Writing an Artist Statement

Overview

Writing an artist statement is often perceived as a redundant and tedious exercise. In truth however, writing this statement can help you focus your ideas and interests as well as guide your audience.

Generally speaking, an artist statement should be about 1 page, double spaced or 3-4 paragraphs. Remember you are not writing a manifesto, but rather a clear and concise overview. It should discuss your work technically, procedurally, visually, and conceptually. You can also, or instead, discuss issues or other artists that inform and influence your work. Your statement should be compelling, insightful, and help others to reflect on and realize what ideas you are investigating, what you are creating and why. Think about how much information you want to volunteer to your audience and how you want them to react to your work. **An artist statement should not refer to class assignments.** It is understood that most of the work you will be showing is the result of a class assignment. However, even with the most prescribed assignment, you are still making artistic decisions; making it “your own”. Why have you made these decisions?

(adapted from www.mollygordon.com/resources...)

Organizing your Thoughts

1. Think about why / how you make artistic decisions and generate phrases that capture these thoughts. Don’t worry about making sense or connections quite yet.
   a. Why did you get into the work? What were your intentions? Your goals?
   b. How did your visual / conceptual ideas, subjects, images and process emerge?

2. Make a list of words / phrases that communicate your feelings about your work and values. Do not censor yourself.

3. Answer the following questions as simply as you can…
   a. How / Why did you choose your materials?
   b. What formal qualities do you respond to (ie: line, shape, composition, etc.)?
   c. What defines a successful piece for you?
   d. What patterns emerge in your work and/or process?
   e. What do you do differently from the way you were taught? Why?

4. Look at your list of words / phrases and add new words to this list suggested by your answers above.

5. Define and investigate some chosen words from this list. They may be related or different. How do their definitions connect to larger ideas that may be in common with your work and thinking?
Formatting the Statement

Paragraph 1

Begin with a simple statement of why you work the way you do. Support the statement, telling the reader more about your goals, aspirations and intentions.

Paragraph 2

Tell the reader how you make decisions in the course of your work. How and why do you select materials, techniques, and themes? Keep it simple and tell the truth.

Paragraph 3

Tell the reader a little more about your current work. How did it grow out of prior work or life experiences? What are you exploring, attempting, or challenging by doing this work? What artists, historical references or current events inform this work?

Revision & Editing Tools

An artist statement is a piece of very personal writing. Sleep on it. Let it sit for a day or a night until you have the necessary detachment to polish your writing without violating your sense of integrity. Revise and polish to completion.

Helpful Hints

1. Try to write a brief statement from the first, second and third person perspective. You may discover novel ways of considering your work based on how you perceive others to understand it.

2. Read other artist statements. Explore diverse approaches in writing.

3. Have a peer view / critique your work and share his/her thoughts. The way they perceive the work may be that which is fresh and enlightening.