tips on writing your artist statement

What is an artist statement?
An artist statement is a general introduction of your work as an artist. It is the what, how, and why of your work, from your own perspective. It helps you convey the deeper meaning or purpose of your work to the audience (clients, gallery owners, scholarship boards, entrance panels, etc.).

What kind of artists need personal statements? If you are a designer, photographer, fashion designer, illustrator, sculpture artist, abstract artist, painter or any other kind of artist, you need an artist statement.

Why you need an artist statement
An artist statement lets you convey the reasoning behind your work—why you chose a particular subject matter, why you work in a certain medium, etc. And further, a well-written statement shows the relationship of you to your artwork, and helps creates a connection with the viewer that will make your work (and your name) more memorable.

An artist statement can:
• Clarify your own ideas about your work.
• Describe your work, in your own words.
• Be a base for a proposal for an exhibition or project.
• Fill a requirement for scholarships, grants/funding, teaching positions, or admission to school.
• Be a good source of info for art reviewers, journalists, reporters, etc.
• Introduce your work to the buying public.

How to write an artist statement
Writing an artist statement is a chore for most artists. But following theses steps will make it a little easier for you to decide what to write and how to write it.

Artist statement content
The artist statement should be about you, not about the viewer. It should explain what YOU think about your work, not about how the viewer should interpret it.

1. Ask yourself questions about your work:
• Why you have created the work and what is its history?
• Your overall vision-- what are you trying to say in the work?
• How does your current work relate to your previous work?
• What influences your work?
• What is your inspiration for your images?
• How does this work fit into a series or larger body of work?

2. Create a list of words and phrases that describe your chosen themes, your artistic values, creation process, and influences (i.e. experiences, dreams). Draw from your answers from the previous step.

3. Edit down your list of words and begin creating sentences using those words.

4. Combine the sentences into logical, flowing paragraphs.
Start writing:
Begin with an overview paragraph that makes a clear and concise statement about your work, and support that statement with your reasoning. This paragraph should be broad in scope. Specifics will come next.

Next, go into detail about how the issues or ideas mentioned in your opening paragraph are presented in your work (offer a specific example) and why you use the materials and tools that you do.

Point out themes in your work or discuss experiences that have influenced your work.

Finally, sum up the most important points made throughout previous paragraphs.

Content Tips:
Be concise—Keep your writing simple, clear, and to-the-point. Describe each portion in as few words as possible.

Proofread your artist’s statement for grammar, spelling, clarity, and interest. Consider hiring a professional proofreader who is familiar with artist’s statements.

Technical Tips:
- Write in the first person perspective (“I created….”, “My experience with….”).
- No longer than one page, single-spaced, using 10 – 12 point type.
- No fancy fonts or design layouts

Be sure to keep your personal artist statement up-to-date. If your work begins to change or you tackle new subjects, update your statement to reflect your growth. It can be helpful to save previous versions of your artist statement, so you can see how you’ve changed and grown as an artist.

Things to avoid in an artist statement
Your artist statement is like a personal creed and shouldn’t read like a press release or marketing material. Strive for authenticity.

Avoid:
- Arrogance and pomposity (how great or relevant you are)
- Grandiose expressions and clichés about your work and views
- Overuse of technical terms and jargon
- Long explanations or discourses on techniques and materials you use
- Poems or prosy writing
- Childhood or family stories, unless they are very relevant to your work
- Bragging about awards and honors
- Marketing speak: “Marketing strategies, by their very nature, are designed to be manipulative, while the power of an artist statement lies in the authenticity of its authorship.” - Ariane Goodwin in “Writing the Artist Statement”