

ART
Ambassador

THRIVING ARTIST
NETWORK

TALKING YOUR TALK:

The Next Step to Becoming a Thriving Artist



A program for artists as a step-by-step guide to creating a short art statement about your art.

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for the Thriving Artist Network

TALKING YOUR TALK

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TALKING YOUR TALK

**For Artists who are already producing a body of work, the first step is to write
Your Short Art Statement**

Reasons to have a Short Art Statement prepared and ready:

1. To answer the question, What kind of art do you make?
2. To be able to talk about your art in a conversational manner to anyone, whether you know them or not, and whether they have seen your art or not.
3. To be comfortable talking with gallery owners, curators, and art world professionals
4. To know for yourself the essence of what you are doing with your art
5. To include a short overview of your work when you are writing a cover letter, applying for a grant or writing another document
6. To have a short introduction for your website or brochure
7. To know how unique your art is
8. To get someone, anyone, everyone, interested in looking at your art
9. To get more exhibitions for your art
10. To make more sales

An Overview of the Process

- ☞ You can see all the uses for this statement in your future. The key thing is that you want to simplify your message, make it clear and concise, and have it communicate the essence of your art.
- ☞ In the end, you may find that what you think your art is about isn't really the case. Be open to this process and be willing to find out something that you didn't know about. You are going to be looking deeper.
- ☞ Think about who your audience is for this. You will be talking to both an educated art audience and someone who may not know a lot about art. You're going to choose words that have both general appeal and specific description or detail. You're going to be drawing a picture for someone but you're going to be using words.
- ☞ Things to watch out for:
 - ☞ Don't try and be fancy or cutesy to get attention. Be yourself. It's nice to be poetic if your art is poetry, but steer away from being esoteric or dramatic for effect. You will only lose your audience rather than draw them in.
 - ☞ Some people use a lot of words to say what their art is, and others find it hard to say anything. In this process we are going to 'separate you out of' the artwork. Imagine yourself taking a step back from your art and putting up a transparent screen between the art and yourself. Look at it from an objective point of view, as if you've never seen it before and you're looking at it for the first time.
 - ☞ Know when to talk about your art, and when to let your art speak for you. Describe what it looks like, but leave openings for people to enter through. That's what gets them engaged, and that's what you want.
- ☞ This is something that you will want to say in a conversational way. Once you're finished, speak it again and again until you memorize it. If you get caught up on certain words because you wouldn't actually talk that way, replace the words or phrases with a simpler way of saying the same thing.

- ☛ Edit, edit, edit, then refine. Write out your statement, practice it, then set it aside. When you come back to it with a fresh eye, work on it again. Words aren't precious. They're not like art materials. They don't cost anything. If you toss them out, no one will know.
- ☛ Try your statement out with other artists, family, friends until it feels right. Believe me, you will learn a lot about yourself and your art by going through this exercise.

Before you Start

- Think about the purpose of your short art statement and what it will accomplish for you
- Visualize your most recent or ongoing body of work

Getting Started

Answer these questions about your art. Take out a sheet of paper and begin to write your answers in lists.

- ☞ What words describe what your art looks like—ex. figurative, abstract, color field abstraction, nature-based, floral, portrait, landscape, representational, realistic—then make a list of them
- ☞ List the words that describe your work in aesthetic terms: color, texture, form, shape, pattern, line
- ☞ List the materials you use
- ☞ List the themes you work with
- ☞ List the ideas/concerns that go into your art
- ☞ List the most important influence on your art
- ☞ List the school or genre that your art fits into, if there is one
- ☞ What is your intention for your art?
- ☞ What is the overriding purpose of your art: examples: to add beauty to the world, to expose political hypocrisy, to show the complexity of relationships, to question the meaning of success, to create community, to show the importance of the environment in our lives, etc.
- ☞ What is the overriding “idea” behind your art? (may be the same or different from the ‘overriding purpose’)
- ☞ Tell how you reach this goal in your art (how do you create meaning in your art?)

Do this Exercise

Create one page for each topic and put your answers below:

- 🌍 Describe your art – style, color, what does it look like at its most basic?
- 🌍 List the materials—oil paint, acrylic, handmade paper, photography, etc.

- 🌍 List the themes

- 🌍 List the ideas or concerns that you focus on

- 🌍 List your most important influence(s)

- 🌍 Write the name of the School or genre you fit into

- 🌍 Explain your intention for your art—what you want your viewer to think or feel or experience
 - Example: I want to make people think, I want the viewer to realize how beautiful the world is, I want to confront people's expectations, I want to make people feel joyful, etc.

- 🌍 What is the overriding the overriding "idea" behind your art purpose of your art?
 - Example: My family history informs my work. I use personal stories to reflect the universal experience of mankind.

- 🌍 How do you reach this goal in your art?
 - Example: My sculptural forms are metaphors for the way people interact with one another.

The Next Step

After you have written down answers to all these categories of questions, chose the six (6) most important elements you want to say about your art and put a check in front of each one. Spread out those pages in full view, and move the other pages aside.

Start to Build Your Statement

Begin by combining your 6 most important elements into 3 sentences, with at least 2 elements in each. The simplest way is to start by describing your art first and then get to the ideas. But you can also reverse the process and start with the ideas and then describe what it looks like. You can tell your intention for what you want your audience to experience at the beginning or, to make it a little more suspenseful, put it at the end.

You can start by being straightforward:

I make landscape paintings using bold, primary colors. I live in a gritty, urban area and my paintings are dreams and memories of places I have visited or want to see one day. I think that adding a little romance and drama to life transforms our sense of enjoying being in the now.

Here's another example that is more complex, building on a deeper examination of the art:

What's really important to me is that I (your idea/concern) confront the viewer with something shocking that makes them think. I contrast the (describe) bold colors of my abstract paintings with (materials) found objects to bring in (describe) representational elements that directly point out the (theme) chaotic state of the world today with its violence and confusion. Like (major influence) Robert Rauschenberg, my works are (describe) multi-layered and (intention) open-ended so that the viewer can draw conclusions for themselves.

Choosing Your Words

Think carefully about the words you choose to use. You want the describing words to create a visual picture that comes to life.

As you describe your imagery, think of it in the active rather than passive sense. Use verbs that create a sense of the experience that you want to evoke in the painting. Rather than using the verb, "are," in a sentence, make sure your verbs are active, such as "show," "reveal," "contrast," etc.

See the Addendum for a list of words to stimulate, inspire and choose from.

Put it Together

To help you get started, **use this template and fill in the blanks.**

I make _____ paintings that comes from _____ -
_____. Ever since I was young I've had a passion for
_____ and I think that the best way to live is to be reminded
of _____ by living with it in painting. I work out my ideas and
concerns on the canvas. What I start with is never where I end up. I want people to
come on that journey with me and end up -
_____.

Your first draft will just get your ideas down on paper. Don't leave it at that. Keep working on it by substituting words and phrases, and changing the order until you get something you like.

Go to the Next Level

1. When you're finished, go back and add some poetry to your writing: add a metaphor or simile. A metaphor uses other words to find another way of saying the same thing, and it moves the listener into the intuitive or experiential side of things, away from the exacting specifics. A simile adds the word "like" to make an example of something that is "like" something else. Adding metaphors introduces that element of poetry to your statement, and that's where the *art* comes in.
2. Add in a sensual experience to your description so that your viewer will actually get the "sense" of what you are doing with your art. Think of sound, sight, feel. Imagine something that takes the viewer where you want to take them. You can do this with words or by creating imagery with your words.
3. Do another draft and this time vary your words. Think about how to say the same thing in another way, and challenge yourself to make it just a little bit better.

4. Sleep on it, and pick it up again the next day. Become more aware of the words and phrases around you, and incorporate one of them into your statement.

Looking Back

Check back over your work to make sure you understand it. The biggest barrier between you and your audience is to use “lofty” words that only members of the club - artists who’ve been to art school - can understand. Remember that most of the time you are talking to people who are interested in your art, but don’t know as much about it as you do. You want to tell them enough to help them understand, but not so much that they feel stupid. You are giving them some hints to let them get it for themselves. Allow them to discover your work as it is unfolding. It will be more exciting for them that way, and they’ll get drawn in.

Enjoying art should be a slowly revealing process. If everything is out on the surface, there’s no joy in digging deeper to enter into the layers of meaning that you have put there to begin with. Easy come, easy go. It’s all about ways of seeing. Help your viewer see into your vision. If you bring them in with you, they’re likely to stay there longer.

ADDENDUM I

Instead of using the passive “are,” “have,” and “do,” try using some of these verbs:

bring in	encounters	depict
trigger	honors	refers to
contrast	process	breaks in
seek/search for	strives for	moves
delve into	blur	distills
evoke	show	breaks into
investigate	manipulate	moves
requires	collide	sends
merges	tie in	recognize
reveals	evolve	create
blooms	layers	scrape
releases	reflects	engages
pulses	shows	imagines
performs	manipulates	attaches
seems to be	collides	emphasize
entranced by	tie in	
pulsates	reflect	

ADDENDUM II

Successful Examples of Short Art Statements

The following are examples of short art statements that achieve the goals of drawing people in. Read them out loud and listen to them. Notice how it makes you visualize the art that's being described. Check yourself to see how you feel as you listen to the words. Go over these statements and notice how they make you get curious, drawn in and become involved. That is the effect you want to create.

I use paint, ink, and pastels and make impressionistic and dreamlike shapes and colors that merge into a collage, drawing or painting. Much of my material comes from animals, figure drawing, Jungian dream process, or primitive art motifs of indigenous people. Wild and Free Studios is the name I use in honor of endangered species, the disappearing indigenous tribes of the world, and my own striving to free my creative spirit.

I draw figures with wire so I can play with balancing the abstract elements of line and form. At the same time I am creating interactions between the figures by juxtaposing and layering them which provokes dialogue and engagement and questions the nature of relationship and community. I invite viewers to find meaning and invent narratives for themselves.

In my art I bring in a combination of elements and materials that trigger the viewer to create their own story. I'm contrasting the visual elements of drawing and painting with collage pieces that I've selected from my own life and experiences. I want to emphasize the exotic and encourage people to take themselves to the romantic places in their minds.

The familiar is made strange by virtue of the found materials I use to construct, well, just about anything. My images range from brilliantly off the wall to overly predictable. The only consistent part of my work is that it is consistently adventurous and enriches whatever is possible in an image.

I strive to get strong and unified forms out of a process of layering found images from a reference source I collect such as old science books. Color tends to be softened or muted so at first you think the work is minimal, but once the eye is involved there turns out to be plenty of intricacy. It gathers momentum and meaning the longer you stay with it.

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Gwenda Joyce has worked in the art world as a gallery owner, an art consultant, a curator and an agent. She was the founder and owner of the Gwenda Jay Gallery and the Gwenda Jay/Addington Gallery in Chicago for 20 years, working in the art world on a national and international level. As an art consultant, she selected art for 3 Kaiser Hospitals and advised private collectors. She created the Sculpture Park at the Wells Fargo Center for the Arts in Santa Rosa, California and curated two other outdoor sculpture exhibition venues in Sonoma County. Her work as an Artist's Agent and Coach is dedicated to helping artists expand and establish their art careers.

The mission of Gwenda Joyce - Art Ambassador is to help artists become prepared, confident and directed in building a thriving art career. Art Ambassador offers programs, guidance, and events for artists to reach higher levels of professionalism and success. Her clients get results by getting their art out of the studio and onto gallery walls. Gwenda created the Thriving Artist Network for artists. For more information, go to www.ArtAmbassador.net

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