

Beyond the Elevator Speech: Writing and Talking about Your Work

Presented by Miriam Works
Works Consulting
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Worry about your art. Worry about having really good images. But don't worry about whether your artist statement is a literary masterpiece.

Joe Miller, Curator, Gallery Van Go

Writing about Your Work

You write (partly) in order to talk.

They read (mostly) in order to understand and to justify their interest in you.

- **Artist Statement:** Helps the viewer understand you and your work. Describes your inspiration, influences, process, technique and materials.
- **Artist Bio:** Explains your art-related life and background. Usually no longer than a paragraph or two.

Good statements: direct, down to earth, make a connection with the viewer.

Poor statements: wordy, vague, pretentious or all of the above.

Read lots of examples. Notice what you like and don't like.

Use plain, clear language and simple declarative sentences.

Instead of: The hats made by Colleen Graham are both whimsical and sophisticated, and are all one of a kind pieces.

Try: Colleen Graham creates whimsical, sophisticated one of a kind hats.

Read it aloud.

Keep it short. No longer than three or four paragraphs.

Make it positive.

Instead of: Alex Browne, though not formally educated in art, has pursued ambitious projects in sculpture from an early age.

Try: Alex Browne, a self-taught artist, pursued ambitious projects in sculpture from an early age.

Be objective.

Get help if needed.

Barbara Bottington has many years of experience in art, ranging from free-lance illustration to the creation of original fine art in a variety of media. She received her MFA from Philadelphia College of the Arts in 1978, where she studied with noted painter Scott Skillsley. Barbara strives to infuse her subject matter with vitality, achieved through meticulous attention to detail coupled with an aesthetic expression of the subject's beauty, elegance and subtle imperfections.

I'm a retired NICU nurse. After so many years taking care of our smallest and most fragile babies, I find it just right to paint in a way that requires care and patience.

Lois Nakhle

I know how to start and when to stop; it is between these two points that I struggle to discover, create, and find a sense of order and balance.

David French

Nathan spends much of his time in the woods. All his art starts in the field.

Nathan Beccue

Raised by parents who loved nature and the outdoors, Elizabeth spent her early years in the woods and waters of Iowa.

Elizabeth Smith

It has been a great joy for me to paint the plants and flowers. I never knew that a tiny flower could have such a flawless design, perfect symmetry and beautiful color.

Ku Mie Kim

Don Charles uses everything from old soda cans to bits of leather, found cedar and discarded tractor parts found on a farm to weave images in his mind's eye into stunning works of sculptural art.

Questions to ponder to help develop your written materials or quick blurb.

- What are your earliest memories of making art?
- What is it about your medium or subjects that makes them interesting?
- Did any person or anyone's art influence you to take up your work?
- Why do you choose the subjects you depict?
- What images or objects intrigue or excite you?
- Why do you choose the colors you use?
- What do you think about while you make your work?
- Is it the process of making or the finished object/image that motivates you?

Talking about Your Work

Make sure that you tell your art's story. The story behind an object, even when the object isn't worth big bucks, is often what entertains intrigues and attracts viewers. A work of art without a story is just another pretty picture.

Alan Bamberger, art consultant

- Introduce yourself to people as an artist. Practice smiling and meeting their eyes.

"Hi, I'm Charlotte. Thanks for taking a look at my new work. (I loved making these paintings because....) (This series is about...)"

- Practice describing your work in one or two sentences. Be honest about what pulls you forward in your work. Try not to think about your listener's reactions.
- Don't be negative or describe yourself as a serial beginner.

Talk like a professional artist, even if your art career is part-time. When someone asks if they can visit your studio, don't say, "I paint in my kitchen when my husband and kids are away." Instead, say, "My studio is a small, working studio that doesn't accommodate visitors, but I would be happy to bring a selection of my work to you for a private viewing."

D.L. Hawley, Painter, "Looking Like a Pro", The Artist's Magazine

- Be yourself: let your personality/enthusiasm/quirkiness out.

I love big, beautiful, colorful flowers and leaves that curl and I can't resist painting them.

Sue Woodfine

It belongs to me. God told me if I painted it enough I could have it.

Georgia O'Keeffe

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for artists and creatively driven organizations.
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