

Artist Statements Guidelines and Examples

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There are no rules for writing an artist statement.

There are many types and purposes for artist statements. *Write for the audience and context.*

That being said, here are some suggestions:

1. Writing

- a. Write in the first person. This is a statement of *your* understanding of what you are doing, the ideas you are working with, and the field in which you work.
- b. Avoid jargon and needlessly complex language.
- c. Be precise and specific. Avoid abstract concepts and unnecessary words.
- d. Start with a strong, clear, informative and engaging opening sentence.
- e. Edit and revise until each sentence and the statement as a whole communicate your understanding of the work in a vivid, clear and succinct way.

2. Components

- a. Right up front state WHAT ideas and issues concern you. Everything else in your statement follows from this, providing background and detail. (*Hook the reader*)
- b. The HOW of your method/process is the link between the ideas and issues that concern you and your work.
- c. Through your writing, DEMONSTRATE the kind of analysis that interests you. Never tell your readers how they will experience the work, but guide them toward your understanding of it. (*Show, don't tell*)
- d. WHY: Provide insight into the meaning of the work in such a way that it leaves room for interpretation.

Here are some examples for consideration:

Kim Sooja (2002)



Cloth and Life (Statement from artist's website)

We are wrapped in cotton cloth at birth, we wear it until we die, and we are again wrapped in it for burial. Especially in Korea, we use cloth as a symbolic material on important occasions such as coming of age ceremonies, weddings, funerals, and rites for ancestors. Therefore, cloth is thought to be more than a material, being identified with the body – that is, as a container for the spirit. When a person dies, his family burns the clothes and sheets he used. This may have the symbolic meaning of sending his body and spirit to the sky, the world of the unknown. When I look back over my more than twenty years of handling bedcovers, I feel that I have always been performing, guided by the piles of cloth I have lived among.

What in the world have I stitched and patched. What have I tied up in bundles. When will the journey of my needle end, my silkworm unwrap its flesh. Will it in the end slough off its skin. Will the bundles with no destination find their way to go.

Adrian Norvid



Artist Statement (from artist's website)

My work consists of large format drawings, massed hangings of smaller, poster-like works, rangy paper constructions and laconic found objects. The works are installed so as to create a drawn environment, a saturated visual space loaded with imagery and possessed of a sort of Rococo impulse that leans towards patterning, excess and distortion.

The work is generated by impulse and whim and the fetishizing of objects and obscure cultural phenomena (milk crates for instance, have been a fixation for some years, albeit altered or repurposed). I am drawn to making stews of things -

obscure associative narrative conglomerations – a-temporal and discontinuous. In my works, Psychedelia, Victoriana or Hillbilly backwoods can run together. The characters and objects may reference Elizabethan Ex-Libris, 70's analog electronic musical instruments, 60's children's annuals or current iconic product packaging and jingoism. Process and crafting are similarly divergent - intricate and laborious works with pronounced optical buzz coexist with crude forms that signal like pre-school toys.

I am preoccupied with non-sequiturs, inappropriateness, cheek or truculence, shabbiness and disorder. In many ways I like to debase things, to embrace the rotten or tasteless and I am interested in genres when they are sullied and bastardized.

Emily Jan



(Statement from artist's website)

Emily Jan creates intricately crafted, hyper-realistic installations made of a mixture of hand-made flora and fauna and found objects. These environments, like enterable museum dioramas, mix elements of high culture with low culture, science with mythology, and history with current affairs.

In her hands, common North American materials (wool, wicker, recycled cloth, found objects, and the ephemera of daily life) are transformed through labour-intensive processes. The creatures, wondrous and monstrous by turns, feel real but are entirely handmade. They are not taxidermy, but are emotionally believable to the point where they are often mistaken as such.

In this age of mass extinctions and climate change, the importance of being able to envision places we may never see, to hold space for them in our minds and in our hearts, is ever greater. And though not always overtly ecological, the work ultimately seeks to transport some of that distant experience to the viewer – to stretch the boundaries of our collective imaginings in order to encompass the unseen, to learn to love the unknown as well as the familiar, and ultimately to strive to weave all these strands into a larger narrative about what it means to be a human living in a world roiling with turmoil and catastrophe but yet which is still mysterious and beautiful.

Marisa Portolese



Artist Statement (from artist's website)

Portraiture, the representations of women, childhood, youth culture, narrative and autobiography are major and recurrent themes within my work. I am also interested in feminist issues as well as identity politics. I usually produce large-scale color photographs, which juxtapose human figures with landscape and still life. I concentrate on elucidating facets of human experiences in relation to psychological and physical environments, relating to larger themes concerning identity and spectatorship. I attempt to weave together gesture, affect, and the nuances of my subjects' gaze, to create an immersive and emotional landscape for the viewer. I am interested in the relationship between the fixed photographic portrait and the moving image and I often use the gallery space for creating narrative. Borrowing from cinematic strategies, I construct introspective poses that suggest a story. Through the physiognomy, expression, and the staging of my subjects, I try to capture the narrative potential within each still image.

Kent Monkman, 'Rebellion' (2003) (from Canada Council Art Bank)



In my series of paintings 'Eros and Empire,' I play with sexuality and gender to discuss power relations between First Nations people and Europeans. I appropriate 19th-century North American landscape paintings, and create fictitious romantic narratives to challenge the subjectivity of the original artists. My paintings often feature my alter ego, Miss Chief Share Eagle Testickle, a glamorous drag queen who parodies Cher's Hollywood half-breed stereotype. Share is a precocious, flamboyant painter who both rivals the 19th-century artists in self-aggrandizement and asserts an empowered expression of Native sexuality.

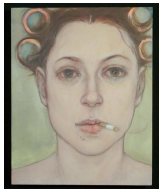
Surabhi Ghosh (courtesy of the artist)



My work considers the liminal power of the decorative: the visual phenomena that permeate the edges of the spaces we inhabit. Constantly observed but frequently disregarded as a visual subject, ornamentation hides in plain sight.

What is the communicative function of ornamental patterning in (private) daily life and (public) cultural spaces? Where is it positioned in systems of belief, value, and political power? When inspected, this marginalized information—or rather the marginalization of this information—acts in the creation of place identity, traces shifts in cultural identity, and reveals competing narratives. My work maps points of intersection between abstraction, minimalism, and ornamentation while expanding on a speculative understanding of these and other imbricated histories.

Eliza Griffiths



In the Secret Garden (2000) (from Canada Council Art Bank)

In her work *In the Secret Garden*, an oil painting on canvas, (2000), Eliza Griffiths captured the rebelliousness and fragility of being a girl at the beginning of a new century. The portrait of a young girl, cigarette dangling from her mouth and hair tightly wound in plastic rollers suggests a contradiction between the desire to rebel with the need to belong. There is however, no confusion in the face of the girl, a face that casually registers her own strength and identity.

Tacita Dean



Painted Trees (from Tacita Dean, *Selected Writings 1992-2011*)

I began by collecting postcards of deformed trees – strange mutations with rogue branches or outsize trunks, not consciously knowing why, but just adding them to my collection of images that I found in flea markets. And then idling in the studio, I began outlining the tree shapes with white – highlighting their forms and monumentalizing their grotesque beauty. It was very satisfying, denying all the chaos of the background.

Later, researching Fontainebleau for a project in Japan, I began reading about its famous oak, and this made me think about England. I have chosen to be estranged, living in Berlin, but I do not love the soil here or the trees: the soil is sandy and the trees are evergreen. So I researched English oaks and English yews, and monkey puzzle trees because I have always loved them, and wondered why they crop up indiscriminately in suburban streets, on school playing fields or in unlikely back gardens. I imagined a Victorian commercial salesman dispersing the seeds across England. They all seem to be of the same generation and, quite suddenly, they have all started dying.

I found Majesty on a private estate near my childhood home in Kent. It is the largest intact trunk of any oak living in England. Next to Majesty, in the same field, was its sister tree, Beauty. Two great oaks – names by others generations ago – that experts can only guess the age of. The old yew in the churchyard in the tiny village of Crowhurst in Surrey, I chose, of course, because of its name. It has a door into its trunk and is slumped over onto its supports. They guess it to be well over 1300 years old. Time made manifest.

I then printed the tree on obsolete photographic paper and mounted them again on a paper support – done by experts who are among the last left in their trades. I did not court obsolete materials or outdated techniques but what seemed appropriate and attractive to me had just gone that way. I then hand-painted around every branch with a small gauge paintbrush in white gouache paint, delighting in my proximity to even the tiniest and most inaccessible of branches on these mighty trees.