

**The Dreaded Artist Statement**  
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**<http://www.artadvice.com>**

There are many times when an artist is asked to compose an artist statement. Sometimes, it is in response to a specific inquiry by a gallery or collector, sometimes in response to a particular grant proposal or in conjunction with a curatorial statement or exhibition. Other times, artists just feel the need to explain their work. Most of the time, however, artists are not the best suited for this particular task. Regardless of one's ability to write, writing about your own work poses unique problems that very few artists are equipped to deal with. Consequently, most artists' statements become overly personal explanations about what art means to you and what you are trying to accomplish in your work things that are better saved for personal journal musings than for a public artist statement. Every artist wants his or her work to be understood and appreciated in the context in which it was made.

However, very few artists are able to articulate intelligent insight into how to achieve that level of understanding, nor should they. Part of the joy, from an observer's point of view comes from the primary experience with the art bringing to his or her own personal and intimate connection. If those things are spelled out for them, before they have an opportunity to develop that connection for themselves, a huge part of the experience of appreciating the art is missing.

On the other hand, writing an artist statement for your own use, can be a very valuable experience. Artists need to know how to intelligently talk about their work, their influences, the sources for their imagery, and answer any questions about their technique. It is every artist's responsibility to see themselves in an art historical context and understand how they fit into the contemporary art world, regardless of the reasons that drive them to create.

If you have the need for a written artist statement to be made available to the public, I suggest hiring a professional art writer to interview you in your studio, look at your work and your slides, and write a brief essay about your work. Most artists don't realize that many art reviewers make their living as writers, often making their services available to galleries or museums for catalog essays or miscellaneous writing jobs. If you have followed the writing of a particular art critic in your area, it is not unusual to ask them to write an essay for a fee. Alternately, you can approach a curator who has taken a favorable view of your work, or even a local art history professor. Fees for these services are generally based on a "per word" structure, ranging from a minimum of \$100 to a maximum of \$2500 depending on the stature of the writer. If hiring a professional is absolutely out of your realm and you must prepare an artist's statement yourself, here are some general guidelines to follow:

- Don't get personal. Keep the reasons why you make art to yourself.
- Educate, but don't preach. Imagine what you would like said if someone was explaining your work.
- Complete this sentence "This series is based on....."
- Mention important influences, artists as well as writers, that may set a context for your work.
- Discuss the process or technique if it is particularly unusual or an important element in understanding your media.

Be sure to keep your statement down to one page, maximum. Preferably, 2-3 well written, concise paragraphs should get the job done. It's best to only give out your artist statement when it is requested, not as part of an unsolicited package. This alleviates the problem of telling someone more than they want to know, allowing for questions and interaction, and offers the opportunity for follow up.