

میزنا mizna



Annual Report 2023

For twenty-five years, Mizna has been a woman-led contemporary arts organization. Since our founding, we have promoted experimental approaches to art, literature, and film; work that questions and expands the forms and conceptual frameworks of Arab and SWANA culture. We publish a biannual print literary and art journal, *Mizna*, and *Mizna Online*, a digital platform for literary and multidisciplinary work reflecting critically on the current realities of the SWANA region and beyond. We produce the Twin Cities Arab Film Festival, the largest and longest-running SWANA-centered film festival in the Midwest. Mizna also offers readings, film series, performances, public art commissions, and community events that have featured 1000+ local and transnational writers, filmmakers, and artists.

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Responding to Urgency

A Message from our Board Chair

Our community is facing urgent and challenging times. In the past year, the Palestinian, Armenian, Afghan, Sudanese, Moroccan, and Libyan communities have been living through various forms of catastrophe. Mizna is at the forefront of the cultural sector's response.

On behalf of the Mizna board, I would like to thank our staff for their incredibly hard work, both in responding to our community's urgent needs and in growing our organization's programming capabilities. With their creativity and steadfastness, our staff have completed one of the most impactful years in our history. Our literary journal, *Mizna*, won the prestigious Whiting Literary Magazine Award and is steadily expanding its reach with distribution across the US, Europe, and some independent book shops in the SWANA region. In addition to producing an award-winning journal, we launched *Mizna Online*, a digital platform spotlighting commissioned poetry, prose, criticism, reviews, and experimental, multidisciplinary work that reflects on the urgent and current realities of the SWANA region and beyond. Currently, *Mizna Online* has pivoted and emerged as a space for the urgent writing of Palestinian voices in this time of genocide. Our film programs, which include the Twin Cities Arab Film Festival, marking its eighteenth year in September 2024, the Mizna Film Series, as well as special screenings across the Twin Cities, continue to flourish through partnerships with other local film organizations such as the Walker Art Center, MSP Film Society, and Trylon Cinema. We also experienced a period of critical organizational growth, welcoming Deputy Director Ellina Kevorkian, Executive Editor George Abraham, and NNAAC Fellow Nour Eldin Hussein onto Mizna's staff.

Throughout the genocidal war that Israel is waging on Gaza, Mizna has demonstrated its commitment to social justice as well as the importance of cultural work in times of upheaval and revolution. Through a series of Palestine solidarity programs which include film screenings, readings, fundraisers, and

installations, as well as our newly launched online publishing series highlighting Palestinian and anti-Zionist authors, Mizna has served as an important space for artists, writers, and filmmakers, as well as the many community members looking to learn about, gather for, and act for Palestine. Mizna's solidarity programs have accelerated our audience growth and reach, and we are excited to continue welcoming new local, national, and international audiences through our inspiring work.

I am thankful to the Mizna staff for their efforts in creating a meaningful space for SWANA culture and community in these challenging times.

Rabih Nahas
Mizna Board Chair

Living Our Values Since 1999

A Message from our Executive + Artistic Director

In 1999, Mizna was founded to respond to a critical need: to present our community as multifaceted and to create a cultural landscape where our underrepresented experiences could be reflected through art. Since then, Mizna has worked tirelessly to create an unburdened, vibrant space that encourages the exchange of ideas and reflects the realities of the SWANA region and its diaspora.

Today, our community faces an extremely urgent reality. Gaza has been assaulted by a months-long genocidal war which has resulted in tens of thousands of civilian deaths, the forced displacement of nearly two million people, imminent famine, and the collapse of all of Gaza's infrastructure. In the US and Europe, Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims, and anti-Zionist comrades are facing a rise in discrimination, and artists, writers, and filmmakers are being censored for expressing solidarity with Palestine. Days into the genocide, we had to reevaluate what it means to do our work during this shattering violence. We could not go on about our business as usual when our staff, our artists, and our community were witnessing these grotesque horrors.

So, we at Mizna set aside our regular work. We thought about the important role that cultural work can play to bring communities together, to center artists—the critical storytellers and processes of humanity's conscience—and jumped into action to meet the moment. Since October 2023, we have presented numerous fundraisers, installations, solidarity events, and teach-ins; we helped produce a powerful installation, *Bear Witness*—made up of 10,000 flags honoring those martyred in Gaza whose names have been publicized; we coordinated the launch of the ongoing *Fast for Gaza* campaign, a weekly fast which will continue to take place until a permanent ceasefire is called; we launched our digital platform, *Mizna Online*, and have used it as a space to spotlight Palestinian and anti-Zionist voices, including many authors in Gaza; above all, Mizna has offered a collective

space to come together, grieve, learn, and act for Palestine.

In 2024, Mizna celebrates our twenty-fifth anniversary. It is not a small achievement to reach twenty five years as a values-driven arts organization. It is a reflection of the deep care and commitment of our community of staff, board members, artists, and audiences that ensure we continue to live our values in everything we do. In this anniversary year, we will curate programming that adapts and actively responds not only to our community's needs but also to the state of the world. In 2024, you will see Mizna publish three new journals, the incredibly special and formally innovative *Cinema* issue which is guest-edited Saeed Taji Farouky, a summer issue that focuses on this catastrophic moment, and a *Futurities* issue guest-edited by Barrak Alzaid; we will present our 18th annual Twin Cities Arab Film Festival, which will have a special focus on Sudanese and Palestinian experiences, and the Mizna Film Series which highlights significant contributions from the archives made by women filmmakers to SWANA cinema. In addition to our regular annual programs, our 2024 programming includes the formal addition of *Mizna Online* to our website, hosting several literary and film events presented in solidarity with Palestine, and marking our 25-year milestone with a special event that brings the Mizna family together to mark this milestone.

We continue to strive in creating a cultural space for collective gathering, communal relief, and resilience.

Thank you for joining us in our journey.

Lana Salah Barkawi
Executive + Artistic Director

How often have we spoken of the quality of light. The way the
 fern holds drops of rain. Each encompassing the world around it
 magnified like fire. Consuming the breach of desire. A branch reaching for
 another. A net made manifest in the expanse of sky. The way her
 hand dips slowly into the space of another. How do we call ourselves
 by names other than our own? How do we walk without feeling our
 flesh? The rough facade of a brick building or the considered
 touch of another's hand. Our palms can hold within them all the
 beauty we have come to know. The whole of the world was never
 ours to have. But that which our palms can touch
 that space we hold between each hand. That
 is our earth and our sun. Our reminder
 that we are still alive.

Lin'd from
 bro side by
 Meher Khan
 of a poem
 by Matthew
 Shenoda
 \$5

Letter press prints
 by Amos Paul
 Kennedy Jr + the
 Mizna writing
 collective, at a
 Minn Ctr for Book Arts
 Workshop
 \$10

**YOUR
 WAR DRUM
 AIN'T LOUDER
 THAN THIS
 BREATH**
 MIZNA
 ART POETRY PROSE

Subeir Hammad

Center artwork in
 the folio I Want Sky.
 Art by queer Palestinian
 artist Haitham Haddad



**LIFE IS A
 RIGHT
 NOT
 COLLATERAL!**



Photo by Bruce Silcox

Journal

Mizna: SWANA Lit + Art is an acclaimed biannual print publication with a history of connecting established and emerging authors with an international readership. We publish poetry, fiction, essays, comix, and visual art.

In 2023, we published **Mizna: Black SWANA Takeover**, guest-edited by acclaimed poet Safia Elhillo and produced by an all-Black takeover team. The highly anticipated issue explores the infinitely varied and kaleidoscopic nature of the Black SWANA experience.

Our summer issue, **Mizna: Myth and Memory**, was originally intended to be an unthemed issue. However, following the selection process, the editorial team noticed an emerging constellation of works on myth, memory, and folklore in its foundational pieces and retroactively titled the issue *Myth and Memory*.

Mizna won the prestigious Whiting Literary Magazine Prize. The prize recognizes excellence and empowers outstanding nonprofit

publications to develop and implement ideas that will have a transformative impact and help sustain their work as champions of writers.

In 2023, we published 55 authors from Armenia, Canada, Iraq, Ireland, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Palestine, Portugal, Qatar, South Africa, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States. We sent 654 single issues to readers and subscribers. Our top subscriber cities were the Twin Cities, New York City, the Bay Area, Chicago, Washington DC, and Dearborn.

Where can you find issues of Mizna?

Twin Cities

Birchbark Books & Native Arts
Boneshaker Books
Bookhouse Dinkytown
Eat My Words
Magers + Quinn
Moon Palace Books
Subtext: A Bookstore

North America

Ann Arbor: Literati
Chicago: Pilsen Community Books, Quimby's Bookstore
Los Angeles: Skylight Books
Montreal: Maktaba Bookshop
New Jersey: Iris Market Café
Seattle: Open Books

Europe

Amsterdam: Athenaeum
Boekhandel, Boekie Woekie
Berlin: Motto Books, do you read me?!, Pro qm, bbooks
Bucharest: PUNCH
London: Mosaic Rooms
Paris: Galleria Continua
Stuttgart: Superjuju
Vienna: Salon für Kunstbuch
Vila do Conde: Loja das Curtas

SWANA

Tangier: Librairie des Colonnes
Beirut: Barzakh

654
issues sold

55
authors published

16
cities

20
bookstores



Working with Mizna marked a turning point in my career. I had the opportunity to meet, work, and collaborate with the most talented people, and I was able to read incredible poetry and prose along the way. I felt supported in every step, and being able to meet most of the team in real life was the cherry on top of what was already a very fulfilling experience. I'm grateful for the time I had with Mizna and meeting people I now consider friends, and would collaborate with everyone there again with no hesitation.

— Samah Fadil, Writer



Introducing *Mizna Online*

Mizna Online is our recently launched digital publishing platform. Featuring commissioned poetry, prose, criticism, reviews, and experimental multidisciplinary work, *Mizna Online* complements our biannual print publication with regular content reflecting on the urgent and current realities of the SWANA region and beyond. Since October 2023, *Mizna Online* has been focusing its efforts on publishing work in solidarity with Palestine and anti-Zionism. Recent pieces feature poetry and prose from Palestinian authors, including many who are currently experiencing the genocidal war in Gaza. In 2024, *Mizna Online* will be launched as a formal addition to our website.

Film

55
films
screened

45
filmmakers
featured

6
screening
venues

17
countries
highlighted

Established in 2003, the **Twin Cities Arab Film Festival** debuts independent films from more than fifteen Arabic-speaking countries and their diasporas. In 2023, we presented our 17th annual Twin Cities Arab Film Festival with special screenings and programming across the Twin Cities. The weekend included a screening at the Bell Museum's Planetarium, post-screening discussions with actors and filmmakers, and an outdoor screening under the Third Avenue Bridge. This year's festival featured 35 films, over two-thirds of which were directed by women.

The **Mizna Film Series** is a quarterly selection of programs marking our first venture into year-round curated film programming. Our 2023 Mizna Film Series highlighted archival works and initiatives that document Palestine's struggle for liberation. The series presented rare and rediscovered Palestinian films as well as works produced by international collaborators and groups in solidarity with Palestine. Audiences had the opportunity to watch some of the programs both in person and online.

Programs presented stories from the United Kingdom, Palestine, Iraq, the United States, Egypt, Japan, Yemen, Kenya, Qatar, Lebanon, Jordan, Canada, Morocco, Sudan, France, Saudi Arabia, and Western Sahara.



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THE CHRISTMAS

Photo by Makeen Osman

Public Program Highlights

Solidarity Programs

Continuing Mizna's long history of furthering social justice in all our work, we took part in and presented several solidarity events, programs, and fundraisers for Palestine, Iran, Armenia, Morocco, Libya, Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria, and more.

In 2023 we

- * Took part in a general strike in solidarity with Palestine on October 13, 2023.
- * Made our sold-out *Palestine Issue* available to download for free.
- * Hosted fundraiser screenings and readings for Morocco, Libya, Sudan, and Palestine.
- * Hosted a panel on art and activism in Afghanistan and Iran.
- * Amplified voices from Armenia, Sudan, Iran, Morocco, and Palestine in our communications and programs.
- * Publicly reaffirmed our solidarity with Palestine as well as with anti-Zionist allies who have been censored and vilified for standing up for Palestine.

AWP

We had a robust presence at the AWP 2023 conference in Seattle, WA. We launched our winter issue, *Mizna: Black SWANA Takeover* and presented our AWP panel, *Black SWANA Lit: Collective Black Identity in SWANA*. Additionally, Mizna copresented interactive and embodied writing workshop with Barrak Alzaid that focused on our relationship to the environment and geopolitics of the Persian Gulf.

Readings Across the Country

We presented and copresented readings across the US, including the Seattle and Twin Cities launch of *Mizna: Black SWANA Takeover*; the launch of *Mizna: Myth and Memory* at the major Twin Cities literary festival Word Play; *Exiled Joy* with Randa Jarrar and Ghayath Almadhoun in LA; Raja Shehadeh at the East Side Freedom Library, and more.

Palestine Writes in Philadelphia

Mizna's Executive + Artistic Director Lana S. Barkawi and Executive Editor George Abraham represented Mizna at the 2023 Palestine Writes Conference. Lana served as a panelist on the *Independent Presses and Palestine* panel and George was a panelist on the *Poetry in Conversation* panel.

Mizna + RAWIFest

In October 2023, we cohosted Mizna + RAWifest, a biannual conference dedicated to supporting and disseminating creative and scholarly writing by Arab/SWANA individuals, in Minneapolis at the Loft Literary Center. This year's conference featured a slate of panels and events with over 60 writers, artists, and performers presenting their work.



Photo by Bruce Silcox

Selected Partnerships and Events

February 2023

Only Voice Remains: Art, Scholarship and Activism in Iran and Afghanistan presented with the Department of GWSS at the University of Minnesota and the Loft Literary Center.

March 2023

Black SWANA Lit: Mizna AWP Offsite presented with Northwest Film Forum.

April 2023

Random House Presents: An Evening Celebrating Arab American Authors presented with Random House Books and Moon Palace Books.

May 2023

Raja Shehadeh Reading presented with Rain Taxi and East Side Freedom Library.

Il Cinema Ritrovato On Tour: Algeria In Flames + Les Mains Libres presented with Archives on Screen.

July 2023

Exiled Joy: Reading and Conversation presented with Thomas Mann House, RAWI, and Beyond Baroque.

Mizna: Myth and Memory Launch Event presented with The Loft Literary Center's Wordplay Festival.

February–August 2023

Mizna Film Series 2023 presented with Trylon Cinema.

September 2023

2023 Arab Film Festival presented with the Bell Museum, Minneapolis Saint Paul Film Society, and The Walker Art Center.

October 2023

Mizna + RAWifest presented with RAWI.

November 2023

Solidarity Evening for Palestine presented with Pangea World Theater, New Arab American Theater Works, and Art2Action.

Arab Film Fest Tulsa 2023 presented with Circle Cinema and Tulsa Artist Fellowship.

Palestine Solidarity Screening and Fundraiser presented with Palestine Cinema Days and Trylon Cinema.

December 2023

Bear Witness: Honoring Gaza's Martyrs Installation and Special Events presented with Public Functionary, UMN Students for Justice in Palestine, and Afghan Cultural Society.

Words for Palestine presented with Arab American National Museum and Palestine Writes.

Prints for Palestine presented with Minnesota Center for Book Arts.

Who Remembers? Armenian Palestinian Solidarities: A Reading presented with International Armenian Literary Alliance, Armenian-American Action Network, Fikra, PalFest, WAWOG, and Yerazad.



It's extremely important that people have a way to share their creative endeavors. Your work has helped to make this possible. It's even more important to me that the global south has a voice, and you have helped to ensure the Arab and SWANA diaspora have a platform.

— Nicholas Hemenway, Donor

Photo by Jordan Lee Thompson



Photo by Alvan Washington

2023 in Numbers

AUDIENCES

11,183
TOTAL ATTENDEES

2,446
Film Programs

2,335
Literary Programs

6,403
* Other Programs

* Includes 5,000 viewers of *Alien Technology II* by Monira Al Qadiri, a public sculpture commissioned by Mizna in 2017 and installed in St. Paul, MN.

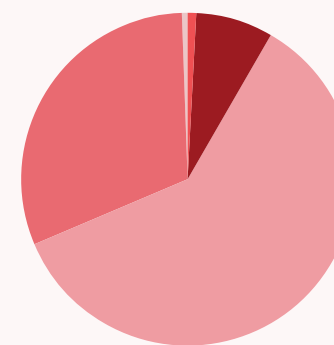
IMPACT

114 artists, filmmakers, and writers featured in Mizna programs

\$49,049 paid in artist honorariums

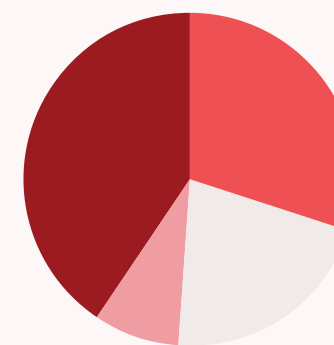
FINANCIAL REPORT

CONTRIBUTED SUPPORT



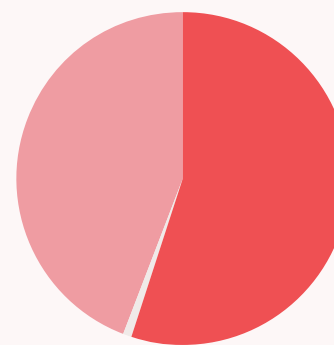
Grant from Other Nonprofit	\$2,293
Government Grants	\$152,006
Corporate + Foundation	\$295,639
Individual Gifts	\$37,685
Sponsorships	\$4,250
TOTAL	\$491,873

EARNED REVENUE



Program Income	\$18,976
Merchandise Sales	\$3,924
Ticket Sales	\$9,994
Journal Subscriptions + Sales	\$14,124
TOTAL	\$47,018

EXPENDITURES



Programs & Projects	\$202,773
Professional Development	\$3,902
General Operating + Admin	\$254,587
TOTAL	\$461,261

TOTAL INCOME \$538,891

NET INCOME \$77,630

WEBSITE STATS

Views per month 9,000
Unique visitors per month 5,000
Total users 2023 48,000

Top five countries that visited our website were the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and France

Top five cities that visited our website were Twin Cities, New York, Chicago, London, and Los Angeles

SOCIAL MEDIA REACH

Twitter/X 5,000 followers
Facebook 5,900 followers
Instagram 12,400 followers



Photo by Reva Keller

Special Thanks

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Moon Palace Books
Karam Law
The Depot Hotel
Sahan Journal
Trylon Cinema
UMN Arab Students Association
UMN CSCL

Program Volunteers

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Jna Shelomith & Ethan Laubach
Amy Shetler
Nadia Shihab in memory of Kareem Shihab
Fadi Shihadeh
Brandon Shimoda
Rick Simonson
Deepa Sivarajan
Kristin Slater
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Suzanne Springer-Hewitt
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Jordan Lee Thompson
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Lily Tung in memory of Rita Tung
Charissa Uemura
Pramila Vasudevan
Jada Vogt
Chamindika Wanduragala
Xiaolu Wang
Jane Willard
Sydney Jael Wilson
Jessica Winegar
Liwon Xu
Dima Zaghal
Jessica Zimmerman
Anonymous (20) including in memory of Helen Marzouk; in honor of my Palestinian friends; and on behalf of Petra

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