

Build Your Artist Statement

CONSTRUCTION SET- COLLECTING THE WORDS

The WHAT

What is your art physically? Paintings? Prints? Sculpture? Mixed media?

What size is it? Large scale (over 6 feet)? Miniature? Various sizes?

What medium predominates? Which other mediums are involved?

What non-tangible ingredients are in your work: color, texture, objects, drawing, softness or hardness, etc?

What style: representational, non-objective, realist, abstract expressionist, figurative, narrative, formalist, hard edge geometric...?

Which qualities make your work uniquely yours, or instantly recognizable as yours?
Quality of line? Personal iconography? Personal subject matter? Unique style?
Unique materials?

Name 3

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

THE HOW

Are your works made in one sitting? Over a long period? Do you have parts fabricated? One piece at a time or several at once? In a series, or individual subjects?

What are the unique methods that you use to make your work? A new way of printing? Painting over prints? Combining media? A way of making you have improvised and made your own?

THE WHO

Who do you imagine seeing and being moved by your work? Young people?
Children? Adults? Painting connoisseurs? Other artists? Musicians? The Wealthy?
Working people?

THE WHERE

Here would your work be best seen? Museums? Galleries? Homes? Schools? Public
spaces? The internet or web sites? Outdoors in an urban space? In the country?

Name 3

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

THE WHY, PART 1 - Inspiration

What inspires you to make the work? Ideas? Visuals as in landscape, a particular
sense of place, or special people? Political ideas? Ecological ideas? Historical?
Human relations? Interior dialogues? Introspection? States of mind? Discovery
during the art-making process?

Name 3

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

THE WHY, Part 2 - Motivation

Who or what makes you get out of bed to make art? Other artists? Music? The light? "Nature"? Wildlife? Mountains? A certain performance or exhibition? What are you exploring, attempting, challenging by doing this work?

Name 3

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

EXPECTATIONS OF YOUR AUDIENCE

What do you want your audience to take away from seeing or experiencing your work? What do you hope your audience will do? To buy? To enjoy? To bring it home? To react? To spark discussions? To act? To change their mind? To pay attention? To care more about something?

Name 3

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

CONSTRUCTION ZONE (piecing it together)

EXERCISE 1: FULL VERSION

We are going to write three paragraphs with the answers from above. Keep your sentences authentic and direct. Use the present tense ("I am," not "I was," "I do," not "I did.") Be brave: say nice things about yourself.

Write three to five sentences per paragraph.

What and how: (I make ___ by ___ with _____)

What inspired or moved me to make the works:

Why you make it and what the viewer should understand or do:

This gives us our basic layout. The sentences can be edited and adjusted to the uses we have for it. You'll write slightly differently when applying to a juried show or putting a statement into your catalog.

Next, let's get more concise. Why? Every editing session makes us more knowledgeable about our methods and motives, and the more that we have thought about these ahead of time the more clearly we can communicate.

It's getting a bit more difficult, yes? What to include and what to leave out? Our 50-wornder needs to be spot on. Let go of any words that stray from a brief and accurate description.

EXERCISE 4: OUT LOUD

Pair up, choose a partner and read your one-sentence pitch aloud.

Switch reader and listener.

Edit your sentence:

Pair up again, read your sentence to each other.

One workshop I attended had us do this several times in a kind of round robin. It was vastly useful as practice. When we finished, it really brought home how important it is to have thought this out and have something in mind and available. It could be the director of a regional museum asking you!

It also brought home to me how useful it was to hear yourself say these words **aloud**. It brings clarity to the statement and to your understanding of your art-making.

OK, why did I have you put together three versions of your thoughts? It's to give you the building blocks for the different types and uses for Artist Statements. You can see that "Artist Statement" is not one thing, done once and used over and over. You will need your statement in one of these three versions and it will have to be slightly edited to suit each venue or application.

THE ELEVATOR PITCH – for openings and casual conversation, etc.

SHORT VERSION (50 WORDS) – for juried show applications, interviews, written introductions. For your website,

THE LONG VERSION – for applications for residencies, grants, for catalogs and publications, for galleries and exhibitions

In addition, to these statements about your work in general, you will often be asked for statements about particular works. Use the same approach. Describe the what, how and why of the particular piece.

Finally, two VERY important actions for almost every statement you write

PROOFREAD

Ask at least two friends to proofread your statement. It can be hugely useful to have one friend be an artist and one be a non-artist, because you will be speaking to both in your statement. Your artist friend will know what your art terms mean and your non-artist reader will save you from “artspeak”.

GET FEEDBACK

Once you have a statement template, ask others, especially those who know your work, to give you feedback on whether the statement matches the work they see. This is invaluable; both for honing your statement and for understanding whether what you are trying to do with your art is actually happening. This is not for the faint of heart, but so useful in your personal artistic growth!!!