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ARTISTS STATEMENTS:

WRITING A GOOD ONE

WHY WRITE AN ARTISTS STATEMENT?

- To introduce your work E.G. to a buying public
- To promote your work
- To explain the thinking behind your work
- To clarify your own ideas about your work
- For someone who is writing about your work E.G. in a catalogue or magazine.

WHO / WHAT ARE YOU WRITING THE STATEMENT FOR?

Some examples:

- Audience might be: gallery, dealer, curator, agent, reviewer or the public
- An exhibition / gallery
- For a proposal for an exhibition or project
- For an application for funding
- A catalogue
- Your website
- The press / your promotional material
- A post E.G. teaching position
- To include with slides / for a presentation

The phrasing might be angled differently for different audiences, EG. A formal exhibition catalogue will be different from a chatty blog on a website. Think – who is the reader and what assumptions can you make about their knowledge?

Whoever the audience is, the language you use should be clear and concise, not fluffy, woolly or overly dramatic.

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WHATS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A STATAMENT AND A BIO?

A **Statement** is a general introduction to your work, body of work or specific project. It is written in the first person and includes:

- A description of the work
- Meaning and motivation
- Artistic processes / techniques

A **Biog** is a short statement about your career as an artist and any major accomplishments. It is written in the third person and can include:

- Where you were born, and where you are now based
- Whether you have a formal art education or are self taught
- A selection of exhibitions
- Any collections your work is in
- Art organisations or professional bodies you are part of

HOW LONG SHOULD IT BE?

There are different kinds for different purposes.

Full-Page Statement – This is your main writing about your work, the methods you use, the history of your work, etc. It may also include specific examples of your current work or project. Should be no longer than one page. Edit, develop, re-write this document as an ongoing work in progress.

Short Statement – condensed – edited down to include the above in an abbreviated way, usually specific to the project at hand. 100-200 words or depending on the brief.

Short Project Statement – a very short statement about the specific project you are presenting.

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HOW TO WRITE

Be clear: Use accessible vocabulary; keep in mind that your readers may not be scholars, artists, or art historians. Make sure the content in your artist statement is not too complex or technical. Don't intimidate your audience or put them off.

Be concise: Don't go on for pages and pages about your work. You want your statement to pull the viewer in, but you don't want to bore them.

Be consistent: Make sure that what you say in your artist's statement matches the works that are the focus. Make sure that your statement compliments other texts such as bios and press releases.

It should be brief enough that the reader can get the essential information in that time, and that their flow isn't too disrupted when they stop to read the statement in full.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

The "How":
The 'How' refers to how you created your works. Describe your works; what colours do you use, do you make large marks or small marks, specific techniques? What kind of tools are integral to your process?

The "What":
Are your paintings abstract? Portraits? Do you take photos of landscapes? What is your imagery? Describe your works in a general way to flow from how you work to what you make.

The "Why":
Why do you make what you make? What symbols do you use and why? Explain the influences behind the meanings of your works.

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EXAMPLES TO INCLUDE

- Why you have created the work and its history
- Your overall vision of the body of work
- Is there an 'intention' behind the work?
- what do you want the work to achieve?
- How your current work relates to your previous work or longer body of work

- Where your work fits in with current contemporary art
- Sources and inspirations
- Artists you have been influenced by
- Are there any particular theories, artists or schools of thought relevant to your work?
- Any outside influences and ideas outside the arts, which have bearing on your work?
- What ties your individual pieces of work together into a practice?

- What media you work with and why?
- Is there a relationship between the media and the ideas that you work with
- What themes, ideas and concerns does your work uniquely consider?
- Are there processes involved in the work and are they relevant to the ideas you are dealing with?

WHAT NOT TO INCLUDE

- Information about your career as an artist
- Exhibition history
- Work history
- Anything about your childhood or family unless it is very relevant to your work.
- Poems or prosy writing.
- Folksy anecdotes about some important event in your life.

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DO'S

- Use the first person
- Keep it short
- Be specific
- Get to the point
- Include precise references
- Match your writing to your work
- Keep it appropriate to its context
- Spellcheck Spellcheck Spellcheck
- Grab the reader's interest with the first sentence
- Draw the reader into your world
- Talk about the *why* of the artwork
- Get someone else to read over it for you
- Change your statement based on the opportunity

DONT'S

- Use fancy type faces / paper
- Use "art speak"
- Use jargon
- Generalize
- Use passive or inconsistent voices
- Include unnecessary or pretentious references
- Include biographical information
- Romanticise
- Use statements starting with "I hope to…" , "I will…" or "I am trying to…" instead tell say what you do with confidence

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TIPS:

- Don't dress your work up to be something that it's not. An accurate statement about good work that deals with a relatively simple idea is much better than trying to make something appear clever by dressing it in fancy language.

- Say what you see: it can be helpful to refer to any physical qualities of your work in reference to the conceptual ones. Explain the decisions that you made about how the work took shape and why you made them.

- Stick to your subject, which is your practice. The purpose of the statement is to talk in a focused way about your practice, not wider philosophical questions or concepts.

- Objectivity - use of superlatives and grand claims when describing your work will do you no favours. Use objective language when describing your own work.

- Organise the detail. Significant ideas should be at the end of each sentence for emphasis.

- Not all artists can write well. If you're in that category, think about hiring a professional writer or editor to help you. Or team up with a buddy.

Questions to think about when writing your statement

- What keeps you coming back to the studio, day after day?
- What's the best response to your artwork (comment in a guest book, at an exhibit)
- What questions are you asked most frequently about your work?
- What's your artist *story*? (as opposed to your biography and CV)
- Who is your art for?

STILL STUCK???

Outline the necessary information
What are the key facts you need to get across?
What are the important bits of your work that you want your audiences to understand?
What sets you aside from other artists?

Interview yourself
Interview yourself, or better yet, have a friend interview you.
Set up some important questions, then record yourself speaking the answers aloud. This is good way to avoid using complicated language, and keep your ideas clear and simple. It will also provide a conversational tone to your writing (i.e. not sounding pretentious). Listen back to the recording. Then transcribe a few good sentences.

Some examples to ask:

- Who is your audience?
- Who are your influences?
- Explain your work to a child.
- How do you make your work?
- How do your materials inform your concept?
- How is your work unique?

Do a mind map

Write/draw anything that comes to mind about your work. How does it connect? What repeats? What collides together and stands out? What is the most unique?

Ask yourself “What are you trying to say in the work?” “What influences my work?” “How do my methods of working (techniques, style, formal decisions) support the content of my work?” “What are specific examples of this in my work”

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