

Making a Statement

How to start:

“My Art Explores ...”

Or,

“The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths.”

Bruce Nauman

What to Consider

Audience:

Gallerists/Curators

Picture Editors

Awarding Bodies

Collectors

University Admissions Officer (Post-Graduate study)

Art Buyers (Ad Agencies)

Other Artists

People!

Are you writing purely for the gatekeepers - those that exhibit, commission, purchase - or anyone that you wish to communicate to, openly and democratically.

Voice: First or Third Person

Third person is the conventional voice for a statement. However, a brief perusal of websites will demonstrate that many artists use, or also use, first person, especially if their work is personal or diaristic.

Tone - This will dictate how someone might feel about the artist and the art from the statement alone.

Options:

Formal and Academic

Intimate/Diaristic

Conversational

Manifesto

Length

Write a length that suits you and your work

- as ever, less is more.

200 Words is a good starting point.

Artist statements should be adaptable depending on context. This might determine length, tone and content.

A gallery catalogue statement may be different from a funding application or application for post-graduate study or residency. In these other contexts, there will often be guidance - explicit and implicit - that can assist you in writing well.

Don't ...

Be Boring

Sound False

You are writing for people who are not only looking for authenticity, but are also experts in spotting what isn't.

Digress

In an essay you might support an argument with statistics (or other facts), but in a statement stick to your theme.

On a similar note, with regard to the statement content and the claims you make for your practice, keep information precise - avoid creating exaggerated expectations or, for that matter, underplay your work.

Don't . . .

Use Jargon - AKA [Arty Bollocks](#)

IAE

International Art English

Below you'll find some examples of what Rule and Levine termed 'International Art English' - a form of pretentious writing about art, based on their observations of art discussion and critique in specific journals. There is a link to their essay at the bottom of the page.

IAE has a distinctive
lexicon: *aporia, radically, space, proposition, biopolitical, tension, transversal, autonomy.*

An artist's work inevitably interrogates, questions, encodes, transforms, subverts, imbricates, displaces—though often it doesn't do these things so much as it serves to, functions to, or seems to (or might seem to) do these things.

IAE rebukes English for its lack of
nouns: *Visual* becomes *visuality*, *global* becomes *globality*, *potential* becomes *potentiality*, *experience* becomes ... *experiencability*.

Alix Rule and David Levine

https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/international_art_english

Let us turn to a press release for Kim Beom's "*Animalia*," exhibited at REDCAT last spring:

"Through an expansive practice that spans drawing, sculpture, video, and artist books, Kim contemplates a world in which perception is radically questioned. His visual language is characterised by deadpan humour and absurdist propositions that playfully and subversively invert expectations. By suggesting that what you see may not be what you see, Kim reveals the tension between internal psychology and external reality, and relates observation and knowledge as states of mind."

IAE always recommends using more rather than fewer words. Hence a press release for a show called "*Investigations*" notes that one of the artists "reveals something else about the real, different information."

And when Olafur Eliasson's *Yellow Fog* "is shown at dusk—the transition period between day and night—it represents and comments on the subtle changes in the day's rhythm." If such redundancies follow from this rule, so too do groupings of ostensibly unrelated items. Catriona Jeffries Gallery writes of Jin-me Yoon:

"Like an insect, or the wounded, or even a fugitive, Yoon moves forward with her signature combination of skill and awkwardness."

The principle of anti-economy also accounts for the dependence on lists in IAE.

This is illustrated at inevitable length in the 2010 press release announcing the conference "*Cultures of the Curatorial*," which identifies "the curatorial" as "forms of practice, techniques, formats and aesthetics ... not dissimilar to the functions of the concepts of the filmic or the literary" that entail "activities such as organisation, compilation, display, presentation, mediation or publication ... a multitude of different, overlapping and heterogeneously coded tasks and roles."

One *press release* notes that "humanity has aspired to elevation and desired to be free from alienation of and subjugation to gravity. ... This physical and existential dialectic, which is in a permanent state of oscillation between height and willful falling, drives us to explore the limits of balance." Yes, the assertion here is that standing up is a dialectical practice.

It is worth adding that although it is important to keep language clear and avoid pretension, some concepts within art practice are more complex, and therefore the use of what may seem more specialised terminology is unavoidable.

The important point is that the phraseology you use should illuminate and not obscure meaning.

Statement Examples

The following selection includes a range of both established and early-career artists. A few, including Alice Oliver, Gemma Copp and Jess Parry, are very or fairly recent graduates from Swansea. Some, such as Bruce Nauman's, are clearly written for them (and, in Nauman's case, there is use of prose rather adjacent to IAE). Some are voiced as first person, some are third person.

These are all generic artist statements and you will find many examples that are also specific to given bodies of work. You will have to adapt statements to discuss individual projects.

Some of these examples also have a separate, 'About the Artist' paragraph; this is quite common on websites and in gallery catalogues. It is useful to read them and differentiate the 2 types of information.

BIO/STATEMENT

BIO

Jess Parry (b. 1999) is Welsh Flesh Artist and the recent undergraduate award winner of the 'Haydn John James Layton Painting and Drawing Undergraduate Prize 2020.'

She has just graduated with her first class honours degree in BA (Hons) in Fine Art: Studio, Site & Context from her three-year course at Swansea College of Art, UWTSD.

She plans to study a postgraduate in the near future.

STATEMENT

ITS FLESH. ITS NOTHING BUT FLESH. MY FLESH, YOUR FLESH. ITS NOTHING BUT FLESH!

Her work is the excess flesh that she does not want on her body. It becomes an almost alter-ego that contrasts against the femininity of the artists delicate touch.

She is concerned with the monstrous femme and confronts ideological womanly bodily parts in a seductively sinister fashion.

She explores this through sculpture, performance, video/photography, drawing and arrives at a painting. It's a complex and integral process.

Flesh to her is a malleable substance and she's utterly fascinated by its violently visceral, grotesque carnality that fuels her work.

She feels that the hand of the artist is indeed as violent as the hand of the butcher. As delicate as the hand of a seamstress and as intimate as the hand of the surgeon.

"there's just something about the bathroom and that taboo associated with the figure and flesh that I'm really interested in right now"

The site of the bathroom to the artist is the human behind closed doors. The sides of the human we don't want to see. The taboo associated within such a space of personal intimacy intrigues her. We clean ourselves only to get dirty again.

JESS PARRY

SELECTED WORK

aparry76cc@icloud.com

[Contact](#)

Jess is fascinated by the filth and flesh that makes us human.

She is concerned with the monstrous femme and confronts ideological womanly bodily parts with a grotesque, viscerally confrontational and a beautifully morbid fascination.

A painter turned recent embroiderer, Jess has used her knowledge of mark making to disrupt the traditional norms of what embroidery is meant to be- elegantly intricate and classically beautiful. Yuck!

This website provides an introductory gateway into Finnemore's imagination, concepts and creative process. The images here are representative of projects, which in-themselves, contain substantial bodies of work.

Peter Finnemore is an artist who seeks to '*make visible*', he embraces the broad range and language of photographic art practice. Investigating the dynamic interchange between, biography & presence, generational memory, culture, history and origins.

His first major exhibition was in 1986, where he was selected for the *New Contemporaries* exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. He has since exhibited in solo and group exhibitions both nationally and internationally, including, representing Wales at the 51st Venice Biennale (2005). In 2014, Finnemore was included in a major volume - *Photography Today*, edited by Mark Durden and published by Phaidon, which is a survey of influential international contemporary photography.

Major published works include *Gwendraeth House* (Ffotogallery, 2000) and *Zen Gardener* (Oriol Mostyn, 2004). *Album / Silent Village* catalogue (Ffotogallery, 2010)

Finnemore's photographic artworks and films are included in a number of private and public collections including Arts Council of Great Britain, Scottish Arts Council, National Museums of Wales Collection, Argos Center for Media and Art - Brussels, Lidice Memorial Museum - Czech Republic, The Art Museum at Princeton University - USA, Light Work - photography and digital media center - Syracuse - USA and Chrysler Museum of Art - New Jersey, USA.

Coinciding with a career as an Independent Artist, Finnemore's experience includes a range of overlapping roles within artistic education throughout the UK.

[Download CV](#)

Since the 1960s, Bruce Nauman's radical interdisciplinary approach has challenged conventions while producing new methodologies for creating art and meaning. His rigorous, ascetic engagement with the existential dichotomies of life/death, love/hate, pleasure/pain has embraced performance, video, holography, installation, sculpture, and drawing. From the attitudes and forms of his Post–Minimalist and Conceptual work to his most recent sound installations, persistent themes and ideas appear: the use of the body as material; the relationship between image and language, art and viewer; and the generative interaction of positive and negative space.

Artist Statement, Gagosian Gallery

Artist Statement

I work primarily with photographic materials and processes, but I do not consider myself a photographer. While I produce photographic prints, my purpose generally falls in line with documenting a process or the results of a process. Usually, I will begin an image either using digital cameras or, with decreasing frequency, film cameras, and then in the course of making an image, I also use wood, string, wire, mud, alkyds, oil paint, watercolor, and ink, sometimes as additions to a print but just as often as primary materials themselves. My process generally aims at disrupting processes and outcomes embedded in the apparatus of "photography." The moral capacity of photography shows itself when it is occupied most with a documentary intent, without which we would be unable to navigate our world the way we have constructed it. I admire that mode but do not practice it. Making art is punk rock, no matter how refined it seems on the outside, and the way I make images is a little closer to smashing electric guitars than playing them.

Regardless of what materials I use, the central problem in my work is how to understand the environment, our perception of the environment, and how we use contextual clues to fill in gaps in our knowledge. I never start a project with any of this in mind. Images are the result of a disturbance, my dissatisfaction with what I am looking at or sometimes what I am thinking. This is a central tenet of photography and behind our drive to preserve everything temporal in images, but my dissatisfaction ranges a little further than that. At the very least we are all dissatisfied with what is passing, but I am more interested in knowing just what it is that is passing. We collect records of phenomena very easily. What I want in my images is the Being of an experience.

Charles Grogg

August 2017

About the Artist

Gemma Copp is a Welsh artist, who resides in Swansea, her city of birth. Graduating with a BA in Fine Art from Swansea Metropolitan University in 2006, Copp went on to complete an MA in Contemporary Dialogues in 2009 at the same University. Copp has taken part in the Glynn Vivian's Artist in Residence Programme. Copp has also shown work nationally and internationally and has most recently exhibited work at La Citadel in Mauritius, as part of the Edge Effect show and Ephemeral Coast Project - curated by Celina Jeffery. Other exhibitions have taken place at the Erarta Gallery in Russia, Talbot Rice Gallery in Edinburgh, and at the Mannheim Film Festival in Germany, where Copp received a special commendation from the judges. Copp was awarded Welsh Artist of the Year in 2012 for her film *Rising Tides*.

Artist' Statement

As an artist who predominately works with film and installation, my practice aims to raise a flux of visceral emotions relating to identity and basic human emotions and concerns. My intentions throughout my practice is to create positive, transitional shifts in thoughts and emotion through enactment. This extends to my current series of works which considers the frailty of coastlines.



Alice Oliver is a visual artist and writer who works with photography, moving image, and installation. Alice is currently completing a Master's in Photography at the Royal College of Art where her practice focuses on humans' relation to their surrounding landscape, reflecting on our sense of place, telling an underlying narrative of human presence or existence.

Alice Oliver (b. 1998), is a research-driven visual artist and writer whose practice focuses on our relationships to our surrounding natural landscape, and within a contemporary feminist discourse, provides a retelling of the deeply intimate connections between human and non-human nature. In an ongoing lyrical exploration into the relationship between the ancient landscape surrounding her and photography's materiality, cyclical traces emerge as Alice unveils the natural cycles and suppressed narratives by visualising the rituals of the female body.

In 2022 Alice graduated with Distinction in MA Photography from the Royal College of Art. Alice has exhibited both nationally and internationally, most recently having 'Herb of Grace' exhibited at the European Green Party Congress in Copenhagen, Denmark. In 2022, Alice was selected for the SW Darkroom Residency Award and is currently completing her residency there.

Alice is also the founder and curator of SOLA Journal, an artist-led platform and publisher that facilitates exploration and conversations within contemporary visual art, both online and in print.

HOW
TO
WRITE
ABOUT
CONTEMPORARY
ART

Gilda Williams

Thames & Hudson

Artists Write to Work



Kate Kramer

The art world is a place that can seem scary and impenetrable to an artist at the beginning of their journey. This book addresses and gives special attention to rarely discussed topics that underpin a professional practice within this field.

Whilst the list is not exhaustive, these opinion pieces give a glimpse behind the curtain, equipping artists with the practical tools needed to approach their career.

ISBN
978-1-9997930-4-5

NAVIGATING THE ART WORLD Professional Practice for the Early Career Artist

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