# PEN America Annual Literary Gala Addresses Controversy and Advocates for Free Expression



PEN America hosted its annual literary gala on May 16, 2024, under the blue whale at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. The event, which aimed to raise around $2 million, proceeded amidst internal and external criticism regarding PEN America's response to the Israel-Hamas war. Protests occurred outside the venue, led by Writers Against the War on Gaza, highlighting the group’s controversial stance.

Inside, over 600 guests, including writers Malcolm Gladwell, Gary Shteyngart, Jay McInerney, and Claire Messud, gathered. The event featured speeches from organizational leaders such as CEO Suzanne Nossel, who acknowledged frustrations and emphasized the mission to protect free expression globally.

Celebrities like Seth Meyers, Paul Simon, and Tyler Perry also attended. Honorees included WSJ publisher Almar Latour for advocating for detained journalist Evan Gershkovich, and Pham Doan Trang, a jailed Vietnamese writer, among others. Despite the controversy, the evening focused on uniting to defend persecuted writers and combat global book bans.