



## **How to write an Artist Statement**

The first question is - *What is an artist's statement?* And the second question is - *Why do you need one?* To answer the second question first, perhaps a gallery has requested a statement from you or you're preparing a new brochure or résumé and think such a statement is required (or your work will be displayed in a public area, like the school hallway.) Then you have to tackle the first question - what is it and what should be included in it?

Your artist's statement can be anything you want it to be, but primarily, it should help potential buyers, students, employers and teacher to understand what you believe to be the most important aspects of your art and the techniques you use to make it. The statement should summarize these things in as few words as possible, preferably short ones, and not be a lengthy dissertation on your place in the future history of art. A paragraph of three or four sentences should do it. You won't keep your readers much longer than that.

Once you've determined that you need an artist's statement, don't expect to come up with the pithy phrase or statement in one sitting. The time you spend in developing a worthwhile statement is invaluable in helping you define your art for yourself. You may not have given this much thought before. Do some brainstorming or journaling on these questions, as though you were interviewing yourself:

- Why do you like to make art?
- What subjects do you prefer? Why?
- What processes and techniques do you use? Why?
- How is your work different from others?
- What do you see in your artwork?
- What do other people say they see?
- What are your goals and aspirations as an artist?
- Who or what inspires you?

Enlist the aid of a trusted friend and do some brainstorming. Don't analyze, just put it down and keep adding to the lists. Once you have a good start, start comparing one thought to another and decide which one grabs you. Throw the other one out. Keep comparing and eliminating until you have three or four main ideas that express the essence of your artistic purpose. Your statement should be short, clear, understandable, not over-stated, and not too mystical or spiritual. Everything in your statement should be relevant to your art.

Below are some examples of other artist's statements. You should also start to read other artist's statements when you go to exhibitions to get more examples (ask for a copy of a person's statement you really liked - remember not to plagiarize!!!!).

## Example #1 explaining all of her bodies of work

**Kathleen Bitetti**

### **Artist Statement & Explanation of Bodies of work**

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.



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**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.*

**Bibliography**

1. <http://www.artistsfoundation.org/index.htm>