Writing Your Artist Statement

Moderated by Elizabeth Davies and Puck Janes

Free of charge to Guild members

October 29, 2000
4pm – 5:30pm
Zoom Meeting

Workshop Materials: See PDF attachment in Zoom invite email

Workshop Overview

4:00-4:05pm

Having an artist statement is essential for submitting work to an exhibition, providing context for your work on a blog or website, and for posting to the Gallery/Members page on the Guild's website.

Typically, an artist statement should be between 80 – 250 words. It can include a line or two of bio, but essentially your statement should answer the question:

What do I want viewers to know about my work?

Exercise 1: Match Artist Statements to Ceramic Pieces

4:05-4:15pm

The purpose of this exercise is to identify how Artist Statements can effectively be used to support the presentation of work.

Prior to the Zoom meeting, participants will be asked to:

- Review the images of ceramic pieces and associated Artist Statements that are included in the workshop materials you received in the Zoom meeting invite email.
- In advance of Zoom meeting, attempt to correctly match each image of a ceramic piece to the corresponding artist statement.
- Note down words and sentences used in the sample statements which might come in handy in drafting statements about the works you are exhibiting.

During the Zoom meeting, participants will:

- Review and discuss several examples to consider why and how these statements are effective and consider how these statements can help in framing your own artist statement.

Exercise 2: Identify Key Words & Helpful Phrases to Describe Your Work

4:15-4:30pm

This exercise aims to help you to identify key words and phrases to use in drafting your Artist Statement. This is helpful in expanding the terms and concepts we use to describe our work.

Working in new breakout groups (3 people / group), each participant will:

- Refer to your workshop materials for a sample sheet of key words and helpful phrases.
- Review the key word list and phrases with your breakout group, briefly discuss the significance or importance of words that interest you.
- Working on your own, circle the words and phrases that best describe how you wish others to view your work.
- Narrow the list down to ten words or phrases that you may use in your own artist statement.

Exercise 3: Identify Important Elements and Themes in Your Work

4:30-4:50pm

The objective of this exercise is to identify the most salient elements and themes that you want viewers to know about your work. Everyone will take a turn asking questions, responding as the potter, and taking notes. The resulting key concepts can later be used in drafting your artist statement.

Working in new breakout groups (3 people / group), participants will:

- Assign one of the following roles to each group member: the potter, the questioner, the silent note taker. The group will rotate through these roles, so each participant has an opportunity to act as the potter.
  ** Although you have a note taker, you may want to jot down some notes for use in Exercise 4.*
- Refer to your workshop materials for a list of sample questions to guide the discussion.
- Use the sample questions (or your own questions) to lead an appreciative inquiry into what each potter considers the most important elements of their work that they would like viewers to know.
- Each note taker should email the notes from the conversation directly to the potter whose work is discussed (please share your email with the note taker as you start your discussion).

Exercise 4: Drafting Your Artist Statement

4:50-5:25pm

The final exercise in the workshop offers you the opportunity to draft your own artist statement and receive feedback from your fellow potters.

Working in new breakout groups (3 people / group), please:

- Write a first draft of your artist statement for your work using:
  - phrases gleaned from the 'matching artist statement to potter' exercise,
  - important elements and themes that you discussed during your interview,
  - key words that help capture the essence of your work and process.
- Exchange your draft with other participants in your breakout group.
- Discuss your texts with each other and consider:
  - What questions arise that are not answered by your statement?
  - Do you feel like people understand your work after reading your statement?
  - What elements do you need to strengthen or change?
  - Could you improve the flow of the text to make it easier for people to read?
- Edit your statement to respond to your fellow potters' questions and feedback.

Workshop Closing

5:25-5:30pm

We will reconvene as a group for a final word from the moderators and brief discussion on the next steps in finalizing your artist statement.

Follow Up

- This workshop is intended to help support you in drafting your Artist Statement, and we encourage participants to draw on each other's support and feedback moving forward. If you feel comfortable, we suggest you share your email with other potters in the group for follow-up and refinement of your Artist Statements.

What's Next?: Crafting Your Elevator Pitch

I find people are often curious about my work once they find out I'm a potter. These conversations often run along the lines of, "Oh, wow, I saw someone throw once, it looked amazing," or "I just love pottery, I always go to pottery sales," or "I tried once, a long time ago, but it was so hard." Then comes the inevitable question: "What do you make?". Now that you've started crafting your artist statement, you're set up for taking on the next challenge.

When you have these conversations, it's fun to challenge yourself to describe your work rather than pulling up photos on your phone. You might describe what you've been making recently; how exhibits, nature or your travels have inspired your work, and; why your work has changed over time. Great! Remember what you said, because with a little fine tuning you may have another important marketing tool – the classic Elevator Pitch. This is the short and sweet description that sums up your work in a way that people feel excited and curious about it. Give it a try!

More Resources

Looking for more examples of great artist statements? Check out the following resources:

- **Celebrating Ceramics - Exhibitor Listings:** https://www.celebratingceramics.co.uk/virtual-cc20/zone-h
- **Professor Lieu's "How to Write an Artist Statement":** https://artprof.org/professional-development/how-to-write-an-artist-statement

Exercise 1: Match Artist Statements to Ceramic Pieces

	Artist Statement	Corresponding Image #
c	Exposed clay, crude hand marks , flaws and imperfections. My work has an aesthetic that deviates from traditional craft practice where refinement, beauty and underlying functionality are key drivers. I am more interested in the expression of how an object grows, develops, survives; how it assumes its own life force and sense of being during the making and beyond, and how its history is revealed and remembered by marks and scars. Leaving exposed the realities of the making process and the evidence of my interaction with the material is therefore integral to my approach.	
e	Struck by their serenity and simplicity, the shapes I throw are based on Moon Jars, a Korean form from the Choson Dynasty, originally made from plain white porcelain. Due to the making process, the subtleties of the form are beyond my complete control - something I both relish and nurture. Inspired by a fascination with the landscape and how the resource within it can be utilized, this pure jar form has become my canvas into which I incorporate materials from places that have significance to my life, such as clays, rocks, and seaweeds.	
w	My work is based around recycling, whether it is styles from different cultures or using the clay and glazes leftover from teaching sessions. I enjoy using found objects as a starting point for my work - using cardboard boxes as moulds , referencing fragments I have found on the Thames foreshore such as broken handles and patterned shards. I am showing work based around my pleasure of drinking tea: drinking vessels and storage caddies. While I drink I think and what comes is reflected in the work present . The pieces are collage events and can be made richer with the ceramic transfers given to me by friends.	
z	My work explores the thrown form - searching for that essence - a quality that survives time and where the traditional and contemporary meet. I use the techniques of the past with the eyes of the present. Pieces are individual, often on a large scale, and include platters, bottles, pitchers and jars alongside some pressed and extruded forms. I like flat surfaces, which enhance innovative decorative techniques and use celadons, shinos and ashed surfaces in combination together with the added gift of wood firing. Workshops and exhibitions abroad include Japan, America and New Zealand. Work in many private and public collections.	

f	The transformation of raw materials - mud to art - is, for ceramists, a fascinating journey of evolutionary transition, peppered with risk taking step changes. My own work represents an ongoing dialogue between the technical sophistication of processes, serendipity and timeless human qualities. After 30 years my pieces have become more minimal in style; yet the simplicity and apparent effortlessness aimed for stems from a labour-intensive, unforgiving and demanding "making" technique, together with a dramatic and intense firing process. Ultimately for me, each piece has to justify its existence with a quiet, yet powerful, presence.	
t	I am drawn to that particular quality of stillness and sobriety that pots can have and aim to make pieces that are quiet and contemplate, revealing their qualities to the viewer over time and through use and handling. I make functional ceramics in reduced stoneware. Each piece is initially thrown then individually worked and decorated. Stripes, spots and cross-hatching help map out the surface and reveal aspects of the form. The reduction firing process muted colours, which are often marked out with darker lines and patterning. The resulting pot is unique but shares of family resemblance with its fellows.	
p	… makes a range of ceramic stoneware, specializing in large bowls thrown at the potter's wheel. He also produces slab-rolled wall hangings and square dishes. After graduation he was accepted on the Craft Councils Pottery Skills Course in Ireland where he trained for two years. On his return to the Lake District, he established his own studio. "Taking inspiration from Oriental ceramics, I have developed a palette of my own glazes . These range from subtle shinos too rich, dark temmokus and copper reds. Glazes are applied quickly by dipping and pouring in different combinations, which fused together in the heat of the kiln. As with the thrown pieces, I am always adapting and experimenting with glaze recipes, searching for different colours and textures to complement the forms."	
k	Dramatic contrasts of light and dark, craggy and smooth, together with the texture of aging artifacts, have been my main artistic focus for many years. I have developed my technique of layering vitreous slips to evoke sun-worn, weathered surfaces that try to capture the point between existence and decay; pigments are mixed and intermixed to give subtle colours. Using the wheel and firing to stoneware I try to make vessels that encompass these concerns and, for all the drama, result in calm, elegant, contemporary pieces. Since my degree course I've exhibited widely in ... an abroad and have been elected...	

h	Porcelain, with its pure, white character and its translucency, is still tempting me to throw simple forms thinly. In order to find the one and only shape, structured by hard edges and smooth curves, I cut the wall apart, puzzle around and assemble them assiduously. After the bisque firing an experimental approach with lines, fields or gestural brushstrokes begins. In the end the vessel should offer a different picture of well balanced, interacting structures from various perspectives. Sometimes the painting not only combines the inside with the outside, but also connects different chambers or even vessels with each other.	
m	My luxurious serving dishes are intended for the times when we pause from the hardship and grayness of daily life, and get together around the table in a convivial atmosphere. In their bold interpretation of function, the dishes engage the users' imagination and provide exciting possibilities for presenting food, adding a touch of the extraordinary to the timeless act of sharing food. Using very wet porcelain I create soft folds while joining various components to make flowing forms. Fluid glazes run into each other, pull in the folds, drip off feet and edges, accentuating a sense of overflowing plenty.	
o	In recent years my work as a potter has taken me to many places. From Devon and Cornwall to Edinburgh, New Zealand, to Japan, a little of each place returns to my London studio with me. However, digging clay in the Japanese mountains takes me back to my starting point, for I trained in Japan and recently had my 40th exhibition there. Currently I am experimenting by adding Devon river mud to my bought-in clay to give it life and unpredictability, and wish to grow closer to nature through this alchemical medium of earth and fire.	
b	The pots that John makes refer most often to architecture, archaeology and everyday objects. A format is decided, but room is always allowed for spontaneous and expressive handling of the medium through the slab-formed or thrown elements. The clay is heavily grogged to withstand the unusual methods of making and the surfaces are treated simply with slips, stains, oxides and on-glaze colours. Both gas and electric kilns are used. John also makes pots, but the results continually question and criticize our perception of pottery.	
l	I make slip decorated earthenware, wheel thrown, altered and handbuilt. The slips are trailed, poured or brushed on, then fired in an electric kiln, usually with a clear glaze. My main concern with my new work is to combine making and decorating so they flow together and retain some freshness and spontaneity.	

y	The objective of my work is to produce beautiful objects that are modern but which owe an allegiance to history, giving them a timeless quality. Strong simple shapes are decorated with complex glaze surfaces to compliment the form and excite the eye. Landscape in all forms is my main source of inspiration, along with ancient artifacts and the art of ancient Egypt. Combinations of shiny, matte and semi-matte glazes are built up in layers to create the textural surfaces during firing. Wax is used to isolate areas during the glaze application.	
g	The inspiration behind [my] work is fascination with two-dimensional depiction of three-dimensional form, but on the grand scale of the cartographer or geologist. Different coloured glazes are carefully trailed and juxtaposed over the large surfaces of platters and plates, with particular attention to line and containment. The firing process softens line, producing a more dynamic visual effect, echoing some of the amazing revelations made when the natural world is 'cut open' by mapping, or with a rock hammer. Functionality of the form pays homage to the simple origins of early ceramic forms in the found natural.	
v	I trained at [x] School of Arts and Crafts. All my pots are mostly throwing on the potter's wheel; shapes are then freely manipulated and incised. Marks are applied to the soft stoneware clay to give a subtle tactile clay surface. I am fascinated by experimenting with high-fired stoneware glazes and have developed a method of applying the different colours in multiple layers to produce a rhythmic pattern. The pieces I make are tall thin vessels, curved bowls, teabowls, large platters an lidded pots purposely simplified to allow the surface texture to express itself.	

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16

Exercise 2: Key Words Worksheet

- **Create lists of specialized words, phrases, quotes, and sentences** that connect with or describe your work, including anything referring to concept, content, process, technique, materials, inspirations, influences, etc.

1. Circle the words that describe how you see your work.
2. Narrow your list down to 10 words or 5 phrases. Use in your artist statement. Post in your workspace.

- 2-dimensional
- 3-dimensional
- abstract
- academic
- accidental
- aesthetic
- African
- alive
- ambiguous
- amorphous
- amuse
- analogous
- ancient
- androgynous
- angular
- anonymous
- anthropomorphic
- appealing
- archetypal
- architectural
- artifact
- Asian
- assembled
- asymmetrical
- awkward
- balanced
- beckoning
- beautiful
- bizarre
- bright
- broken
- brushed
- chaotic
- charming
- childlike
- clean and clear
- cliché
- colour
- combined
- comfort
- complex
- composite
- conceptual
- connotation
- constructed
- contained
- contemplative
- contemporary
- continuity
- contour
- contrast
- craft
- creative
- crude
- curious
- curvy
- cut
- cutting edge
- dada
- dark
- darted
- dead
- deceptive
- decoration
- delicate
- demanding
- depth
- descriptive
- designed
- detailed
- dichotomy
- dignified
- dipped
- disheveled
- distinctive
- distorted dominant
- dry
- dull
- dynamic
- earthbound
- earthy
- elegant
- emotive
- emphasis
- emulate
- enduring
- enigmatic
- enticing
- erosion

- erotic
- erosion
- eternal
- ethereal
- European
- everyday
- exaggerated
- excite
- exploring
- expressive
- eye-catching
- familiar
- feminine
- fierce
- fine art
- fine
- flaws
- craftsmanship
- flawed
- fleshy
- float
- flow
- fluid
- fold
- folk art
- formal
- fragility
- frenetic
- fresh
- friendly
- fun
- functional
- fused
- fussy
- futuristic
- gentle
- geometric
- gestalt
- gestural
- glossy
- graceful
- graphic
- harmonious
- historical
- honest
- huge
- humour
- imagine
- impact
- imperfections
- indecisive
- individualistic
- influences
- informed by…
- innocent
- interactive
- intimate
- interesting
- intricacy
- intriguing
- intuitive
- invasive
- invigorate
- inviting
- irregular
- ivory tower
- joy
- kitschy
- layered
- Lego-like
- light
- linear
- loose
- loved
- lustrous
- luxurious
- lyrical
- magic
- manipulated
- mannered
- marked
- masculine
- mathematical
- matte
- mended
- modern
- modified
- monochromatic
- moody
- motif
- mottled
- movement
- muted
- naïve
- narrative
- natural
- nature
- neutral
- noble
- non-functional
- nonsensical
- nostalgic
- old-fashioned
- one-off
- ordinary
- organic
- outsider art
- overflowing
- overworked
- painterly
- passion

- patterns
- perfect
- perform
- perspective
- playful
- poetic
- popular culture
- poured
- powerful
- practical
- precise
- pure
- quality
- quiet
- quirky
- refined
- regal
- retro
- rhythm
- rich
- risky
- ritual
- robust
- rough
- rustic
- sacred
- sanded
- satirical
- scarred
- scraped
- sculptural
- seductive
- sensual
- serene
- sewn
- sexy
- shadow
- sheltered
- shiny
- simplicity
- smooth
- soft
- soft-edged
- solid
- sophisticated
- specific
- spontaneous
- story of…
- strength
- structured
- stylish
- subdued
- subtle
- superfluous
- symmetrical
- tactile
- tension
- texture
- tidal
- tight
- timeless
- traditional
- transformation
- transitional
- translucent
- transparent
- trompe-l'oeil
- unforgiving
- urban
- useful
- utilitarian
- vibrant
- vivacious
- vivid
- voice
- voluptuous
- vulgar
- whimsical
- witty

Exercise 2: Helpful Phrases Worksheet

Phrases for writing your bio:

- I graduated from... and since then ..... after graduation...
- workshops and exhibitions in...
- My work is in the .... collection.
- my work has been exhibited widely in
- Chair of...

Phrases for describing your work: I make

- I use
- my new work
- I have developed my technique of layering
- beyond my complete control ...
- currently, I am experimenting with
- into which I incorporate materials
- each piece is thrown, then individually worked... and decorated
- runs, drips, and pooling of glazes
- I like the unpredictability of glazes,
- I apply my glazes thickly
- the transformation of raw materials,
- mud to art -
- simplicity and apparent effortlessness
- labour intensive, demanding techniques
- main aim is to produce a decorative object that
- all my pots are one-off pieces
- I use terra sigillata, a fine particled liquid clay
- landscape is my main source of inspiration
- combinations of shiny, matt, and semi-matt glazes
- textural surfaces.
- using very wet porcelain, I create ...
- runs, drips, and pooling of glazes,
- a moment in time – captured, and frozen
- creating crystallisation on porcelain
- a certain unpredictability
- I encourage glaze runs
- variations in texture and colour
- innovative decorative techniques
- I use glazes in combination ...
- apparently familiar objects become something new
- my pieces range from ... to ...
- I use hand-building techniques to create ...
- slip painting, decals, and metallic lustres
- surface decoration
- reminding us of bygone eras
- large bowls thrown at the potter's wheel
- I apply glazes quickly by dipping and pouring in different combinations
- in the heat of the kiln.
- experimenting with glaze recipes
- searching for different colours and textures
- recently I have spent time developing a range of ...
- the clay is heavily grogged
- by coiling, pinching, and various modelling techniques
- decorated using precious metal lustres
- I want my pieces to be fun.
- objects have a story to tell
- my current range consists of...
- wheel-thrown ceramics

- I make heads and faces.
- I sit down with the clay and see what emerges ...
- I use of coloured slips.
- combined with wax resist and stencils
- distinctive patterns
- I refire it repeatedly
- I risk all
- idiosyncratic figures
- the animal form provides me with
- elements of chance and spontaneity
- my aim is to use materials, shapes and textures in a new way
- research into patterns and forms from nature
- curved sections of clay
- granulated surface
- terra sigillata and smoke firing
- influences stem from
- brush strokes
- fields of colour
- I cut and fold
- when leather-hard, I either dip, brush or pour
- I make slab-built vessel forms ...
- subtly textured surfaces evoke
- patterns found in the natural world
- raw clay
- flaws and imperfections

Exercise 3: Examples of Questions to Guide Your Interview

- What can you tell me about your work?
- Can you describe the kind of work you do?
- What does your work mean to you?
- How did you become interested in clay?
- Describe one of your recent works; what was your inspiration?
- Do you work in series?
- What materials and/or specialized processes and techniques do you use?.
- Why do you make art/craft? (possibly including specific aspects of your background that caused you to become an artist/craftsperson)
- Why is this kind of work important to you?
- Why clay?
- Why hand-build/throw?
- What are your sources of inspiration? (possibly a bit of family history, a defining personal experience)