

## ARTIST'S STATEMENTS

*You are probably hoping that you can get away with saying that the work stands for itself. In the 1950's an artist was expected to say things like that, but now it just won't fly.*

-Cay Lang, Author of Taking the Leap, The Insiders Guide to Exhibiting and Selling Your Art

### WHAT IS AN ARTIST'S STATEMENT?

At the most basic level, an artist's statement generates interest in your work. It allows a viewer "access" to your work that they may not have otherwise. It assists gallery directors, critics, consultants and other writers in explaining your work to potential buyers, readers or granting organizations. It is used in grants, exhibition proposals, dossiers, exhibitions, articles and catalogues. In short, it is used in almost every aspect of presenting your work. The myth of the brilliant but inarticulate artist is a lie.

An artist's statement is always a work in progress. It is a journey that will change as you do and help you to see your work in a new light. It is honest writing. Statements that are too grandiose will always ring hollow and this insincerity will damage the integrity of your work. It is a guide or an insight to the way that you work or think that will add layers of understanding to your work.

It is an insight into why you make art. It can include memories and anecdotes that provide an understanding of the work or your influences. It can draw on shared experiences like wonder, loneliness, joy, fear, fulfillment or emptiness to help others to relate to your work.

Statements as short as a single sentence are rarely effective. While most are much longer, they should not be more than a page. While they *can* be in first or third person, third person statements sound like press releases and lose the ability to relate to a viewer on a personal level; First person is standard and preferred.

The artist's statement can focus on a particular topic like: symbols, materials, a single body of work, metaphors, influences, all of your work, process, inspirations, or your thoughts about art in general. However, a well-rounded statement will probably touch on many or all of these that apply to your work.

### WHAT AN ARTIST'S STATEMENT ISN'T:

It is not patronizing or lecturing. While it may provide technical or conceptual insight, it does not destroy the mystery or wonder that exists in the work. A statement that is too technical or uses too much "artspeak" can be difficult for people who are genuinely interested in your work to understand. It doesn't state the obvious. If you are a painter, for instance, you don't need to tell us you like to paint since we can see that from your work. It isn't a record of what you have attempted, tried, hoped, or aspired to do. This implies that you didn't succeed. "My work stands on its own and doesn't need a statement" is a naive approach that will guarantee that your work will be misunderstood and you will not be taken seriously.

### REALITY CHECK:

Look at your work - while you're writing your statement and when you're finished. Does your statement seem congruent with your work? If not, go back and revise it.