic is ridiculous. … Zionism isn’t even a religious construct. It’s a political one.”

After the AGO capitulated to the pro-Zionist watchdogs, the Walker and the Vancouver Art Gallery went ahead with their part of the acquisition, and *Stendhal Syndrome* opened in November in Vancouver



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