**Writing an Artist Statement**

**By: Ariane Goodwin ED.D**

Defining an artist statement has the same benefits as setting a goal: it tells you if you are headed in the right direction. If you don't know where you are going, then getting there becomes a dicey affair. You could end up driving around for hours. On the other hand, if you establish where you are going, you have a marker for knowing whether or not you get there. This single step will save you hours of grief.

So, I repeat: an artist statement is what, how, and why you do what you do, from your perspective.

This means that an artist statement is personal, as personal as your art. It is also honest, in the very same way that your art reflects a true expression of your being. Because an artist statement speaks to the relationship between you and your work, it needs to be as authentic as your work. When done well, the statement and your art support each other.

The secret lies in how an artist statement builds another bridge between the artist and the audience. An effective statement creates a personal connection to the artwork and stimulates our human thirst for "story". This, in turn, triggers longer memory storage about the artist by immersing the viewer in two languages: visual and linguistic.

For people who see your work, a well-written statement keeps your name in front of them even longer. Name recognition, or branding as it's known in business, is nothing more than remembering - out of a virtual storm of cultural stimulation - what has struck a deep chord within us.

Another secret is that the artist statement is not just for art patrons and gallery owners. It is also for the artist. Writing an artist statement gives you another way to reflect on your work. When you dare to climb this small, professional Mr. Everest, a surprising view of your own work waits for you at the top.

The very effort of searching for words, which reflects your relationship to your art, increases your creative flow. This is true whenever we engage in a form of self-expression that pushes us out of our comfort zone. Like sweat from physical exertion, the struggle gets our juices flowing.

One of the great keys of creativity is to shake things up, get out of familiar boxes, work against the grain. Sometimes it is hard for an artist - whose artwork is, by definition, out of the box - to realize how easy it is for any pattern to become familiar. Working out of the box can, paradoxically, end up becoming another box.

Writing an artist statement - the what, how, and why of your work - will draw art patrons closer to your work, even as it deepens your own awareness.

As sculptor Ohnmacht, learned:

"Writing my artist statement gave me a chance to focus on myself. It opened up more creative juice and self-expression than I had experienced in a long time. Taming my internal critic, and the roadblocks to my inner mind, gave me new skills to express my heartfelt emotions to others.

Working on my statement gave me the opportunity to delve into my inner soul and reflect on the science of 'me'. When I took the time to evaluate what, how and why I do what I do, it refined my work and gave me a fresh, determined self-confidence that I had lacked before."

On the flip side, a poorly done statement lowers your credibility. Even if collectors love your work, an artist statement that comes off as arrogant, naïve, pushy, academic, or fluffy taints your artwork by association. Why take the chance? Your work deserves a statement that gives you the professional edge you need.

If you don't like to write or don't trust your writing, hire a professional who writes for artists - like me!

**Examples of Well-Written Artist Statements and Reflections**

**Lyle Carbajal**



There's nothing quite as beautiful as the unintentional. For this reason I've attempted through the use of color, reference, placement, and most importantly, line, to capture, if just a fraction, of the naiveté I see in my daily surroundings. My bright colors and dark, brisk lines reflect moods of small children, brush-in-hand, being told to concentrate and stay within the lines, by those well intentioned grade school teachers who encouraged us all to produce masterpieces. Tucked into my own pictures are images associated with childhood: comics, monsters, machines, animals and faces. My interest in the face is evident in each painting, where the primary visages are wild-eyed and gripped with anger, terror, confusion or pain. Either way, the depictions of extreme emotive states delineate my paintings from those of a child. Both the innocent associations of youth and the horror of maturation are bluntly juxtaposed, and seek not so much to find unity in the passage of life, but to expose its division.

**Jonathan H. Dough - Artist Statement**
My artwork takes a critical view of social, political and cultural issues. In my work, I deconstruct the American dream, fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and lullabies that are part of our childhood and adult culture. Having engaged subjects as diverse as the civil rights movement, southern rock music and modernist architecture, my work reproduces familiar visual signs, arranging them into new conceptually layered pieces.

Often times these themes are combined into installations that feature mundane domestic objects painted blue, juxtaposed with whimsical objects, and often embellished with stenciled text. The color blue establishes a dream-like surreal quality, suggests notions of calmness and safety, and formally unifies the disparate objects in each installation. The texts provide clues to content and interpretation.

While I use a variety of materials and processes in each project my methodology is consistent. Although there may not always be material similarities between the different projects they are linked by recurring formal concerns and through the subject matter. The subject matter of each body of work determines the materials and the forms of the work.

Each project often consists of multiple works, often in a range of different media, grouped around specific themes and meanings. During research and production new areas of interest arise and lead to the next body of work.

**Molly Gordon - Artist Statement**

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.

**Sample Reflective Essay #1
Author: Prefers to remain anonymous**

As an English major I have learned to appreciate the peaceful, yet exhilarating moment when my mind engages with an author's thoughts on a page. As Toni Morrison says in The Dancing Mind , "[reading is] to experience one's own mind dancing with another's." In my early days as a college student, I wanted to know the "true" meaning of a work or what the author intended, however, I have now realized this would void literature of its most noteworthy complexities. Individual interpretations bring varied insights to a work and it is also interesting to point out messages the author may not have realized s/he included in the piece.

I have always been a thinker, but throughout my coursework, I have greatly sharpened my critical analysis skills. Instead of focusing on proposed meanings or biographical background, I have learned to continuously ask "why" on many different levels. I challenge myself to dig into a text as deeply as possible and unpack every detail to develop a satisfying close read. Also, by reading multiple novels by the same author I have learned to identify different writing styles and make connections that weave texts together; this helped me develop a deeper understanding of the novels. When I look at one of my freshman level novels and see clean pages, I realize that I did not actively read the book. I guess you could say that I have learned to read with a pen, which has drastically taken my writing to a new level because I am able to connect back with my initial insights marked on the page.

Writing had always been one of my strengths, but it was challenging to take that initial step past the high school, five-paragraph essay form that constricted my ideas for so long. Moving past this form, however, has greatly opened my mind. My thoughts are now able to be more complex because I have learned how to sustain a logical argument in an organized manner. My writing has become increasingly more concise and I no longer have room for added "fluff" or "padding." Another improvement is my ability to point out multiple complexities within a text, instead of sticking to one-sided arguments in my papers. Furthermore, learning how to find peer reviewed journal articles and order books through interlibrary loan has significantly widened the scope of my research, which has lead to more scholarly papers with credible references. My writing is so much more interesting than it used to be.

It is difficult to identify gaps in my knowledge as an English major, only because I feel like I have learned so much. I feel that I have largely expanded my literary analysis and writing skills, but I need to be prepared to teach high school students their required literature. I think it would be useful to identify commonly taught novels in our local high schools and study them myself. By studying the required literature and thinking about how to teach it, I will have a sturdy foundation to work from once I am in the classroom.