



Artist Statement Writing Workshop

Visual Art South West

Workshop by Ellen Angus

Artist Statement Writing

Overview:

- Introduction to workshop host
- Why does it feel uncomfortable?
- Anchor points / exploratory
- Task - Previous Artist Statements
- What do you want the artist statement to do?
- Obstacle 1 They all sound alike - task
- Obstacle 2 They are indecipherable - task
- Obstacle 3 They are boring - task
- Obstacle 4 Fear of having nothing to say - task
- Obstacle 5 Artists communicate better in images than words - task
- Concluding thoughts
- Make more art than statements!

Introduction

Who am I?

An Artist!



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Introduction

Who am I? And the other things!

Lecturing

- University of Lincoln
- Nottingham Trent University,
- Umeå Konstskola
- Umeå Academy of Fine Art

Artist Development and Writing Workshops

Spike Island
New Midlands Group
Nottingham Contemporary
Primary
Visual Arts South West



Artist Statement Writing

Why does it feel uncomfortable?

- *Reflect on the different iterations.*
- *Does it feel like an uncomfortable pinning down of your practice?*
- *Is it constantly shifting taking on different shapes, masks, performances.*
- *Does it feel like truth saying?! bearing all*

'I might think I have found a kind of context that all my work sits under neatly until one work would rebel and become tyrannical and then set up camp somewhere else causing everything to shift over, giving me a totally different perspective to the one that I had before. At other times I felt I was casting ahead- looking towards future work and becoming completely bored of the 'older' work that I was attempting to relate my statement to.'

Artist Statement Writing – Anchor points, exploratory

How can you write an artist statement if you are changing/evolving and shapeshifting?

Can we view it more like anchor points, supports for you and your practice, moments of reflection?

In this sense could it feel positive, exploratory? Even exciting?!

Task

Reflect and look at previous Artist Statements- what has worked? What hasn't worked, what has changed in your practice since the last artist statement you wrote?

Identify a key theme, idea or principle that holds your art together

PREVIOUS ARTIST STATEMENTS!

2017 During one particular introduction, I declared I was a dog or at least that my process of art-making is reminiscent of the behaviour of a dog bringing back it's master's trash and laying it out on the carpet. I began another declaring that I was a magpie due to my collecting and hoarding of shiny objects.

2020 I am firmly on the side of the promiscuous one, the illegitimate one, the trickster, the jester, the magpie and crow.

Artist Statement 2022

My artistic practice has typically used self-abasement, desire and humour as a feminist device to challenge existent and nascent power structures. I set the ridiculous and banal against the monumental and sublime. I explore this through an ongoing series of sets or room installations which explore painting, performance and assemblages of found objects.

What do you want the artist statement to do?

- + **reflect** your art and true interests believably back to you
- + assists you in your **thinking** as you continue making art

This could relate to **visibility** - Wanting to attract interest in your work—from, galleries, awarding/funding bodies, other artists.

Do you have any extra points to add to the list?!



Time and unpaid labour

Writing applications and writing artist statements will take up hours of unpaid labour; people have caring responsibilities, full-time work, pay freezes etc.

This will only work if it is helpful to you, it should give you a moment to reflect, think deeply about your direction and your practice, regroup then plot your course. That could be career advancement or it could be more studio time or a change in materials.

You do not need to do all these tasks- pick what appeals most!
Work with a friend if that is easier.

Artist Statement Generator

Artist Statement Generator

<https://500letters.org/index.php> Jasper Rigole

My work explores the relationship between {gender politics; military–industrial complex; universality of myth/the body} and {copycat violence; postmodern discourse; unwanted gifts; skateboard ethics}. With influences as diverse as {Derrida; Caravaggio; Kierkegaard} and {Miles Davis; Buckminster Fuller; John Lennon}, new {variations; combinations; synergies} are {synthesized; generated; distilled} from both {orderly and random dialogues; explicit and implicit layers; mundane and transcendent dialogues}.

The Obstacles

1. They all sound alike

Before setting off on 'My art explores...', take inventory of the countless other options available or invent your own!

Task

- *Begin by reading artist's statements by artists that you like—What kind of tone do they have? Why do you like them? What don't you like about them? What feels inventive or original?*
- *I have picked Laure Provost*

Example Text - Laure Prouvost

Laure Prouvost's artistic **output consistently returns to themes of escape into unfamiliar worlds or imaginings of unexpected alternative environments.** A strong narrative impulse propels her practice, resulting in immersive, transmedial installations with interwoven story lines that combine fiction and reality. Her videos, installations, paintings and tapestries unhinge commonplace and expected connections between language, image, and perception. **Stepping away from traditional linear** narratives, the artist crafts **sensual environments laden with playful mistranslation that open a space for the viewer to grapple with the unstable relationship between imagination and reality.** The elasticity of the written word comprises a central element of Prouvost's practice, stating: **"Words for me are very visually powerful, because with words people create their own vision. I am just hinting and suggesting possibilities, the audience is making its own image in its head. It is also about misunderstanding, misinterpreting, miscommunicating - words also suggesting failure and other senses."**

Example Text - Anne Truitt

In this example from the journal of Anne Truitt (1929–2004), the late American sculptor gave this anecdotal explanation behind her choice of material:

[...] I thought of making bare, unpainted wooden sculptures for the outdoors. On the National Cathedral grounds in Washington there is a carved wooden bench honed to honey color by weather. It stands under a tree, and so could be a sculpture; this was my thought last spring when I ran my fingers over the pure, bare surface of the bench. I have been thinking about Japanese wood and the heavenly order of humble materials.

I come to the point of using steel, and simply cannot. It's like the marriage proposal of a perfectly eligible man who just isn't loveable [1]. It is wood I love.

Source Text ' - ANNE TRUITT, 'Daybook: The Journal of an Artist, 1974–79', in Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings, 2012

The Obstacles

2. They are indecipherable

Remember that terms such as ontology, epistemology and metaphysics carry specific technical meaning; use sparingly, and only if essential. Bringing your ideas round to the media you've chosen is a must.

Don't worry about trying to overplease a reader with big, complicated words!

Task

- Have a look at International Art English

[https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/
issues/16/contents/
international art english](https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/16/contents/international_art_english)

What is International Art English?!

• https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/16/contents/international_art_english

- curious lexical, grammatical, and stylistic features
- IAE has a distinctive lexicon: *aporia*, *radically*, *space*, *proposition*, *biopolitical*, *tension*, *transversal*, *autonomy*. An artist's work inevitably interrogates, questions, encodes, transforms, subverts, imbricates, displaces—though often it doesn't do these things so much as it serves to, functions to, or seems to (or might seem to) do these things. IAE rebukes English for its lack of nouns: *Visual* becomes *visuality*, *global* becomes *globality*, *potential* becomes *potentiality*, *experience* becomes ... [experientcability](#).

The Obstacles

3. They are boring!

Usually, the boredom factor is in exact proportion to the degree of imprecision;

Smart and specific detail related to your practice is what makes interesting and exciting to read.

Be specific; your statement should be uniquely applicable to your artwork alone.

Task

Ground your reader in media or images they can see, in the accompanying work or photograph.

What really gives you satisfaction in your work—the materials? The technology?

The process of making, or hunting for sources? The human relationships that build? Start there.

The Obstacles

4. Fear of having nothing to say

Some artists work intuitively, and worry that fixing their thoughts in ink on paper might kill them. Many memorable artists' statements boil down to tracking the artist's decisions.

Task

-Which decision (whether hard-won, accidental) produced the most meaningful outcome, for you?

Try writing out pages in longhand; from that flood of handwritten text extract and develop the moments that feel most promising.



The Obstacles

5. Artists communicate better in images than in words

If writing is a struggle remember usually you're writing for a curious, empathetic reader who's interested in your art and wants to know more.

To help envision this, imagine you're writing directly to the one person who understands your work best.

Task

- Write for your comrade!*
- If you prefer talking, try asking your art-loving friend to record an 'interview' with you, the transcript of which can provide the basis of a written statement.*
- If that doesn't work – try writing from the perspective on a piece of art work or an art object.*

Key points to conclude

Smart and specific detail related to your practice is what makes interesting and exciting to read.

Which moments changed everything?

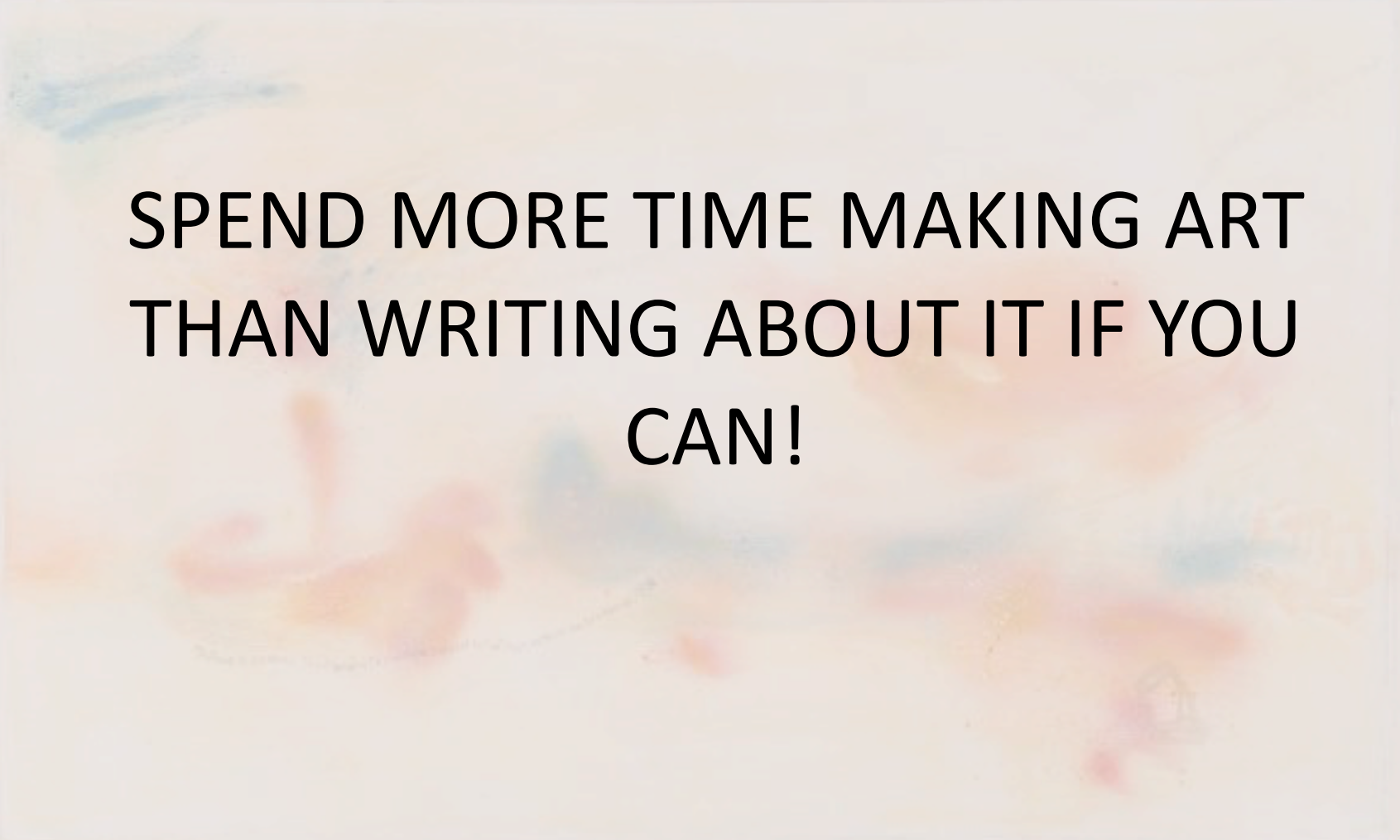
What were you really excited about as you worked?

-Which decision (whether hard-won, accidental, or bearing unanticipated results) produced the most meaningful outcome, for you?

imagine you're writing directly

to the one person who understands your work best.

identify a key theme, idea or principle that holds your art together



**SPEND MORE TIME MAKING ART
THAN WRITING ABOUT IT IF YOU
CAN!**