

Writing / Interpreting an Artist Statement

Beginning Notes:

You may want to begin by taking notes, write down words that you would use to describe your work. Do the same for the process(es) you use to make your work- list out the processes you use. The next step is to start to link the words into sentences. After you write the sentences, see if you can put them together into paragraphs. If you have several bodies of work you might do this process for each body of work.

The Statement

It is best to start with a long version of your artist statement, that way you can edit it down to a manageable size. Be careful not to over use "art speak" terms/language and write for an audience who has never interacted with/seen your work. In other words, keep it simple, clear, and straight forward. It might be best to start with a general paragraph about your work and then get more specific regarding your bodies of work (if you are showing several bodies of work in an exhibition or submitting them for a proposal).

The Audience

Those reading your statement need to understand it the first time they read it. You should also write in the first person, not in third person (ie I made, My work, etc.) You may also want to review past articles and reviews of your work. This info can help in the writing of your artist statement and might provide some quotes to include in your statement. If you do include quotes, you must footnote the source!!

Final Thoughts

An artist statement should not be longer than one page in length (unless you are have been asked specifically to write a long one!). Some good artists statements have only been 3 to 4 sentences! Have at least one person proof read your statement. It might be best to have two people read it; one who is familiar with your work and one who is not familiar with your work.

Examples of Artist Statements (3 examples in total):

Example #1 explaining all of her bodies of work

Kathleen Bitetti **Artist Statement**

Since the early 1990s, my work has involved the creation of conceptually based sociopolitical objects and installations. In 1992 I began stenciling text by hand onto objects. Hand stenciled text/language has now become a very prominent feature in my work and I continue to use the same stencil and medium (graphite) that I used in 1992. In my work, I deconstruct the American dream, fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and lullabies that are part of our childhood and adult culture. My work also addresses gender roles/gender assignment, the fragility of family dynamics, domestic violence and the underlying threads of violence and danger that underpin American society. Often times these themes are combined into installations that feature mundane domestic objects, painted pure white and are often embellished with stenciled text. The color white establishes a dream-like surreal quality, suggests notions of purity and safety, and formally unifies the disparate objects in each installation. The texts provide clues to content and interpretation. My "conceptual sculpture weds minimal form with maximal content" (Shawn Hill, "BayWindows" Nov. 14 96 p27).

I usually work on several bodies of work concurrently. I also create site specific temporary installations for indoor sites (I have in the past created temporary outdoor site specific work as well). I often rework a site specific installation into a self contained format that will enable the piece to be shown in a non site specific installation format/ environment. And often times elements from my sculptures, installations, and non site specific work are utilized in my site specific installations. In other words, the various bodies of work inform or cross pollinate each other.

The six specific bodies of work that I am working on concurrently:

"Weary Heads"- a series of ten life size beds. I began the series in late 1994. These beds are beautiful objects, but they are also very dangerous. Both stenciled text/language and pillows with text are prominent elements in the series. These works transform an object, that usually provides comfort, into one that has nightmare qualities.

"Forever Hold Your Peace" In 1992, I began this series of 11 large sculptural components that attempt to reveal the life of a person who is in a battering/ abusive environment. The majority of contemporary art work addressing domestic violence does not show the whole picture of what it is like to live with such violence on a daily basis, nor does it demonstrate the long time line of domestic violence. It is the goal of my work to more fully represent the long nightmare of domestic violence and to show the underlying thread of violence/danger that underlies such relationships.

Lullabies & Fairy Tales are other areas that I am investigating. Several of my works focus on deconstructing these forms of "childhood" entertainment (these themes also make appearances in

the other bodies of work).

Pillows Talk- In 1993, I began working with pillows and stenciling text on them. I have created four major pieces that use only pillows (pillows are also an important element in the Weary Heads series).

Site Specific Installation Work- Birds is the most recent example of this work, but Lullaby/Rock A Bye Baby and one version of Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf are also examples.

Works on Paper- My works on paper tend to differ from my 3-D/ installation work. These works are very personal pieces that have been inspired by and made for particular people in my life. Nor are these works minimal in form, color, or content. I often incorporate appropriated images and text into my works on paper and I usually sew these pieces by hand and/or by machine. Like in my 3D/ installation works, the text is hand stenciled onto the piece. My works on paper are usually celebratory and often times meant to be humorous.

Example #2 explaining her work in general and specific pieces- notice the similar introductory paragraph!

Kathleen Bitetti
Artist Statement

Since the early 1990s, my work has involved the creation of conceptually based sociopolitical objects and installations. In my work, I deconstruct the American dream, fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and lullabies that are part of our childhood and adult culture. My work also addresses gender roles/gender assignment, the fragility of family dynamics, domestic violence and the underlying threads of violence and danger that underpin American society. These themes are often combined with the metaphors commonly used by those in battering relationships into installations that feature mundane domestic objects, painted pure white and embellished with stenciled text. The color white establishes a dream-like surreal quality, suggests notions of purity and safety, and formally unifies the disparate objects in each installation. The texts provide clues to content and interpretation. My "conceptual sculpture weds minimal form with maximal content". (Shawn Hill, "BayWindows" Nov. 14 96 p27).

The two works, both Untitled 1991, are examples of my earlier work that addressed the overlooked issues of class in American society. Those who are in the lower classes are usually the ones who are "watched like goldfish" and must depend on others for their very survival. The monopoly game pieces are also very important clues to understanding the various facets of our so called classless society.

The piece entitled, Porter Crib 1997, is from a series of 10 beds entitled, "Weary Heads". I began

the series in late 1994. These life size beds are beautiful objects, but they are also very dangerous. These works transform an object, that usually provides comfort, into one that has nightmare qualities and is incapable of providing comfort. Stenciled text/language is a prominent element in my "Weary Heads" bed series. The Porter Crib text is taken from a "Christianized" Celtic/Pagan childhood prayer. The prayer is stenciled on tracing paper, thus making it impossible for any infant to lie in the crib with out falling through on to the floor. Children are also at the mercy of others. Presently, I am working on completing two more of the beds in the series. I hope to show all 10 beds in a gallery setting in the future.

Example #3 explaining one piece

Kathleen Bitetti
Artist Statement

Birds

These plaster birds were cast from two ceramic birds my mother had in our family home. Interestingly, the two original ceramic birds are exactly the same in every detail, except that one was painted blue indicating a Blue Jay, while the other was painted red indicating a cardinal. I chose to keep my birds white. These birds, in my mindscape, symbolize safety, good luck and purity. All the birds in the museum have been cast specifically for this show and I have placed them all in their specific sites within the museum.

I first made these white plaster birds to be elements in a 1996 site specific installation entitled, Lullaby/Rock A Bye Baby. The installation examined the duality of the lullaby: it is an extremely violent song that is considered a cherished "lullaby" that one sings to soothe children to sleep.

Ironically, while working on these birds for this show, I found out that many people believe that having any birds in their house, living or in any depiction, is a harbinger/cause of bad luck. Thus these birds, like the majority of my work, have conflicting meanings