

Writing Artist Statements & Bios

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With info from <http://www.gyst-ink.com/artist-statement-guidelines/>

What's an Artist Statement, and why do I need one?

- An artist statement is an introduction to your work, a body of work, or a specific project. It's an explanation of why you do what you do, and a way for your audience (viewers, prospective buyers, the media) to understand more about your work.
- Both visual and performing artists are often required to submit an artist statement when applying for exhibitions, festivals, grants and other events.
- An artist statement is usually written in first person ("I'm inspired by the local landscape of Kamloops.").

Artist Statement Example

<http://www.mollygordon.com/pa/artiststatement.html>

Knitting is my key to the secret garden, my way down the rabbit hole, my looking glass. Hand knitting started it. From the beginning the process of transforming string into cloth has struck me as magical. And, over the years, that magical process has had its way with me, leading me from hobby to art. Knitting fills me with a sense of accomplishment and integrity, and has proven a most amenable vehicle for translating inner vision to outer reality.

I knit from the inside out. Though I work quite deliberately, consciously employing both traditional and innovative techniques, my unconscious is the undisputed project manager.

The concrete, repetitive nature of this work frees my imagination and provides many opportunities for happy accident and grace to influence the finished product.

Recently I discovered some childhood drawings: simple, crayoned patchworks that resonate deeply with my fiber work. Inspired and invigorated by a renewed sense of continuity, and awed by the mystery of how creation occurs, I am now knitting richly varied fabrics exploring many patterns, textures and colors. Once knit, the fabrics are pieced to form an always new patchwork from which I make my garments and accessories.

Points to consider when writing an Artist's Statement

- Who is your audience? Do they have a PhD in art history, or is their knowledge of art more basic?
- Pay attention to requested length. Keep it short and sweet unless a longer statement is asked for.
- Consider including some or all of the following:
 - Why you have created the work and its history.
 - Your overall vision.
 - What you expect from your audience and how they will react.
 - How your current work relates to your previous work.
 - Where your work fits in with the art world (i.e. is it contemporary? traditional?).
 - How your work fits into a group exhibition, or a series of projects you have done.
 - Sources and inspiration for your images.
 - Artists you have been influenced by, how your work relates to other artists' work, or other influences.
 - How this work fits into a series or longer body of work.
 - How a certain technique is important to the work.
 - Your philosophy of art making or of the work's origin.

What's a Bio, and why do I need one?

- We all know that a bio (biography) is the story of your life... an artist's bio is the story of your life as it relates to your artistic practice.
- Bios can vary in length depending on what they are needed for (from a couple of sentences on a website to a full-length book)!
- Your audience wants to know who you are. Finding out about the person behind the art is just as fascinating as the work itself.
- When in doubt, keep your bio 100% professional (for exhibition or festival applications). At other times, such as on your own website or for a less formal audience, a dash of humour or information about your family or hobbies can be a welcome touch.
- Both an artist statement and a bio are essentials for your own marketing materials – your website, brochures, Facebook page, etc. etc.
- A bio is usually written in third person (“He writes, paints, and composes music in Kamloops, BC”).

Biography – Example

Sbo Ndlovu was born in Durban, South Africa in 1970. Ndlovu works predominantly in the medium of painting, but includes video in his large scale installations. Ndlovu completed an MFA with distinction at the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town in 2006. He has had solo shows in Cape Town at Blank Projects, Bell-Roberts Gallery and the South African National Gallery, the KZNSA in Durban as well as the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa in Venice. He is represented in the collection of the South African National Gallery. Ndlovu is the newly appointed judge of the Spier Contemporary 2010. He lives and works in Cape Town.

Points to consider when writing a Bio

- Keep it short and simple.
- Start with an introductory sentence that includes your name, the medium that you work in and where you are from.
- Include background information such as where you studied or important exhibitions or awards you have received, if applicable.
- Mention projects that you are currently working on and any recent exhibitions or performances, or projects that are upcoming.
- Don't be shy – include all of your accomplishments, background and goals as an artist.
- “Just the facts, ma'am” -- keep your biography descriptive. Avoid value judgments about your work. Let your audience and the critics give you the rave reviews!

General Tips on Writing

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- **Writing doesn't have to be scary.** Some of us have had negative experiences with writing in the past. It may help to think of writing as “speaking on the page.”
- **Know your audience.** Are you writing for a university/college professor, an exhibition curator or festival organizer, your audience, or a prospective buyer? Depending on what your artist statement is being used for, you may need to write a few different versions – and that's okay! As you write, picture speaking directly to one of the people you are trying to communicate your message to.
- **Write to be understood.** Be clear. Use your own voice. Don't use high-falutin' words, unless they're already part of your everyday vocabulary. You don't need to try to sound smart (you already are!). Unless you're writing for a highly formal / educated audience, write the way you speak.
- **Use the active voice.** Action verbs keep momentum going and keep the reader interested. Avoid the passive voice where possible. “I use vibrant colours in my work” is a much more powerful (and interesting) statement than “Vibrant colours are utilized in my work.”
- **Read, re-read and read again.** At least half of the writing process is editing! Re-read what you've written until it sounds right. Read it aloud to yourself or someone else. Have someone else proofread your work if possible – even seasoned editors can miss embarrassing typos.
- **Beware of purple prose.** Flowery writing can be fun, but clear and simple writing is the most effective. Stay away from sentences that go on for paragraphs and too many **adjectives** (“the gorgeous, lovely brilliant blue notebook” or **adverbs** (“she vigorously and colourfully paints landscapes”) – chances are, you can get your point across without a lot of these unnecessary words.
- **Vary sentence length to keep it interesting.** Avoid monotonous sentence construction (e.g. “However, I prefer working with acrylics. Currently, I live in Kamloops.”). You will know when a piece of writing “sings.” Read your work aloud.

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