

Commentary Questions:

What is the central idea of your Concentration?

How does the work in your concentration demonstrate the exploration of your idea? You may refer to specific images as examples.

How to begin your statement:

1. Go to <http://bmoreart.blogspot.com/2009/04/best-professional-practices-for-artists.html> and read the short write up on how to write a good artist statement.

2. Read your example sheets below (or refer to past year student Powerpoints on our server or go to www.artstudy.org/art-and-design-careers/sample-artist-statement.php for more examples):

3. Begin by answering these questions

Title of theme:

Expand on the meaning of the concept:

Why your theme intrigues you or is of particular interest to you:

The media and materials you are using:

Why are you using them?

How does it tie into your theme?

Describe what you principles and elements of design (or metaphor or symbol) you are working with and how it ties in to the theme and concept:

Describe the compositional tools that you are experimenting with and how it ties in to the theme and concept:

List the artists or schools of art that are influencing you. Describe how they are influencing you.

4. Begin to form these ideas into two paragraphs answering the two Commentary Questions above.

Examples

Artist Statement 1

My concentration is a series of abstractions constructed using pastel and ink. I decided to explore the concept of stylizing various shapes and designs found in both nature as well as technology. I chose to focus on zooming in on specially the lines and shapes of these designs and creating animate abstractions from them.

When I first started my concentrations, I created my abstractions from still lives that I had set up. These first concentrations, such as numbers 1, 2 and 3, were geometrically balanced and had an overall scheme to them which prevented them from having a clear focal point. However, I widened the variety of pictures from which I was creating my abstractions and began focusing on computerized designs and images from nature. I focused on the movement of the lines in each picture and embellished them so that they could embody the shape of the design. The negative spaces that the ink encompasses become the placeholders for the color. The lines eventually began to transform into shapes themselves, such as in concentrations 7 and on. The color palette also began to change as my concentrations progress; I began with mostly analogous colors but eventually became more confident in my color choices. Starting with concentration number 9, I began exploring with complimentary colors and different blending techniques. The transformation of my concentrations enabled me to create this seemingly spontaneous series. However, each piece required careful planning and drafting which was later become more complex and intricate.

Artist Statement 2

I was interested by the possibility that ordinary games could be depicted dramatically to evoke a sense of grandeur. I sought to find unusual vantage points that a player might not normally see. I used charcoal to establish dark rich volumes and ebony pencil to render intricate details and subtle reflections. In my series, I placed special emphasis on perspective, illusion of depth, and exaggeration of proportion to give the game pieces a definitive, towering prominence in the composition.

From the beginning, I employed spatial and proportional exaggeration as a means to lend to the game pieces an air of importance. Starting from my first drawing, I employed a “peek-a-boo” effect, enlarging a pawn at the corner of the composition in order to break the page, create an illusion of depth, and most importantly create a bridge from my vision into the world of the audience. In # 3 (Connect-Four), I began to embrace an ant’s perspective and the Connect-Four slots became a majestic monolith. This was a theme I carried throughout my 7th and 8th pieces in which the “Sorry” pieces and beer bottles, respectively, served to create a distinct world—almost a maze, through which the ant—and the viewer’s eye—wanders. Beginning with #10 (mahjong), I developed the concept to depict game pieces in such a way that they seemed to be falling on top of or speeding towards the viewer, establishing a more dramatic atmosphere. This was achieved by juxtaposing objects of extreme proportions to really attain that “in-your-face” feel. The concept is apparent in both my 10th piece, in which the mahjong piece seems to begin descending onto the viewer, and my 11th piece, in which the large king chess piece held by the hand is almost an ominous overhang above the viewer, almost as a human foot would crush an ant. This impression was perhaps best captured in my final piece, in which the die assumes massive proportions and seems to be speeding towards the face of the viewer.

Artist Statement 3

My concentration revolves around the theme of isolation and alienation in the modern world using the subway as my context. I was intrigued by the downcast and exhausted body language and expressions of commuters in transit. I found the subway particularly evocative because, despite the suffocating proximity and unusually closeness of the other commuters, each person was intently contemplating their own lives, completely unaware that everyone else was consumed by the same personal reflection.

The concept behind my concentration was always about the isolation of people in modern society but my pieces evolved from simply observing commuters to making the viewer become a part of the scene. In #'s 1-3 there is a definite separation between the viewer and the piece but by #12 the viewer feels as if they are on the subway, being tilted and pushed into the mass of humanity around them. In #4 I reached a turning point in my work because the viewer was invited to become another passenger on the subway. I began adding cut paper and elevating my focal points from the paper in #5 to further show the chaotic atmosphere of the subway. In preparation for each drawing I began taking pictures undetected on the subway that often turned out at strange and tilted angles. I began to employ this tilted perspective in the background of #6 to further emphasize the jostling of the subway. Having established the crowded feeling I began to use the harsh florescent lighting of the subway to emphasize the focal point in each piece. I began exaggerating the contrast on the clothes and especially the faces of my subjects in #10 to illustrate the downcast and pensive expressions of someone caught up in their own thoughts. In addition, I drew on paper bags to show the leathery and alienated faces of commuters in a working community. I made the subway out of tracing paper because it captured the boldness of the black and white charcoal, which created the uninviting and cold surface of the subway walls. In the same piece I began to vary the distance of my subjects from the viewer, intensifying the illusion that the viewer was a commuter on the train as well. In #12 I further increased the contrast of the piece so that the majority of the commuters were hidden in the dark underbelly of the subway while my focal point was bathed in the alienating glow of the lights above, isolating him from the surrounding people.

<http://bmoreart.com/2009/04/best-professional-practices-for-artists-2.html>

THE ARTIST STATEMENT & WHY THEY MOSTLY SUCK

CARA OBER APRIL 28, 2009

ART AND CULTURE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT VISUAL ART 6 COMMENTS

Best Professional Practices for Artists: The Artist Statement Made Simple by Cara Ober

What is the goal of writing an artist statement? What does the artist statement do?

A good artist statement should enhance what a viewer sees in your work and provide a concise handle to approach a visual piece. It should be accurate, well-written, and correctly punctuated. It also should be specific to your work and offer unique insight into your process (unlike the



general and non-specific example provided).

Why is it important for a visual artist to put their work into a verbal format? Why do I have to do this????!

As an artist and writer, you would assume that writing an effective artist statement would be easy for me, but it is not. It is HARD! I recently took on the task of writing an updated artist statement and wrote several versions – all were awful. I am aware of what I am doing in my studio and what I am attempting to communicate, but putting this into words seems to be an impossible task. I began to wonder: Is the artist statement really essential?

After conversing with several art critics about this, the response was unanimous: they NEVER read artist statements when reviewing a show. All the critics I interviewed said that artist statements mostly get in the way of experiencing the work, are generally inaccurate and poorly written, and are, on the whole, useless. If this is the case, then why do artists torture ourselves with writing them?

The bottom line is because we have to. If a visual artist wants to apply for any kind of juried show, grant money, or other professional opportunity, we are required to provide an artist statement. My guess is that these are not read all that often, but are used in a tie-breaker situation or used to prove that an artist can write a grammatically correct paragraph, proof of professionalism and/or education. So if we have to write them, how can I make this process less painful and get better results?

Surreal images moving as human souls through changing landscapes make a statement of the conundrum of the human predicament. Her Art offers from the subconscious dream-like images that speak to us all.

I am currently teaching a class at MICA on Professional Practices for Visual Artists and, of course, my students were given the dreaded

assignment of writing an artist statement. It's in the curriculum and I feel responsible to my students: I want them to have all their portfolio materials ready to go when an opportunity arises for them.

The first thing I had my students do was to go online and locate examples of good and bad artist statements. One good local spot for this is the [Baker Artist Awards Site](#), where each artist was required to publish a statement with each project. You can see the work next to the statement and see how the two enrich or undermine one another.

Once my students had located optimal and poor examples of artist statements, we identified a list of characteristics to emulate or to avoid.

Length: Short artist statements were, on the whole, much higher quality than longer ones. People are in a hurry! They are not interested in reading a lengthy statement. Also, the more concise statements had evidence of strong editing, less run-on, and clearer ideas.

Buzzwords: Phrases like “creative expression of feelings,” the description that X artist has been “making art since they were a small child,” the declaration of “finding the extraordinary in the ordinary” and the “juxtaposition of daily life and spirituality” are all definitely bad. Not only are these expressions derivative, they are general. ALL art shares these characteristics, so these terms do not set any one work apart from any other. Any qualitative descriptor of the work like “excellent” or “beautiful” is also off limits and marks an artist as inexperienced. Viewers don't need to be informed of the quality of the work – the statement should, instead, explain what the work DOES.

Art Speak: If you can't say it simply and without invoking the post-post-modernist cannon, who's going to want to read this? Artists do not need to write like writers for ArtForum. Speaking plainly, without hiding behind big, intellectual verbosity is always preferable.

Humor: If your work is humorous, then it is ok for your statement to be. However, if you want your work to be taken seriously, then consider your audience before you make your work seem too light.

Objectivity: The more dispassionate and distanced the artist is from the statement, the stronger the statement appeared to be. Artists can use the first person “I” approach or a third person. At times, a one or two sentence narrative explaining the artist's personal connection to the work can be effective. However, many artists employ a romantic, flowery way to describe their own work and this stinks of bad editing and inexperience. Your artist statement should communicate that you would be professional to work with, so you need to avoid sounding too flakey.

Once my class got a general sense of what to do and, more importantly, what NOT to do, we got down to business and wrote several drafts, which I had the pleasure of editing.

The essentials of the artist statement are as following:

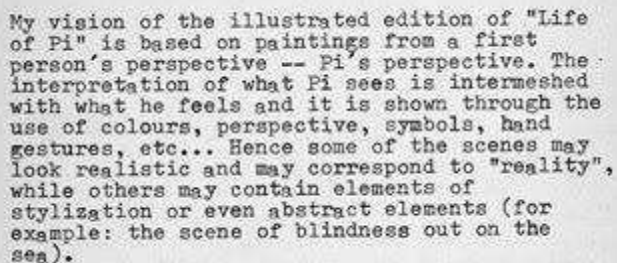
1. An explanation of the materials and media – What tools do you use? Be as specific as you can.
2. An explanation of the subject matter and concepts explored – What are you communicating? Again, be specific – What sets your work apart from other work?
3. How these two aspects reinforce or contradict one another – What does your work DO?

Additional, optional aspects:

4. A short and specific personal narrative – no longer than 2 sentences
5. Historical context – explaining one or two influences on the work and placing it into an art historical continuum
6. NOTHING ELSE – save your feelings for your diary

Other suggestions:

1. Do a studio visit with a colleague, artist, or critic and have them answer questions 1-5 for you and take notes. Let someone more objective than you put your visual work into words.
2. Read artist statements by artists who do work similar to yours. If they did a good job, write something similar.



My vision of the illustrated edition of "Life of Pi" is based on paintings from a first person's perspective -- Pi's perspective. The interpretation of what Pi sees is intermeshed with what he feels and it is shown through the use of colours, perspective, symbols, hand gestures, etc... Hence some of the scenes may look realistic and may correspond to "reality", while others may contain elements of stylization or even abstract elements (for example: the scene of blindness out on the sea).

Artist Statements are annoying to write and not always fun to read. However, if you want to participate in professional activities, you need to have one ready to go. My suggestion is to save yourself a last-minute panic every time you send out an application and have a short, one-paragraph version handy.

Sample of a good artist statement – [Amy Sillman](#).

Author Cara Ober is founding editor at BmoreArt.