

# How doxxing victim Nina Sanadze was lauded one day, hounded the next

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[335 Comments](#)



Honoured, then doxxed and hounded: Jewish sculptor Nina Sanadze in her Maribyrnong studio in Melbourne. Picture: Louis Trerise

When Nina Sanadze was short-listed for the prestigious Blake Prize for religious art last year, she was thrilled.

“It was a great honour to be in the show,” the Melbourne-based Jewish sculptor told The Weekend Australian. However, Sanadze did not bask in the afterglow of her achievement for long.

When the Blake shortlist was announced, pro-Palestinian activists who had been conducting a months-long campaign of “relentless hounding and abuse” against Sanadze, started pressuring Sydney’s Casula Powerhouse Art Centre to banish the Soviet-born artist from an exhibition that accompanied the prize.

Sophia Cai, deputy chair of peak visual arts body NAVA, posted that recent social media comments by Sanadze constituted “racism and body shaming towards Palestinians” and created “a culturally unsafe environment for other artists”.

Cai has shared on social media a collective activists' statement which defended the circulation of a leaked transcript from a Jewish creatives' WhatsApp chat group, as "in the public interest". She thanked the activists and artists who wrote the statement, in which they accused Jewish creatives of co-ordinating efforts to silence support for Palestinians. The Jewish artists denied that claim.

In a Substack post, pro-Palestinian activist and book illustrator Matt Jones Chun accused Casula and the National Gallery of Victoria, where Sanadze was due to open an important solo show, of platforming "a committed propagandist for the Zionist colonial project".

Chun, who was allegedly involved in [leaking personal details of hundreds of Jewish artists and academics](#), wrote: "There is no safe society in which a Zionist can be represented, institutionally protected or rewarded."

"I was really quite crushed when this was happening," Sanadze told The Weekend Australian.

The woman who had brought together 10 art collectives from different cultural backgrounds for a 2023 festival of art and poetry, was weeks later being pilloried as "disgusting", "vile" and "a snake" by other visual artists on social media – some of whom she had previously worked with.

In The Weekend Australian, she writes about her ordeal, and how she sought legal help after she was falsely accused of being a Zionist bully and racist.



Hana and Child (2023) by Nina Sanadze.

The relentless pile-on against Sanadze, who moved to Australia in 1996 after her family fled the Georgian civil war for Russia, reflects the deep and damaging [splits in the arts caused by rising tensions over the Israel-Gaza conflict](#). Cultural organisations from the Melbourne Symphony - Orchestra to Rising Festival and Adelaide Writers' Week have struggled to deal with fallout from pro-Palestinian protests, or threatened boycotts and racist attacks on Jewish artists and donors.

The unsuccessful attempt to cancel Sanadze from the Blake Prize was one example among many in which the artist was targeted after she was doxxed in January 2024 as part of the leaked WhatsApp group of 600 Jewish creatives and academics – [an act that would be illegal under federal law today](#).

Artists doubled down on their abuse when critical – and private – online messages she made about Hamas were publicly leaked and redistributed on social media. Sanadze said the “incredibly manipulated” campaign against her led to serious career setbacks: she lost her commercial gallery representation and was asked to leave her two-year studio residency at Melbourne’s prestigious Gertrude Contemporary prematurely.

“Both (were) citing intense campaigns and threats from (artist) peers as their reasons,” she said, adding that the “authoritarian cultural imperialism in Australia feels as oppressive, if not worse, than what I remember from the Soviet Union”.

One artist, she said, had declared that she could not work alongside a Zionist at the Gertrude studios, even though Sanadze believes in a two-state solution for Israel and the Palestinian people.

Last March, the same day Sanadze turned up to move sculptures from her Gertrude studio to her NGV solo show, anti-Semitic graffiti spelling out the words “Zio dogs” had been splashed on the front of the Gertrude building. She was the only Jewish artist working at Gertrude at the time.

Soon after she was doxxed, Gertrude’s management wrote to her stating that because of her role in the leaked WhatsApp group discussions – which were meant to be confidential – it was “inappropriate to attend Gertrude at this time”. Eventually, she obtained legal help from law firm Arnold Bloch Leibler. The Australian understands a settlement was reached with Gertrude, which receives almost \$1m in government funding each year.



The anti-Semitic graffiti at the Gertrude Gallery.

ABL partner Raphael Leibler, who represented Sanadze pro bono in her dealings with Gertrude, said: “The vile attempts to silence Jewish creatives solely because of their Jewish identity is reminiscent of the darkest authoritarian regimes. It has no place in Australia.”

Mr Leibler warned that Sanadze’s experience was far from isolated. “Arnold Bloch Leibler has fought and will continue to fight those who seek to curtail the careers and livelihoods of Jewish creatives,” he said

Asked about Sanadze’s allegations, a spokeswoman for Gertrude Contemporary said: “Gertrude supports artistic freedom of expression for all artists.”

In extraordinary and misleading comments, Cai told The Weekend Australian on Friday that “Nina has not been doxxed, as she publicly shared her anti-Palestinian and racist views. This made her an unsafe person for other artists”.

Cai, whose latest research involves “the connection between fandom and curating as dual practices rooted in care”, went on to disparage Sanadze’s work as “not very good” and “derivative”, despite the sculptor having had a well-received show at the NGV.

Rhana Davenport, a former director of the Art Gallery of South Australia, has said Sanadze’s work “responds to some of the great forces of our time” such as ideology, armed conflict and the meaning of monuments, and is “powerful”, “evocative” and “dramatic”.

Activists – [many of them from the visual art world](#) – accused Sanadze of “dehumanising Palestinian resistance” after private messages she shared with two former friends were leaked and widely circulated on social media. One of her messages, sent on October 8 2023, challenged the claim that Hamas’s massacre of 1200 Israeli Jews the day before was a legitimate form of resistance.

The artist said that, still “in grief and in shock”, she counselled a Jewish friend that talking about Palestinian oppression rather than Hamas’s mass murder of Israeli civilians at that time was “to condone violence which is not a solution”. In a clear reference to Hamas’s massacre, Sanadze also wrote: “Animal behaviour is not a solution.”

Online activists misrepresented this message, claiming the artist had said Palestinians, rather than Hamas terrorists, were animals. One poster said: “Literally calling Palestinians animals – less than. This is genocidal speech.”

In another leaked, private message, Sanadze said she was “facetiously” referring to Hamas exploiting humanitarian aid when she described captured Palestinian men, stripped to their underwear by the Israeli Defence Forces in December 2023, as “overweight”. She also wrote that “Israel was arresting them (the men) not executing”.

Some NGOs said stripping the men was a breach of human rights, while Israel said it stripped captured men to check for explosives.

Opening in April last year, Sanadze’s solo show at the [NGV examined the fate of fallen Soviet and Russian monuments over time](#) and was a career highlight – yet it opened with extra security and little publicity. She said the NGV gave her show minimal promotion because it feared activists would target the institution.

Soon after, when New York art journal e-Flux published a positive account of her NGV show, calling it “engrossing”, pro-Palestinian activists flooded the site with negative comments. Chun and others demanded the article be removed; another poster described Sanadze’s sculptures as “fascist art”, while Australian artist Lara Chamas called her a “vile person” and a “known Zionist”.



A young Nina Sanadze with her father, Eduard Sanadze, a Georgian composer.

Sanadze grew up during the Soviet era in communist Georgia, and her family fled the 1990s civil war before arriving in Australia in 1996. The 48-year-old mother of two teenagers said there was overwhelming pressure in Australia for visual artists, academics and arts organisations to sign up to the view that Israel was perpetrating a genocide in Gaza and that Hamas were freedom fighters. She said: “The art world and academia, once havens of progressive values and pluralism I cherished, have devolved into oppressive cultural imperialism where dissent is silenced and opposition punished.”

Now, however, after enduring months of harassment and misrepresentation, she is pushing ahead with plans for a new Melbourne gallery, the Goldstone Gallery, which will be “dedicated to presenting cancelled, politically censored, silenced and muted voices”. It will open in February with a photographic exhibition by photojournalist Evgeny Feldman, honouring the life of Alexi Navalny, the Russian opposition leader who died in a gulag in 2024.

For her latest sculptural installation, Sanadze has collected burnt furniture from Melbourne’s recently firebombed Adass Synagogue. She says the damaged furniture “mirrors the singed ruins of my professional life”, but she is determined to “rebuild, create again and allow the art to speak as a witness once more”.