

## Artist Statement Basics

By Erin Genia

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### Why Write an Artist Statement?

Artist statements are fundamental components of your work within the world of art. Why? Artist Statements give the viewer some background on the work, you as the artist, and why you created the piece. A quality piece of artwork will always pique the interest of viewers on its own. However, providing an artist's statement for your work grounds the piece in the context you provide.

If you are submitting your work to a museum or gallery show, for a grant or other opportunity, a written artist's statement will likely be required. A good piece of artwork raises many questions – the viewers will inevitably want to know more about the work and you as the artist. A quality artist statement will help do just that.

### What are the Elements of a Strong Artist's Statement?

An artist statement can be about a single work of art, a body of work, or about you as an artist and why or how you make your artistic decisions. An artist statement of high quality will introduce the viewer – in as few words as possible – to the thought processes, themes or cultural context the work was created in. For example, if the artist statement describes a basket you have woven, you may want to discuss the method you chose, the patterns or style of weaving, material used and why these elements are important to the finished work. If your piece tells a story, or if there is a story behind the creation of your piece, you can tell it in a concise manner in your artist statement. If the work involved research, you can talk about your methods and your findings. If your biographical information is meaningful to the work, include it. An artist statement gives you the opportunity to clarify artistic choices, such as colors, shapes, textures, methods you have used, etc., and discuss why they are important.

### Questions to Consider

You may want to consider some of the questions below when writing your artist statement. Some questions may, or may not, apply to the work.

- ❖ What inspired you to create the work?
- ❖ Why or how did you choose the title of the work?
- ❖ What medium(s) did you use and why?
- ❖ How did you get started in your medium?
- ❖ Who influences your work?
- ❖ How did you determine the size or scale of the work?

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- ❖ Is the work a part of a series? If so, what is the relationship to the other pieces in the series?
- ❖ Does the piece tell a story? If so, how can you tell the story to the viewer in as few words as possible?
- ❖ Is there a story behind the creation of the work that you would like to share?
- ❖ Did you do any research to create the piece? If so, why did you do the research? What did you find out and how did you do the research?
- ❖ How do the elements within the piece relate to each other? How do they relate to the outside world?
- ❖ How does your personal background as an artist influence the creation of your art?
- ❖ How does the piece fit into the continuum of the world of art as you see it?

## **Determining Length**

An artist statement should be as short as possible. It can range from one or two sentences to one page in length, depending on the questions you will be answering, or story you are telling in your statement. Ideally the statement should only be one or two paragraphs. Word choice is important. It can be handy to have a thesaurus close at hand to help you describe difficult or complex concepts in one or two words.

## **Additional Reasons Why Artist Statements are Useful**

The process of writing an artist statement can be useful in describing your work to the audience and world at large. However, it may also be helpful to you in other ways. By putting words to concepts that may have existed in the visual or auditory sense, you may make discoveries. You may learn that you would like to explore a certain idea further and create more works about it. Or, you may find that your work fits into other categories that you never considered. For example, let's say you are writing your artist statement about a photographic portrait – you may have only thought of the work as photography, or as portraiture. However, after investigating your motives in creating it, you may find that the work deals with a theme of home, or place. Then, as you search for grant or exhibition opportunities, you may find more opportunities have opened up to you in thinking about your work in this way.