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.

Cover image from Palestine Solidarity
Evening, photo by Makeen Osman

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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 of humanity’s conscience—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 processors 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
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.

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Where can you find issues of Mizna?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Bookstores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SWANA</td>
<td>Tangier: Librairie des Colonnes Baal: Barzakh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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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

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654 issues sold

55 authors published

16 cities

20 bookstores

Photo by Reva Keller
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.
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.
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.

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.

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.
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

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.


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
2023 in Numbers

**Audiences**

- **Total Attendees**: 11,183
  - Film Programs: 1,446
  - Literary Programs: 6,395
  - Other Programs: 3,342

**Impact**

- 114 artists, filmmakers, and writers featured in Mizna programs
- $49,049 paid in artist honorariums

**Financial Report**

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

- **Contributed Support**: $538,891
  - Program Income: $18,976
  - Merchandise Sales: $3,924
  - Ticket Sales: $9,994
  - Journal Subscriptions + Sales: $14,124

- **Net Income**: $47,018
  - Programs & Projects: $202,773
  - Professional Development: $3,902
  - General Operating + Admin: $254,587

**Website Stats**

- Views per month: 9,000
- Unique visitors per month: 5000
- Total users 2023: 48,000

**Social Media Reach**

- Twitter/X: 5,000 followers
- Instagram: 12,400 followers

**Top Five Countries and Cities**

- 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

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Bilal Alkatout

Vice Chair
Stephanie Hadhad

Secretary
Nahid Khan

Chair
Rabi’h Nahas

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Sagrah Shahid
Jna Shelomith

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