

Excerpts from The Artist's Guide, Jackie Battenfield and Artist Tools Handbook, Creative Capital

Artist Statement

An artist statement is a two- or three- paragraph description about your work that provides the reader with information about your sources, ideas, and inspiration.

A good artist statement informs viewers about the work but doesn't overly explain it. It doesn't replace your art; it supports it.

Getting Started: Collecting Information and Composing the First Draft

A way to get started. Describe one or two recent works. Do it quickly, and don't worry about grammar, jargon, or finding the exact word. Don't think about a format or structure. You should write down everything on paper that comes to mind about the piece. Below are some questions to get you started. Not all of them will apply to your work, but start with those that are the easiest to answer.

- What does your work look like? (Think about size, colors, shapes, textures, light, objects, relationships, etc.) Make your description visual.
- Why do you do it? What is your inspiration? Where does the impetus for making it come from within you?
- Write about the work from different points of view, such as conceptual, thematic, and emotional.
- Is there a central image or idea in the work?
- What are its different elements, and how do they interact within the work?
- What kind of materials are you using? Why?
- How is it made? What is your process?
- How does it use space? How does it relate to the surrounding space?
- Where does this work fit into your development as an artist?
- How does it relate to other artists' work? Who inspires you?
- What questions are you asked about this work?

To make the writing experience as real as possible, sit in front of your work as you write to make sure you capture specific details. Don't try to answer all the questions above in one sitting. Don't reread or criticize what you have written. Allow negative, silly, weird, and even pretentious thoughts to be expressed. Understand that this is just a way to generate the raw material that will shape your state-ment.

Broaden your writing to include other works that may precede the current pieces. Continue with this exercise until you have covered a range of your work and as many of the questions above that apply. Allow this process to take several days or weeks. Don't rush it.

Questions to ask when editing

- Am I writing in the first person? Writing in first person makes your statement more personal.
- Where is the most important information? Develop a strong first sentence. It may be why you make art, your intentions, or what materials you use.
- Is my language accessible to the average reader? Keep it simple.
- Is the writing specific to my work, or could this statement be applied to many other artists? Take the time to identify what in your work is particular to you alone.
- Does my statement come off as overly aggressive or passive? State what your work is doing, not what you hope to do. Try to avoid using words like “aspire,” “hope,” and “attempt.” Eliminate words like “unique,” “first,” and “only.”
- Do I tell readers what their response will be to my work? Refrain from informing viewers how they should feel.
- Does my writing sound defensive? Simply state what the work is, instead of what it is not.
- Have I used the spelling and grammar checker installed on your computer? These programs are helpful but always do a thorough word-by-word edit.

Sample: Visual Artist

My drawings, prints, and sculpture transform discarded materials into mediations on healing, superstition, and protection. My work references black folk art and uses repetitive, labor-intensive arts to create visual affirmations of black history and identity. My newest project, *Eyes Over Harlem* includes a series of prints made from onions and medicinal herbs, thousands of black-eyed peas assembled in a wall drawing, and a floor-to-ceiling column of copper pennies.

Sample: Installation Artist

We think of buildings as static environments upon which we act and in which we live. But buildings, and the materials we use to build and alter them, work on our bodies as much as we work on theirs, altering our inner terrain and cells through their continual emissions of chemicals, dust, and gases. Traces of chemicals, water spills, mold, asbestos, and layers of paint all give rise to the history of a building, much in the same way that tree rings tell us of the age of a tree. Over time, buildings become living

organisms, mutating inside of their walls and air. I am interested in the ways in which our perceptions of shelter are inadequate.

I am working on a series of pieces that take as their point of reference the inner structure of the buildings in which the work is exhibited. I will be using an endo-scope, which is normally used to film the inside of the human body, to film the spaces inside the floors, walls, air ducts, and pipes. I am asking the question: at what point does the building itself function as a living organism?

To produce this work, I travel to the exhibition site and shoot for a few days, also working to record ambient sound. I mainly shoot the insides of pipes, walls and air ducts. After editing the footage to approximately one ten-minute piece, I exhibit the work as a large video projection in the building. It is important that the piece allows viewers to be immersed in the environment, as it underscores the idea that our relationship to a room alters when we become aware of the ignored spaces.