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Writing Your Artist's Statement

I'm sharing my current statement with you, not because I think it's the greatest, but because it's one example, and most of you know my work and can critique the statement to see if it is effective.

This is followed by a helpful article from the Surface Design Association about how to write your own artist's statement.

(Note: I like my artist's statement because I can use part of it or all of it. *The first two paragraphs can stand alone, the third and fourth paragraphs can stand alone, or I can pull short phrases from the entire statement.* It describes my chosen media and my belief about where inspiration comes from. Plus, it is an authentic reflection of how I feel about my own creative process. It works for me right now, but it may change in the future if my work changes.)

My Artist's Statement

I rejoice in the power of art as a "secret handshake" of recognition and belonging. Art humanizes and joins us, helping us communicate in a universal non-verbal language across time and space.

Human faces, ancient or contemporary, fascinate me as summaries of life stories in the moment. Clay, paper, wax and fiber are my instinctive, beloved media but mark-making through abstract painting challenges me to develop my own language of expression and translation. Digital imagery is the new gift of fire in my body of work, which continues to evolve and to happily surprise me.

Through years of self-reflection, I have come to understand that synchronicity, intuition, and the collective unconscious are major influences in my work.

- ***Synchronicity*** - that uncanny coincidence, unlikely conjunction of events, or startling serendipity - happens "out there," against the odds. Something in the Universe seems to swing into place to answer an inner need we have.
- ***Intuition*** happens "in here." It is an inner knowing, an ability to tune into knowledge in a non-rational, nonlinear way. We know something but we don't know how we know it.

- *Collective unconscious, a term coined by Carl Jung, refers to structures of the unconscious mind which are shared among beings of the same species. We know it when we see it.*

The more aware I am of the little day-to-day things that capture my attention by calling to me in a mysterious way, and the more I take note of them, the more understanding I gain about the purpose of my art as basic human communication, both to myself and to the viewer.

Here is the SDA/ATA Article with some follow-up links

What is an Artist Statement?

An artist statement is about your work's purpose or philosophy giving your audience deeper insight into it. It may include the symbolism you give your materials, or the issues you address. Your statement should include whatever is most important to you and your work. It should address and explain in general terms what your art is, your methods and materials.

An artist statement is never finished for long. Like your resume, it will be revised frequently, as your work changes and as you find new ways of expressing what you are doing. Your history and background will be your artist biography. (See Artists Bio).

Uses include the following:

- Exhibit catalogues and articles about you and your work.
- Helping dealers and other arts professionals talk about and sell your work.
- Provide background information for writers of articles, reviews, and catalogues.
- It can function as the basis for cover letters and grant proposals.

How to write an Artist Statement:

Here are some tips and ideas for all artists to think about when composing a new statement or revising their current artist statement.

- **Keep the Statement Simple:** The artist statement should be written both clearly and concisely for a wide range of people who will read it. The language and terms you use should be simple, jargon-free, and easy for anyone to understand; and your statement should be in the first person, as if you are talking about yourself and your art to a group of people.
- **The Statement Should Tell Why:** Explain why you create this kind of art. This could be in the form of an explanation of your motivation and subject matter. In addition, the "why" could also discuss any artistic or personal influences. Overall, you are telling the reader the personal reasons why you create this art.

- **The Statement Should Tell How:** Explaining to the reader the “how” can be a short sentence or two about the artistic process or describing any special techniques that were used in producing this art. You should not get technical or provide a step by step guide on how to create your art. If there are any unusual materials used, that can be mentioned too.
- **What it Means to the Artist:** Overall, this a personal statement of the meaning of the art for you, the artist. This may be the most difficult thing for you to write about as it will reveal something personal about you. It is very difficult to write about yourself, especially when you need to keep it short. For this, think Twitter and try to write this with 140 characters. It is tough to do but try to do it in at least 2 to 3 concise sentences, maximum.
- **Keep it Short:** Remember that people’s attention spans are quite short and that if the artist statement is too long, too complicated or poorly written people will just not read it! Avoid big, flowery and complicated words. It just does not work. You are not trying to impress anyone, you are trying to communicate to a very wide audience what your art is about.

Here are some other things to consider and incorporate into an Artist Statement:

Dos:

- Develop a strong first sentence. Explain clearly and precisely why you make art, what it means to you and what materials you use. Tell a story about something that moved you into making a specific body of work. Draw the reader into your world.
- Focus on topics that may not be apparent from viewing your images, such as, influences in your work: themes and issues. The techniques, materials used, or scale of the work can also be important information to include.
- Keep it short, clear and concise – No more than 1 page, double spaced. Write a strong, compelling statement without art jargon in simple sentences.
- Focus on topics not apparent from viewing your images such as symbols or metaphors, themes and issues underlying your work, materials, scale, etc.
- Proofread your statement for misspelled words, bad grammar, or confusing content.
- Rewrite your statement every time you complete a new body of work.
- Write in first person as if you were speaking to a group of people who don’t know your work. Avoid using I and me.
- If you have multiple bodies or work, materials or techniques, have multiple artist statements for each.
- Study other artists’ statements, as they often reveal inventive ways of expressing artistic purpose and intent—ways that you may wish to emulate in your own artist statement as it takes shape. The time you invest in the editing of your artist statement will pay off in the form of increased audience understanding and interest in your work.

Don’ts:

- Don’t imitate the theoretical or intellectualized style of writing used in critical art magazines. Avoid art-speak and pretentious language. If your statement is difficult to read, it will NOT be read.

- Don't try to impress the reader by your extensive knowledge of art criticism or art history. You want to impress them with your art.
- Don't use weak phrases that reflect insecurities like "I am hoping to," "I am trying to," or "I would like to."
- Don't "tell" the reader what they "must" see in your art. That is what the artist sees and the viewer may see or interpret something else.
- This is not a biography. Do not get that mixed in with the artist statement.
- Don't announce what you are attempting to do, just clearly express what you have accomplished.
- If you are unsure about the end result of the statement, then have other people read it, comment on it or find someone that will help you.

After it is completed, reread it and make sure that the sentence structure and spelling are perfect. Then put the statement away. In a few days, look at it again and follow these steps all over again! At that point, you will see how a phrase, sentence or a word can be changed in order to make the artist statement clearer and overall better.

Finally, if you are happy with the statement, then it is good to go. If however, if you are still not completely happy with the statement, put it away again and reread in order to fine tune and communicate the artist statement clearly.

Remember: The artist statement is speaking to the viewer in your absence. Therefore, the artist statement should be short, concise and well written in a conversational language.

Three types of Artist Statements

One page statement:

- Artist statements are rarely longer than one page, double spaced. More information than that is usually not necessary and will probably not be read.
- It can address a large body of work, or work in different media all concerning the same ideas.
- This longer statement will accompany an exhibition or performance of your work.
- Can be included in a portfolio or grant application.
- Used as a reference for: promoting, describing, selling, writing about your work by gallerists, curators, publicists, critics, journalists etc.

One or two paragraph statement:

- No longer than half a page.
- Addresses the most pertinent information about the work, a particular series or piece.
- Can be incorporated into the heading of an image description sheet, which accompanies a portfolio, grant application, etc.
- Can be the lead-in to a longer project description.
- Can be used for your website or exhibit catalogue.

25 word statement:

- This statement contains the central idea of your work to catch the reader/listeners' attention.
- Can be inserted into correspondence: cover letters, letters of intent, artist biography.
- Memorize it. Be prepared to deliver it anytime. For example when asked "What do you do?" when meeting someone for the first time, at social occasions, openings, on the elevator. Think of it as a verbal business card.

Examples of successful & not so successful Artist Statements: (from *Artspartner.org*)

Example #1: less successful

- *T.S. Eliot spoke of how the present shapes the past as much as the past affects the present. These paintings aspire to blur the distinction between the two and enter into a free-flowing dialogue between my present and my past. They ask fundamental questions as to the nature of time, the nature of change, and the meaning of invention. The ambition, which inspires their making, is to step outside of the linear, chronological unfolding of events and celebrate the eternal present that is the time art shapes.*
- **Evaluation:** This statement, although poetic does not really address any specific aspects of the body of work. The reader is given very little information. Try to avoid using words like "aspire" along with "hope" "attempt". They are weak and may reflect insecure feelings on your part. Try to use more active and strong phrases. Notice how much more active and stronger the phrase is without the word "aspire": "These paintings blur the distinction between..."

Example #2: less successful

- *"The body, however, consists of an indefinite multiplicity of parts and arbitrary manifestations which are subjected to movement and divided into substances, moments, and details." – Marsilio Ficino from "About Love or Platon's Feast"*
- *The works deal with a fragmentary corporeality which seeks its stimulation in the natural sciences, such as botany and neurology. The drawings construct and illustrate an intellectual model of deconstruction of corporeality and the search for unity. The central question here is the sense of time. Do different time levels exist parallel to each other? Does the unity of the individual exist in time, which is characterized by acceleration, rotation, and speed? The drawings reflect an internal world view which revolves around fragment, unity, and rupture. The simple pencil drawings are made on former construction plans, on the reverse sides are old sketches of pattern designs. The structure of the folds and the paper collage further emphasizes this vision.*
- **Evaluation:** This statement doesn't service the visual work either. It is full of important sounding words, but what do they mean? What is an "intellectual model of deconstruction of corporeality?" If the statement is difficult to read, it won't get read. It has not provided much help in allowing the viewer to have a fuller understanding of the art. Prefacing the artist statement with this quote further obscures the artist's intentions without providing any real information.

Example #3: successful

- *I began using a typewriter for its obvious function – to record my thoughts and ideas. Communicating is a crucial yet constant struggle for me. The more I typed, the more the letters and words on the pages began to take on a new function, a new language. My discovery of this new language created with my typewriter and paper was one made up of patterns and grids formed by punctuation marks: commas, colons, apostrophes, and brackets. It was as if the typewriter was experiencing a breakdown, and this breakdown was my breakthrough. I had discovered a new way to communicate. There is an endless source of information that can be created through a limited use of materials: paper and a typewriter. I became, and am still, intrigued by this process.*
- **Evaluation:** This is a good statement. It is precisely written and fun to read. The sentences are strong and simple. It answers the kinds of questions that arise when viewing the work, in this case, how are these marks being made and why while providing supportive information about the artist's process and thinking.

Getting started writing and Artist Statement

Ten Minute Writing Exercises

1. Describe your work: Describe one work of yours that is currently in your studio. Do it quickly. Don't worry about grammar, jargon, or finding the right word. There is no format to this, no structure. Just get down on paper everything that comes to mind about the piece. Some questions to get you started:

- What does it look like? (size, colors, shapes, textures, light, objects, relationships, etc.) Make your description visual.
- What inspired the piece? Where does the work come from in you?
- Talk about the work from a conceptual, thematic, and/or emotional point of view.
- Is there a central or guiding image or idea?
- What are its different elements and how do they affect each other or interact?
- What kind of materials did you use/are you using to create the work? Why
- What was the process of development for the work?
- How does the work use space and relate to the surrounding space? What would be the ideal space in which to exhibit or present this work?
- How does this work fit into the overall flow of your development as an artist?
- Where does it fit into or relate to your awareness of other contemporary work?

2. Identify yourself: Use these questions to articulate who you are as an artist, what is special about you, and where you fit into the big picture.

- What words would you use to describe your work as an artist?
- What sources guide or influence your work? Physical, intellectual, emotional, conceptual?
- What materials do you enjoy working with? Hate? Why? What would you be interested in exploring that you haven't tried yet?
- Whose work or what work do you admire? Why?

- What work/styles/modes do you dislike? Hate? Wish to challenge? Why?
- Who do you compare yourself to? What kind of comparisons do you draw?
- Who do you think your work is for? Who you would like to reach with it or who you would most want to see it?
- What critics do you read? Why?
- What else do you read, see, listen to, and follow outside your discipline?
Poetry? Philosophy? Science? History? Politics? Film? Music?
- How would you describe your background, and how has it influenced you? Where do you come from? Community, geography, ethnicity, family, peers, mentors?

3. Describe your studio: Write a one-page description of your studio or workspace. Do it quickly, and don't worry about grammar or the right word. There is no format to this, no structure...paragraph, notes, or even a list format is fine.

- What does it look like? Size, colors, shapes, textures, objects, relationships, light? Make it visual.
- What identifies it as uniquely yours, or distinct from some other studio?
- How do you relate to it? Order, arrangements, processes, methods, equipment, materials? Habits?
- What are you working on? What kind of work do you have in it at present?

4. Describe your process: Write a one-page description of the process you use to create your work. Do it quickly, and don't worry about grammar or finding the right word. There is no format to this, no structure. Just get down on paper every single thing you can remember about how your work is created. Think in concrete terms: influences; physical qualities; and emotion.

- What materials, elements, surfaces, processes, methods, equipment do you use? Why?
- Where does the impetus for a piece come from in you, personally speaking?
- What concerns guide you in the execution? Are they visual? physical/sensory/sensual? thematic? emotional?
- What moves you to work?
- What is your favorite part of the process?

5. Putting it all Together: Don't Panic! If writing is torture, Get some help!

- Tongue tied? Invite a friend to the studio to discuss your work. Tape-record the conversation and listen to it later. You can also take notes, but often the best phrases get lost in the heat of the moment. Make a note of what kind of questions come up during these sessions. Is there a pattern? If there is, use it in your statement.
- Have several friends who know your work — especially non-artists — read your artist statement and respond. They may have good points to add. They may catch phrases that don't seem to make sense. Your non-artist friends will be best at helping you catch the jargon and 'art-speak' which you may want to rewrite.
- Ask a professional writer to proofread your written materials to check for errors. Ask someone merciless to help you delete repetitive or extraneous phrases and straighten out long sentences.

- Ask people in the comments section below to read your artists statement and give you feedback.

REMEMBER: Keep your statement coherent and to the point to retain reader interest!

Adapted from:

- [Light, Space & Time](#)
 - [NY Foundation for the Arts](#), by Matthew Deleget, NYFA Quarterly, Summer 1999
 - [Jackie Battenfield's Artist in the Marketplace Program](#), The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 2003
 - [The Field: "20 Questions to Get You Writing."](#) The Field is a New York City- based dance service organization.
 - [Artspartner.org](#)
 - ["Don't Quote Deleuze"](#): How to Write a Good Artist Statement
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