Writing an Artist Statement

There are three typical types of statements artists are asked to write: the brief bio, the short statement, the long statement. But often artists will have many different versions of these statements because when writing them it is crucial to keep your audience in mind. If you are using one of these statements for an application to a graduate school, you can use language specific to your field. However, if you are writing for a general audience, an audience likely to attend your show or buy your art at a gallery, you should avoid jargon and pretention. Think about a friend who is interested in art but not academically trained and write something that person will understand and enjoy.

The Brief Bio

This type of statement focuses on basic information about you and your career as an artist. They are typically written in the third person, so you’ll want to refer to yourself by your full name in the first sentence. If you have had the opportunity to show your work widely or if you belong to artist’s organizations or collectives, write about these experiences. Ideally, you should focus on professional activities and experiences. However, early career artists may need to round out their statements with factual information about themselves (where they were born and when, where they grew up, formative events in their life). If this is true for you, you should use your experience as an artist to help select what to discuss and what to leave out (you shouldn’t mention breaking your arm roller skating in junior high unless it allowed you to transition from drawing to photography). In either case, you should end this statement with information on how the reader can find more of your work.

The Long Statement

Typically running about a page, these can accompany a specific work or body of work. In either case, they typically follow an hourglass-shaped structure.

- The first section provides a broad introduction to the work. This will place the work at hand in the context of your broader goals and themes as an artist or into a political or social context.
- The next section locates the body of work in that larger context. This is your opportunity to explain how the work being shown complicates or expands the work that you’ve done before or connects to the political or social context that you’ve just established. This
section should also talk specifically about the work(s) at hand, perhaps including techniques used, imagery present, sources of inspiration, and artistic influences.

- The final section becomes broader again to conclude and look forward. This may consider the impact that you hope the work will have on the audience or the direction that the project has led you to pursue next. Ideas from the first two sections should reappear in this final section.

**The Short Statement**

The short statement should cover the same ground as the long statement above but do so more briefly. Rather than each section running one to two paragraphs, in the short statement, you only have two to three sentences to cover the same points. It is best, therefore, to reduce the scope of the statement to focus very specifically on the work that it will be accompanying.

**But What Do I Say About Myself?**

If you’re struggling to come up with concrete statements about your influences and practices as an artist, try thinking though answers to the following questions:

- It is hard to be an artist. Why do you make art despite the difficulty?
- What art or artist has inspired you to create the work that you do? What art or artist has inspired your process? How does your art respond to or extend the work of that artist?
- What techniques do you employ in your art? Why have you chosen to use those techniques over others? How have they influenced your work?