

ARTIST STATEMENTS

An artist statement is a general introduction or overview of your work, a body of work, or a specific project. Typically written in the first person and no longer than one page, a statement should be a singular reflection of your attitudes and influences and talk about how those inform your work.

- **Does my statement address major or recurring themes present in my work?**
- **Does my statement give an idea of what my work looks like?**
- **Does it frame my work in as part of a larger cultural, political, or historical discussion?**
- **Does it expose how my process or materials inform or influence the content of my work?**

“A bit of advice, to take or leave: a really great artist statement will never make a bad painting good, but a really bad statement can significantly downgrade a decent painting. Ideally, the painting stands on its own, and the statement adds just enough information – -in the same way a good title can – to give context without taking the responsibility of communication away from the picture.”

Lisa Dorin, Asst. Curator Art Inst. Chicago



WHAT MAKES A STATEMENT *GOOD*?

A good artist statement should serve as a **supplement** to your work, not a key for deciphering it. The statement is a document that can provide context, confirm hunches, and give your audience a sense of why you do what you do, and how. It should not do the heavy lifting of generating or communicating meaning--that's your artwork's job.

A strong statement can convey your personality and ignite curiosity by introducing the material and thought processes that make your work compelling.

DO...

- **Keep your language plain, true to your own voice, active, and specific. (Nouns + verbs, nouns + verbs...)**
- **Be concise. Keep your sentences short and your writing structured and logical. Think about how your statement flows (start with bigger ideas and analogies and flow**
- **Consider yourself, consider your audience(s). Don't try to sound smart; instead, aim to be clear and genuine.**
- **Write in first person, but be able to adapt your statement to third person if requested by a gallery or for publication.**

DON'T...

- **write about your work as though you are interpreting it for others -- interpretation is your audience's job!**
- **use filler language of any sort. Every word in your statement should be necessary.**
- **be vague, mysterious, opaque, or wishy-washy.**
- **make excessive or unnecessary use of jargon.**
- **philosophize or use pompous or grandiose statements about your work or role in the world as an artist.**
- **bring up anecdotes about your family or childhood, unless specifically relevant to your work.**
- **use non-committal “two-faced adjectives”:** self-contradicting descriptions like “my work is familiar but subversive;” “bold but quiet;” “the surface is crumpled but smooth.” This will turn your writing into “organized chaos.”

ALL ADJECTIVES, ADVERBS, AND ELBOWS

- Adjectives: **less is more**. Use adjectives that are *interesting* (<----unlike that one right there!) and *concrete* (<----like this one).
- Read other artist's statements. Read *piles* of them. Do you start to notice common phrases? Do many of the statements start the same way? Take note, and try avoid using those same phrases in your own statement.
- You're describing something visual, tactile, or experiential when writing about your work: why not choose adjectives that are sensory, or form images in your reader's mind?

overgrown; sticky; slack; frosty; polished; chubby; airless; heartbreaking

GENERAL ARTIST STATEMENT: Eila Weber

As a child I recall sitting down for breakfast and staring at the idealized image printed on the cereal box, in relation to the soggy bowl of reality in front of me. At an early age I was fascinated with the disconnect between desire and fulfillment in advertising. The divide between a presented image and reality never seemed to align.

Through print media, creative writing, video, and installation, I explore the tension between the outer surface of an idealistic image and the inner reality of one's identity. My work celebrates and critiques the fabricated happiness and comfort pervasive in our society while questioning the constructed ideals prevalent within American contemporary culture. In an attempt to search for substance amidst the artificial my work draws parallels between consumerism, everyday rituals, sexuality and religion.



PROJECT-SPECIFIC STATEMENTS: Steve Snell

The Missouri River has a bad reputation. It is dangerous and polluted. There are barges and snags and flying carp. It is full of unknowns and very few people. It is also full of wonder, beauty, and plenty of history. It is full of potential for adventure.

I once dreamt of floating a cardboard replica of Lewis and Clark's keelboat down this river. This dream has led to a cardboard boat, a series of videos and paintings, multiple float trips, and the (attempted) fulfillment of this dream. *Daunting Courage* remains an ongoing investigation of this important and beautiful river.



For one week in August 2016, I floated the Missouri between Nebraska City and Kansas City in search of inspiration, meaning, and adventure. Like artist-explorers from the past, I recorded this experience and landscape along the way, with the intention of rediscovering this often overlooked stretch of river and bringing awareness to its important place in our region and history. *Snacks on the River* is a series of works on paper that grew out of this experience. While serving as a record of the journey, they exemplify my own struggle between the comfortable consumption of entertainment and a longing for actual experience and meaning. *Snacks on the River* reflects both.



ELEVATOR PITCHES

An elevator pitch is a conversational overview of your creative practice, summarized in the time it takes to ride an elevator -- about 30 seconds. Essentially, you are crafting a dynamic and clear answer to the question “What do you do?”

- Structure your pitch for clarity: *What* do you do/make? *Why?* *How* do you make it -OR- *Where* does it fit within larger culture?
- Keep it conversational and fun -- personal anecdotes or humor work well here
- Provide enough specifics for a hook. You want your listener to ask you questions and keep the conversation going

ELEVATOR PITCH: Steve Snell

Steve Snell is inspired by local history, myth, and the image of the American west. He calls his work adventure art. It is in an effort to create heroic narratives for the present day or at least project images of them. This adventure and community-based practice has led him to variety of experiences, ranging from floating the Connecticut River in a couch-boat to a random encounter with Alec Baldwin while hiking across Western Massachusetts.



Exercise #1

Describe Your Work

Describe one work of yours that is currently in your studio. Do it quickly. Don't worry about grammar, jargon, or finding the right word. There is no format to this, no structure. Just get down on paper everything that comes to mind.

Some questions to get you started:

- What does it look like? (size, colors, shapes, textures, light, objects, relationships, etc.) Make your description visual.
- What inspired the piece? Where does the work come from in you?
- Talk about the work from a conceptual, thematic, and/or emotional point of view.
- Is there a central or guiding image or idea?
- What are its different elements and how do they affect each other or interact?

- What kind of materials did you use/are you using to create the work? Why?
- What was the process of development for the work?
- How does the work use space and relate to the surrounding space? What would be the ideal space in which to exhibit or present this work?
- How does this work fit into the overall flow of your development as an artist?
- Where does it fit into or relate to your awareness of other contemporary work?

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Exercise #2

Identify Yourself

Use these questions to articulate who you are as an artist, what is special about you, and where you fit into the big picture.

- What words would you use to describe your work as an artist?
- What sources guide or influence your work? Physical, intellectual, emotional, conceptual?
- What materials do you enjoy working with? Hate? Why? What would you be interested in trying that you haven't tried yet?
- Whose work or what work do you admire? Why?
- What work/styles/modes do you dislike? Hate? Wish to challenge? Why?
- Who do you compare yourself to? What kind of comparisons do you draw?

- Who do you think your work is for? Who you would like to reach with it or who you would most want to see it?
- What critics do you read? Why?
- What else do you read, see, listen to, and follow outside your discipline? Poetry? Philosophy? Science? History? Politics? Film? Music?
- How would you describe your background, and how has it influenced you? Where do you come from? Community, geography, ethnicity, family, peers, mentors?

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Exercise #3

Describe Your Studio

Write a one-page description of your studio or workspace. Do it quickly, and don't worry about grammar or the right word. There is no format to this, no structure...paragraph, notes, or even a list format is fine.

- What does it look like? Size, colors, shapes, textures, objects, relationships, light? Make it visual.
- What identifies it as uniquely yours, or distinct from some other studio?
- How do you relate to it? Order, arrangements, processes, methods, equipment, materials? Habits?
- What are you working on? What kind of work do you have in it at present?

- What materials, elements, surfaces, processes, methods, equipment do you use? Why?
- Where does your inspiration come from?
- Where does the impetus for a piece come from in you, personally speaking?
- What concerns guide you in the execution? Are they visual? Physical or sensory? Thematic? Emotional?
- What moves you to work?
- What is your favorite part of the process?

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Putting it all Together: Don't panic. If writing is not your thing, get some help.

- Invite a friend to the studio to discuss your work. Tape-record the conversation and listen to it later. You can also take notes, but often the best phrases get lost in the heat of the moment. Make a note of what kind of questions come up during these sessions. Is there a pattern? If there is, use it in your statement.
- Have several friends who know your work -- especially non-artists -- read your artist statement and respond. They may have good points to add. They may catch phrases that don't seem to make sense. Your non-artist friends will be best at helping you catch the jargon and 'art speak' which you may want to rewrite.
- Ask a professional writer to proofread your written materials to check for errors. Ask someone merciless to help you delete repetitive or extraneous phrases and straighten out long sentences. **REMEMBER:** Keep your statement coherent and to the point to retain reader interest.