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Artist's Professional Face- Biography

About You: *Biography*

There are two schools of thought about the artist's biography. For some, the artist's bio is a professional document that summarizes the Artist's Résumé in narrative form. Since the Bio is intended to be included into public marketing, the thinking is that such things as education, awards and a summary of the most significant accomplishments is something that is important to those who view an exhibition or hear about you before a lecture. In this biography a couple of sentences about your interests, such as the fact that you are dedicated to women's issues, or an intriguing fact about you, such as you have written a book of poetry, are included to personalize you.

Another school of thought maintains that the biography, along with the statement provide an entry way into the artist's work. In this mindset, the biography is crafted not for the art world, but rather for the general public who are less interested in your accomplishments but more appreciative of who you are as a person. So, let's take a look at both types of biographies. Chances are, you will need both of these biographies in your career.

Formal Artist's Biography

You will want what I am calling the formal artist's biography for display in advertising for your solo show, in applying for an online show where your bio will be displayed in an online catalogue, or for use in any other kind of marketing. The formal bio will need to be in a couple of formats. The longer bio should be about three hundred words. You will need an edited version that is 200 words and one that is 100 words. Different submissions require different lengths. If you are using a PC and/or a Word document, you can easily get the word count by highlighting what you have written and go to the top tabs in Word where you find Home/ Insert/ etc. The word count is under REVIEW. When you click on WORD COUNT, you will automatically see the count of the highlighted text so you can edit down or up as needed.

To create your formal artist's bio, go back through your Artist's Résumé and summarize your most significant accomplishments. Write in the third person as if someone else is writing about you. Phrases that are often used are:

- (Your full name) is best known for....
- Her work is described as....
- In her most recent body of work, (name) explores....
- (Last name) has exhibited in....and most recently in...
- (Your full name) has received awards for her work in... OR (Name) has received numerous grants and awards, including
- (Full name) received (degree) from, has studied with (or at)
- She lives (place) with (partner, husband, furry creatures...) where she loves to.....

It can be intimidating to write about yourself and list your accomplishments. Most of us find it easier to write about others rather than ourselves. There is an important payoff, though, in having these documents available to use in your art practice. Worked and reworked over time, these documents gain clarity and become important promotional tools for your work.

If you keep a journal, you will grow in ease over time for expressing your thoughts and insights about yourself and your work. Keeping a record of comments from buyers of your work, comments from reviewers and gallerists can find their way into your biography or website using quotes and testimonials.

But in the end, it is your work, your images and your descriptions and work samples that will be the heart and soul of your professional face, so while the résumé, bio and artist statement are important and necessary, remember that it is only a means to helping others understand and appreciate your work.

Informal Artist Biography

The informal Artist Biography is also narrative but styled less like a list of accomplishments and more like a story. This bio is designed to be included in a publication accompanying your work for a solo show. I've also seen informal biographies displayed in a gallery where many artists show, such as a co-op gallery. Most of those who come through commercial galleries and attend studio tours are interested in art and are eager to learn something about the artist. Formal bios don't work well here and can be off-putting. I use my informal bio for studio shows. Those who drift into my studio often use the biography material to begin a conversation, which is a first step to buying art. The larger goal, however, is to educate and develop interest in the artist and the art. Many of my buyers first became friends through just such conversations and then later return to make a purchase.

For this bio, the opening paragraph, like the opening to a story, is used to grab the audience. For example, "It took a near death experience to make me realize I needed to paint." What could follow might be a three-sentence summary about that moment of transformation followed by the story of how the artist began her artistic journey. We may not each have that kind of dramatic event to begin our bio, but we all can find a compelling beginning to our biography. Artists are mysterious to most non-artists, so they are eager to know something about who you are and how you make work—something that most find magical.

One exercise that can flesh out the material for your informal artist biography is to create your own interview. You can write the answers to questions you create for yourself or use a set of interview questions from other artists interviews. I like to copy interview questions from interviews I come across in art magazines and online as a way for me to find words to express my own ongoing thinking about my work and my process. I keep these questions on a document in my computer and find myself coming back to it again and again as I write, revise, and rewrite my biography for different venues and for different shows.



I often am surprised when I find words that I had written some years before take on new meaning when I reread them some years later. It confirms my own belief that our art and our life are on a continuum. I may claim that "I have been an artist my whole life," but when I look back over journal entries, self-interviews and writing from earlier years, I know the truth of this statement.

As we grow as artists, our work becomes stronger, our compositions develop, and our content deepens. Likewise, our ability to talk about our work, ourselves as artists and our process should also deepen and develop. And, I am here to say, "It does get easier, so don't be afraid to start."

Sample Self- Interview Questions to Explore

Information about You:

- Where do you live now? Where have you lived? What was the best place you have ever lived?
- What part of the world is your favorite place? Have you been there?
- Are you a desert, forest, mountain or water person?
- What kinds of books do you like to read? What are you reading now?
- What art books do you buy and how do you use them (cover to cover-reference-use as how to?)
- What is the most inspiring adventure you had?
- What was the last thing you cooked? Do you cook? If so, what? Are you a good cook? How does cooking/gardening and your life as an artist work together?
- If you could surround yourself with one color what would that be?
- What is one thing you would like to do that you haven't done yet?
- What words do you live by?
- What is a guilty pleasure?
- What is your favorite time of day? What is most productive time of day?
- What was your first job? What has been your best job?
- When did you first become interested in art? Are there other artists in your family? Were you encouraged in your art making?
- What are your interests outside art?

Information about your work:

- What kind of work are you known for? How would you describe your work in one sentence or less?
- How do others describe your work? What do others say of your work when they see it?
- Describe your style and subject matter? How did you develop that style? What drew you to your subject matter?
- What do you feel is unique to you in your art?
- What is on your workspace right now?
- What has engaged your interest this past year? How do you see this engagement reflected in your work now and going forward?
- Why do you make art? When did you start? How did you start?
- What is your least favorite technique or part of the art-making process?
- Do you have or wear a talisman, magical/power garment in the studio or at other times?
- If you had a day to make art with anyone, who would that be?
- How do you promote and expose your work to others?

Information about Technique, Process, Materials, Marketing:

- What is your can't-live-without tool, material, junk yard finds? Tell us the story of how it was discovered?
- What do you listen to when you create?
- What is your best advice to artists?
- What do you feel has been your greatest challenge in selling your work?
- What do you feel you have been most successful at in your art and art business?
- How much hours a week do you spend on creating art? On the business of art?
- Do you have a studio routine? Describe that?
- What is your favorite artist from art history? Why? What is your favorite artwork? Why?