

DEVELOPING ARTIST STATEMENTS AND ARTIST BIOS

JOSEPH MEYERHOFF CENTER FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

WHAT IS AN ARTIST STATEMENT?

An artist statement is text that accompanies and explains the artist's intentions of their body of work. A strong artist statement supplements the visual information in a portfolio or exhibition so that the reader/viewer can better understand it. Your artist statement should stand on its own so that the reader can imagine what your work looks like even if they have not seen it.

LENGTH OF AN ARTIST STATEMENT

An artist statement generally ranges between 100 – 300 words.*

A longer artist statement might describe a large body of work, accompany an exhibition or be used by curators, journalists, publicists, and critics

A shorter artist statement might be used to address very specific information about your body of work, and can be used as an introduction to documents or applications

A super-short artist statement, or “elevator speech” should be more-or-less memorized, so you can clearly articulate to viewers what your work is about, both verbally and in writing

*NOTE: always follow all application instructions. If an application asks for a 500 word artist statement – do what they say!

SOME DOS & DON'TS

- DO write a strong, compelling statement that connects the viewer to your work
- DO develop a strong first sentence
- DO keep it as short as possible
- DO focus on topics that may not be apparent from viewing your work
- DON'T use 'artspeak', overly flowery or pretentious language, or art jargon
- DON'T try to impress the reader with vocabulary or extensive knowledge of art criticism
- DON'T announce what the viewer should feel, just clearly express what you have accomplished

10 MINUTE WRITING EXERCISE

The best way to get started with an artist statement is to begin writing about your work in a 10-minute brainstorming session. Do it quickly, and don't worry particularly about grammar or word-smithing. There is no structure or format to this. Just write or type 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 and/or where does the impetus for the piece come from, personally speaking?
- 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/relate to the surrounding space? What would be the ideal space in which to exhibit or present the 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?

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ARTIST STATEMENT SAMPLE:

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.

-Allyson Strafella (Taken from The Artist's Guide by Jackie Battenfield)

EXPERIENCING WRITERS BLOCK?

-Invite some friends over for a studio visit, while having a conversation about your work record what you are saying. Listen to your conversation later and choose the best excerpts to put in writing.

-Listen carefully to questions and comments about your work during critiques. Are some questions asked more than others? This is what people want to know about, and where you should focus your effort in your statement

WHAT IS AN ARTIST BIO?

An artist bio is a summarized, narrative version of your resume, but shorter and with more personality. Bios are used in your professional package, as part of a catalogue at an exhibition, in publicity and printed programs, and other promotional materials. Your artist biography should integrate portions of your resume and artist statement.

In general, bios are more factual about you as an artist, whereas statements are more about the ideas, concepts and techniques behind your work.

SAMPLE OF AN ARTIST BIO:

Lu Zhang was born in Chongqing, China in 1983. She received her BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2004. Zhang has exhibited in the US and abroad including shows at C. Grimaldis Gallery in Baltimore, Randall Scott Gallery in Washington DC, and The Center for Art and Culture in France. Her work has been reviewed in ARTnews, The Washington Post, The Baltimore Sun and featured in New American Paintings Magazine and Washington Spaces Magazine. In 2010, Zhang received a grant from the Maryland State Arts Council for works on paper. Lu Zhang lives and works in Baltimore, Maryland.

HOW TO PUT IT TOGETHER

- Quality over quantity- keep your bio to one or two paragraphs (especially for a young artist)
- Write about yourself in third person
- Include place of birth, education, and where you currently reside
- You may want to include information on your spouse and children (if any)
- Consider creating a shortened version that can be easily sent to galleries, reporters, collectors, and audiences

FURTHER RESOURCES & EXAMPLES

- *New American Paintings*- copies available in the Career Development Office
- Battenfield, Jackie. *The Artist's Guide*. Philadelphia: De Capo Press, 2009.
- Bhandari, Heather Darcy and Jonathan Melber. *Art/Work*. New York: Free Press, 2009.
- Also make sure to visit galleries/museums and collect your own examples

Make sure to share what you have written with your faculty and peers to get feedback.

Remember that this is a living document that will continually change with your and your work as it develops