

## Nayland Blake on Artist Statements

1. Tell the truth. Describe your work, and your life as it is, not as you think someone wants to hear it to be. Don't anticipate your reader's biases.

2. Write often. Get into the habit of writing about what you do on a regular basis. It will give you much more material to pick from when the time comes for you to make a formal statement.

3. Rewrite often. It's much easier to edit and rewrite an existing piece than it is to generate something new on deadline. Revising allows you to sharpen ideas and cut out redundancies. Allow yourself to make messy first drafts and then go back into them.

4. Use specific examples. Watch out for generalities about your work. If you want to make a point about how an idea functions for you, show how it functions in a specific piece. Don't feel like what you have to say has to be equally true of everything you make. Practice describing pieces as if your audience was sightless.

5. Use history sparingly Don't assume that everyone will know what you mean when you refer to the work of other artists or artistic movements: their ideas may well be antithetical to yours and your point may be lost.

6. Big words do not make your work look better, or make it any more meaningful.

7. Phrases to watch out for:

a. "As a..." often used to sneak in biographical information and as justification for the work, i.e.: "As a veteran my work is concerned with the ideologies of bodily distress...", "as a volcano survivor I want my pieces to have a certain vibrancy..." Find another way to tell people who you are and why you do what you do.

b. "The viewer is invited..." or any of its variations. Often folks use this to try to

force people into a specific experience of the work. It begs the questions How and Why is the viewer invited.

c. "Interest, interesting, interests..." Try writing about your enthusiasms rather than your interests.

d. "The body..." Resist the temptation to make an idea sound more theoretical by sticking the word "the" in front of it. Always ask yourself "which body, or whose body."

8. Finally, imagine that you are writing in sand, not carving in stone. Your artist's statement is not a contract made for all eternity: it is a snapshot of your thinking about your practice at a specific moment.