

————— Everything You Need to Know  
(and Do) As You Pursue Your Art Career

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# ART/ WORK

**REVISED  
+  
UPDATED**

When someone visits your studio, your art is what matters most. So too with a portfolio: when a jury reviews your application, the images of your work are by far the most important part.

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### ***What do I send if they're not specific?***

Sometimes curators and gallerists will just say "send me your work" without explaining what that means. If you're too shy to ask, you can assume they expect ten to twenty images, a résumé, press clips (if you have them), and a cover letter.

All of this should be on your website (see chapter 4), so it should suffice to send a thoughtful email that serves as a cover letter, along with a link to your website. Always attach one image in the email. Choose your strongest or most recognizable image.

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It's common to refer to original artwork as a portfolio, but when people ask you to send over your portfolio they mean your basic submission materials, not your original work. Same deal if someone asks you to send them "your documentation."

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Always list dimensions as *height x width x depth*.

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### ***What are not appropriate to send as images?***

Snapshots, photocopies, head shots, brochures, and postcards. Only send what they ask for.

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### ***Images of 2-D and 3-D Work***

You already have images of all your pieces because you read chapter 2. Now you need to pick ten to twenty images of your **best work**. If the work's surface is important—say you make very intricate or three-dimensional pieces—we recommend creating a portfolio with a mix of full shots and detail images. If the scale and context of the work is important, consider selecting a few installation shots.

Include current work only (that is, finished pieces from your most recent body of work). If older work is necessary for context, include one or two older pieces. But in the vast majority of cases, your current work will create the strongest package. People want to see that you are in the studio right now.

Once you have your images, learn how to resize them on your computer and adjust the resolution. You should keep at least two sizes of each image on your computer, ready to go:

1. A 300 dpi, 8 x 10 inch image, at least 1,200 x 1,800 pixels, which you'll use for printing and sending to the press.
2. A 72 dpi, 8 x 10 image that you can email, put on a disk, upload, post to your website (see chapter 4), and show people on your computer (see "Studio in a Box" in chapter 5). Exact requirements will vary site by site.

Ideal file sizes will change, of course, as email and Internet capabilities grow.

Don't forget to label every digital image. Include a number, your name, and the title of the piece. The number should correspond with an image list and control the order in which the images are seen (e.g., 01\_Melber\_Sky; 02\_Melber\_Earth). Regardless of how you save your files, include all basic labeling information in the body of an email to which they are attached, or

in a corresponding image list: title, year, medium, dimensions or duration, and edition size (if applicable).

While these are general guidelines, *read* and *ask* before you submit anything, whether over email or directly to a website, and submit the exact size, resolution, and file type that you're told to. Max out dimensions and resolution, but never go over. Make sure you enter all labeling information correctly, test your files with a friend or another email account before sending them, and wherever possible preview your work before publishing it to a site. You don't want to send people attachments they can't open or let frustrating technical difficulties distract them from the most important thing—your work.

For complicated installations, video, kinetic works, sound pieces, performances, and time-based projects, submit video clips wherever allowed. For everything else, your still images will have to suffice.

### *Moving Images*

If you are a performance artist or “new media” artist whose work is kinetic or based in sound, video, or film, have both stills (if applicable) and clips ready to send. Unfortunately, this makes your job harder than it is for artists making 2-D and 3-D work. The conventions aren't uniform, so it's more difficult to anticipate what, exactly, you'll need for any given submission. Nevertheless, there are a few things you can do in advance.

Since most applications ask for one to three video clips, narrowing down your work to your three best pieces and uploading them to a private video-hosting site (such as Vimeo) is a good start.

You can also prepare several different versions of those three pieces and bet that you'll eventually end up submitting all of them to one place or another. The still image that represents each piece in a DVD's menu, or the title frame at the start of a clip, is the first impression your viewer will have of your work, so choose striking images and purposeful, professional-looking fonts. We recommend putting any titling, crediting, or other important textual information at the beginning of the video, where it is most likely to be seen.

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### *Presenting Images in a Digital Folder (via the Cloud, a Thumb Drive, a Disk, etc.)*

- Put your images and image list in one folder. Keep your résumé, artist statement, and press clip-pings in a folder separate from your images.
  - Control the order in which your images are viewed. You can do this by beginning each file name with a number (01\_Bhandari\_Landscape, 02\_Bhandari\_Landscape, etc.). Alternatively—though by no means necessary—is to create a PDF or PowerPoint presentation. This allows you to determine the order of images and combine them with text, while minimizing what the viewer has to do to engage your work.
  - Remember to edit. Although your folder may have a lot of space in it, do not feel compelled to fill it up. Show that you know how to edit and you know how to follow directions. The rule of thumb is ten to twenty images.
  - Test the folder before you hand it over. You wouldn't believe how many digital submissions don't work because of various technical glitches. Never assume the recipient will contact you for a replacement.
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—————"I can think of some really wonderful artists who have not been accepted to the program because they take really terrible images of their work. Remember we are judging images, not judging work. If you are going through three hundred people's work and somebody has taken really crappy images, it takes too much sympathy to read the application and it just disappears." **Joseph Havel, artist, director, Core Program, Houston, TX**

—————"I tell students to submit their best images, which is not always their best work. I've sat on many panels and know that they're looking at hundreds of images in a day. Before they can seriously consider your work, you will need to get them to stop clicking the projector. You need to have great images. Maybe you can sneak in a crucial piece that doesn't reproduce well (maybe it has an amazing story and you can sneak that story in) but it's very important to have strong images." **Charles Long, artist, Mount Baldy, CA**

—————"Documentation is critical! And documentation is different from inventory, which is different from the archive. I advise artists to build documentation practices into all of their project budgets. Documentation is a part of your work as an artist. A fuller documentation strategy will include documenting work for your own inventory, for submitting work samples in applications, and for featuring your work in promotional material. The 'look' of your work in each of these categories might be different, especially if you're working in time-based media." **William Penrose, executive director, NURTUREart, Brooklyn, NY**

Most typically, an application will ask you to edit your works down to three-minute clips. Having a three-minute version ready now will save you a huge headache later. (If your piece is less than three minutes, sit back and relax.)

Some applications ask for a highlight reel, which is the most labor-intensive submission of all. It means compiling works in a single file, usually up to five minutes long. The length of each highlighted work is up to you, as are the transitions between pieces. Still, keep it simple and clean. Transitions should not detract from the clips, and should clearly differentiate one from the next.

When you submit a video file, make a title frame before the video starts. Let the viewer see the length of the reel before it begins. And let the viewer fast-forward. A lot of artists lock their videos, aggravating a lot of curators and gallerists who have to watch a lot of videos.

Finally, ask what equipment the place uses to play video and make sure you adhere to their technical specifications. Think about which clips work best on which formats; you might submit a different clip depending on what format they'll be using. For instance, whether the jury will watch a video projection, together, or whether each member will view clips on a laptop, may influence your selection of materials.

### *Physical Images*

For a physical submission, the general rule of thumb is to print the highest-quality images on the paper that makes your work look best. Does your work look better on matte or glossy paper? Textured or smooth? These are simple decisions that could significantly impact how your work is read. But, as with everything else, the size and layout depend on what's asked for. Include your name, title, year, medium, dimensions (or duration), and edition size (if applicable) somewhere on the page with each image, or on an attached image list. We recommend trying to combine the text and image on one page if you can do it well. This eliminates another piece of paper and the risk that it will get separated from the images.

ARTIST NAME  
IMAGE LIST

1. *Landscape 2*, 2017  
c-print, edition of 5  
20 x 24 inches
2. *Untitled*, 2017  
DVD, edition of 3  
5:20
3. *Landscape 5*, 2017  
DVD, edition of 3  
6:22
4. *Community*, 2017  
graphite on paper  
30 x 40 inches  
map of the movement filmed in *Untitled*
5. *Community Response*, 2017  
graphite on paper  
30 x 40 inches  
map of the movement filmed in *Landscape 5*

IMAGE

1.  
**Artist Name**  
*Landscape 2*, 2017  
c-print, edition of 5  
20 x 24 inches

Think about how you will present your images to someone. In a folder? In a binder or sleeves? Don't let your presentation fall apart at the last minute! Take some time deciding what the images go in. It doesn't have to be fancy or expensive. Just allow the work to look its best and relate to the rest of your package.

Include a disk with the same images so that people who like what they see in the printout can look at your digital files for better color and detail.

While printing images may seem old fashioned, some venues have reverted to the old way of doing things to set themselves apart. We're all so overloaded with digital information that a nice printout or catalog can be a welcome relief. *This is not for everyone and should be done judiciously.*

————— "Artists always ask me what the curators want to see. I'm always confused by that question. They want to see your work represented well. Just be honest with your work and yourself." **Hillary Wiedemann**, artist, Chicago; former codirector, *Royal NoneSuch* gallery, Oakland, CA



————— "Depth is better than breadth' is something people just don't get when applying to things. It's something that people just don't get in general. When you are applying to something, you want them to know you are the woman who paints sparrows. They don't really want to know about the cows or the other things. Yes, you can be too narrow, but they need to know you have focus and you do something well." **Christa Blatchford, artist, CEO, Joan Mitchell Foundation, NY**

————— "I don't look at people's résumés. Honestly. They don't mean anything to me. The only thing I might look for is if I know anybody who's worked with this person so I can use them as a reference, if needed. I have an artist in my current show who is in his sixties and has had one exhibition. For me, it's always the work and the person that drives it, not credentials." **Denise Markonish, curator, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA**

————— "I do look at people's CVs. If they've been showing for seven years and they're not smart enough to get that café or restaurant show off there, then there's probably some sort of issue. No filter." **Leigh Conner, CONNERSMITH, Washington, D.C.**

## RÉSUMÉ

Your résumé should list all your relevant *art* work; if it's not related to your art it doesn't belong on your résumé. Keep it clean, succinct, consistent, and easy to read. If you're at the beginning of your career, keep it to one page. No matter how much you want to cram in, don't let the font drop below 10-point. It's just too hard to read.

Before you worry about page limits, though, start by making a master résumé, or CV, which you can then tailor to specific opportunities (and shorten, if necessary). Look at artist résumés on gallery websites and see what style they use; that's the style the gallery is used to. Also look at the résumés of established artists you respect. Feel free to mimic their formatting.

And *no typos*. Seriously. Your résumé has to look professional because you're trying to show that you're a professional. So ask someone to proofread your résumé and fix those typos before you start sending anything out. An extra space between words is a typo. If you separate items with a comma, and then decide halfway down the page to separate them with a slash/that's also a typo. If you use Sentence Case for one heading and ALL CAPS for another heading, guess what? Typo.

Here are the most common sections of an artist résumé:

### Contact Information

Think "need-to-know basis" here. You're not being interviewed on TV, you're just making sure the reader knows who you are and how to find you. List your name, address, phone numbers, email, and website (you really, really want the person to find you). A lot of artists list their birthplace, year of birth, and where they're "based." Those are optional.

Do not include a picture of yourself unless it is a part of your work. This is not an acting gig; a picture is just distracting and silly. Even if you're drop-dead gorgeous.

To harp on a theme, consistency matters. Pick the way you want your name to be listed and stick with it every time, down to the nickname or middle initial or whatever you want in there.

Year, degree, school, city, state.

Whatever order you choose, match it to the other sections. If you start with the year here, start with the year everywhere. Don't list high school (unless you're in high school!). Post-high school education, study abroad, college, and graduate degrees only. Also, no need to list course work or your GPA. This is not a job application. (Except that it is, but you know what we mean.)

### *Solo Exhibitions*

Year, title of show, venue, city, state.

List shows in reverse chronological order, beginning with any confirmed future exhibitions.

It's not just about quantity. People want to see whether you're a good fit for their program given where you are in your trajectory. Have you shown at exhibition spaces with similar programs? Look at the résumés of a venue's artists. Have you shown at venues that show artists of a similar caliber? Pay attention to this when you're tailoring your résumé for a specific space and edit your exhibitions list accordingly. If you're applying to a nonprofit, for instance, you should pull every other nonprofit exhibition to the top of each year and highlight your involvement in your cover letter.

If you've had fewer than four solo shows, call this section "Selected Exhibitions" or simply "Exhibitions" and put all your shows here (instead of separating group shows in a "Group Exhibitions" section) and just indicate which shows (if any) were solo exhibitions.

### *Group Exhibitions*

Year, title of show, curator or juror, venue, city, state.

When you're starting out, people want to see that you're active and involved. It's generally better to have a bunch of shows at lesser-known places than only one show, three years ago, at a higher-profile venue.

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### *Most Common Résumé Mistakes*

- Inconsistent commas. Are you putting a comma before the last item in a list? For example: I make paintings, drawings, and video. Or are you *not* doing that. Whichever way you go, be consistent throughout.
  - Chronological order. Your sections should be in *reverse* chronological order: most recent items first.
  - Missing contact information.
  - Implying something happened when it didn't (yet). If something is upcoming or anticipated, say so. Write "anticipated," "upcoming," or "expected" after the entry.
  - Missing state or country. The location might be obvious to you, but not everyone else, especially if there's more than one place with the same name (e.g., the city of "Portland"). If you start showing internationally, always list the country (including U.S. shows) to keep everything clear.
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Don't write a "goal" or "objective" on your résumé. It's an old convention from corporate America that nobody bothers with anymore because your goal is obvious: to get whatever it is you're submitting your résumé for.

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#### *What's the difference between a CV and a résumé?*

A CV is a general, all-inclusive recitation of one's career. A résumé is a shorter, tailored version. You'll use a résumé for submissions.

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As your career progresses, think of this section as a "best of" list rather than a comprehensive encyclopedia of your group shows. Include interesting curators and mention any catalogs that were produced from the shows. Don't be afraid to lop off shows in lesser-known venues as you add new ones. Big-city commercial galleries in particular are not going to be impressed with "open submission" shows or exhibitions at retail stores, cafés, and the like. Those are good for exposure and sales, and they may be all you have at first. If that's the case, omit the word *café* or *restaurant* unless it's part of the space's official name and look around for alternative, noncommercial venues to add some variety to your résumé. (See chapter 7 for more on finding venues.)

#### *Residencies*

Year, name, city, state.

Double-check the spelling!

#### *Awards, Grants, and Fellowships*

Year, name, description.

If something isn't obvious from its title, explain what it is in a few words. An award may be well known in your area but not elsewhere.

#### *Other Ideas for Headings*

There are many ways to categorize and organize what you've done: Performances, Collaborations, Public Commissions, Publications as Author, Lectures, Visiting Artist Programs, etc. Don't feel constrained by the sections we enumerate in this chapter. Go with what makes the most sense for your work and your accomplishments.

#### *Press*

Author, "Title," *Publication Name*, Location, Date, Section and/or page.

Author, "Title," *Blog or Website Name*, Date, URL.



————— “I look to see if an artist has exhibited in what I consider galleries of a kindred spirit. This requires the artist doing some research to pick the right ones to highlight. Check to see what art fairs the gallery does, and who also participates in those fairs that you’ve exhibited with. There’s no guarantee you won’t include someone the gallery doesn’t like, but the odds of that are not so great.”

*Edward Winkleman, cofounder, Moving Image Art Fair; author, former director, Winkleman Gallery, New York, NY*

—“You should leave everything on there as far as where you have shown, your education, and where you are from. Those are the basics that give a curator or gallerist talking points. ‘Oh—you are from XYZ and went to school at that time—maybe you know so and so.’ Also, at the beginning, it’s most important that you are showing regularly. If you were born in 1996, no one expects you to be showing at the best places in the world.” *Amy Smith-Stewart, curator, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT*

—“I recently did a studio visit with an artist who is midcareer and underrecognized. I looked at her CV and I was shocked to see the number of prominent museums she had exhibited in. And she did it on her own, without gallery representation. I loved her work, but when I saw her CV, I was really impressed.” *Lorraine Molina, owner, LM Projects; former owner, director, Bank, Los Angeles, CA*

For television or radio appearances, list the host, title of show, segment title, station name, and date.

Be discriminating about what you include here. Online press is also press. A well-respected art blog or online magazine is press. Your cousin’s Tweet is not press.

### *Collections*

Name, city, state.

Don’t bother unless your work is in serious collections, such as a museum’s or a famous collector’s. It’s perfectly fine to have a résumé without a “Collections” section. In fact, some find it tacky to include regardless of prestige. Instead, we recommend keeping a list to distribute on request; maybe mention a few significant collections in your bio.

### *Related Experience*

This section often serves as a catchall for interesting entries that don’t quite fit in other sections or find themselves alone in a category. “Related” means related to your practice. Is it? Obviously waiting tables isn’t related, but neither is art handling. Even teaching ceramics isn’t related if you’re a video artist. Maybe if your videos are about ceramics, but you get the idea. Have you curated an exhibition? That could work. Again, this is not a job application so only include work experience that is truly *related*.

Like “collections,” this section is optional.

While you should stick to the order of the first three sections, since those are what people are most interested in and expect to see at the top, you can rearrange, combine, and rename other sections in whatever way makes sense given where you are in your career. And the one-page rule flies out the window once you have more than one page of good material. Here are a few sample résumés to give you an idea.

Do not email Word versions of your résumé, because the formatting may reset when someone else opens the file on another computer, undoing your hard work of making everything line up. Save as a PDF (or some other unalterable format) and then send it out.

LETTERHEAD  
contact info and website

Artist Name

Born Year, Location

Lives and works in City, ST

EDUCATION

Year Degree, University, City, State

Year Degree, University, City, State

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

Year Title, Venue, City, ST (solo)

Title, curated by Important Curator, Venue, City, ST

Title, Venue, City, ST

Year Title, Venue, City, ST

Title, Venue, City, ST

Title, Venue, City, ST (catalog)

Title, Venue, City, ST

Year Title, Venue, City, ST (solo)

Title, Venue, City, ST

Year Title, Venue, City, ST

PUBLICATIONS

Year Last Name, First Name, Title, Publication, Date, Page

Last Name, First Name, Title, Publication, Date, Page

Year Catalog Title, Publisher

Year Catalog Title, Self-published

AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES

Year Title or Description, City, ST

Year Title or Description, City, ST

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*How creative should I get with my materials?*

It all comes down to presenting a clear, clean, and honest submission. It must be complete, organized, and easy to read. And there's nothing wrong with making it beautiful. That doesn't mean you have to spend a lot of money on the packaging, design your own font, or spray everything with perfume. (In fact perfume is a particularly bad idea.) It just means making the viewing experience as pleasurable and interesting as possible without distracting gimmicks. If you try too hard, you will look like you are overcompensating for poor-quality work.

—————*"I think it is good to have something professionally put together and subtle. If it gets too cheesy or aggressive, it feels like used-car sales. I think it can detract from the work."* **Kelly Klaasmeyer, artist, writer, critic, Houston Press; former editor of *glasstire.com*, Houston, TX**

—————*"A crayoned note on lined paper does nothing for us. And we've gotten that! Do your homework and send a nice package."* **Sara Jo Romero, Schroeder Romero Editions, New York, NY**

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# LETTERHEAD

Name, Contact Information, and Website

## Artist Name

Lives and works in City, ST

## Selected Solo and Two-Person Exhibitions

Year *Title*, Venue, City, ST (solo)

Year *Title*, Venue, City, ST (solo) (catalog)  
*Title*, Venue, City, ST

Year *Title*, Venue, City, ST

## Selected Group Exhibitions

Year *Title*, Venue, City, ST (upcoming)  
*Title*, Venue, City, ST, curated by Important Curator  
*Title*, Venue, City, ST

Year *Title*, Venue, City, ST (catalog)  
*Title*, Venue, City, ST  
*Title*, Venue, City, ST  
*Title*, Venue, City, ST

Year *Title*, Venue, City, ST  
*Title*, Venue, City, ST

Year *Title*, Venue, City, ST  
*Title*, Venue, City, ST

## Bibliography

Year Last Name, First Name, *Title*, Publication, Date, Page  
Last Name, First Name, *Title*, Publication, Date, Page

Year Last Name, First Name, *Title*, Publication, Date, Page  
Last Name, First Name, *Title*, Website, Web Address/URL, Exact Date  
Last Name, First Name, *Title*, Publication, Date, Page

## Awards and Residencies

Year Title or Description, City, ST  
Year Title or Description, City, ST  
Year Title or Description, City, ST

## Catalogs

Year Title, Publisher  
Year Title, Publisher

## Education

Year Degree, University, City, State  
Year Degree, University, City, State

## Teaching

Year Position, Department, University, City, State  
Year Position, Department, University, City, State

LETTERHEAD  
Contact Information

ARTIST NAME

*Born City, State*

EDUCATION

Year

Degree, University, City, ST

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Year

"Title," Venue, City, State

Year

"Title," Venue, City, State

"Title," Venue, City, State

Year

"Title," Venue, City, Country

Year

"Title," Venue, City, State

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Year

"Title," Venue, City, State

"Title," Venue, City, State

"Title," Venue, City, State

Year

"Title," Venue, City, State

"Title," Venue, City, State (curated by Curator Name)

"Title," Venue, City, State

"Title," Venue, City, State

PERFORMANCES

Year

"Title," Collaborator, Venue, City, State

"Title," Venue, City, State

Year

"Title," Venue, City, State (curated by Curator Name)

"Title," Venue, City, State

"Title," Venue, City, State

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Year

Last Name, First Name. "Title," Publication, Exact Date, page

Last Name, First Name. "Title," Publication, Exact Date, page

Last Name, First Name. "Title," Publication, Exact Date, page

Year

"Catalog Title," Publisher.

Last Name, First Name. "Title," Publication, Exact Date, page

Year

Last Name, First Name. "Title," Publication, Exact Date, page

"Title," Website, Web Address/URL, Exact Date.

Last Name, First Name. "Title," Publication, Exact Date, page



## AWARDS/GRANTS

Year

Award/Grant/Fellowship

Year

Residency, City, State

Year

Award/Grant/Fellowship

## COLLECTIONS

Collection Name or Collector Name, Location

Collection Name or Collector Name, Location

Collection Name or Collector Name, Location

Collection Name or Collector Name, Location

## CURATORIAL PROJECTS

Year

"Title," Venue, City, State

Year

"Title," co-curated with Curator Name, Venue, City, State

Year

"Title," Venue, City, State

## Example Artist Biographies

New

(Artist Name) was born in (Year) in (Town, State, or Country). In (Year), she received her (degree) in (subject) at (University). (Last Name) has already been included in various important exhibitions including ("Title") at (Venue, City, State) and ("Title") at (Venue, City, State). This year, she will attend (Residency or Special Program). Upcoming shows include ("Title") at (Venue, City, State). (Last Name) currently lives and works in (City, State).

Emerging

(Artist Name) lives and works in (City, State) and was a (Year) recipient of a (Grant/Scholarship/Something Important). He has exhibited in solo exhibitions at (Venue, City, State) and (Venue, City, State). His numerous group exhibitions include ("Title") at (Venue, City, State) and ("Title") at (Venue, City, State). (Last name) was honored with the (Title of Grant/Award) in (Year). Public Collections include (Name) and (Name). He is currently working on (describe work in a few words) for ("Title") at (Venue, City, State) in (Year).

Midcareer

(Artist Name) received her BFA in (Year) from (University) and her MFA in (Year) from (University). She was a member of the (Art/Art History/other) faculty at (University) for the last (#) years. (Last Name)'s work has been written about in (Publication), (Publication), and (Publication). She has been actively involved in guest residencies and lectures (Nationally/Internationally). Her works are included in the public collections of (collection), (collection), and (collection). Solo exhibition venues include (Venue, City, State), (Venue, City, State), and (Venue, City, State). Group exhibition highlights include ("Title") at (Venue, City, State) and ("Title") at (Venue, City, State). Her work will be on view at (Venue, City, State) in (Month of Year).

MOMMY... CAN YOU  
EXPLAIN POST-COLONIAL  
IDENTITY POLITICS  
TO ME?



Speaking of formatting, you will be much happier in the long run if you set up a table in Word, or use Excel, Illustrator, or a similar program that lets you set up a template. You don't want to be stuck readjusting spacing and formatting every time you update your résumé with new information.

## BIOGRAPHY

A short narrative version of your CV (usually 100 to 250 words), where you summarize the important points. Include personal details, key periods in your training, and highlights of your career. If your bio is very short, feel free to include a few brief sentences describing your work.

It's common for biographies to be in the third person because they're used for press releases and other promotions.

## PRESS CLIPS

Make a press clip for any article that mentions you—even if it's one sentence from a group show review. For printed articles, scan the title bar from the publication's first page, which has the publication's name and date of the article. Combine that with a scan of the article's full text, using Photoshop or similar software, and save as a new high-resolution PDF or image file.

The same idea applies to online articles: Whether you take a screenshot or print the entire browser page as a PDF, make sure you capture the publication title, publication date, author byline, and any other relevant information that would help someone look the article up if he or she wanted to. Clean up the image so it looks professional, by cropping out anything unrelated (ads, other articles, etc.) and lining everything up if you had to assemble multiple screenshots or pages.

Keep originals and copies of any catalogs and brochures that include your work. Be selective about whom you send originals to, since you'll have a limited number and it's not really necessary for every submission. High-quality digital versions should suffice in most situations.

————— "The good news is all press is good press, whether it's a neighborhood newsletter, a friend's blog, or the local newspaper or hipster 'zine. For an artist building a career, press is important. It generates interest, exposes the work to a new audience, proves relevance, and serves as a historical record, so that your labors are remembered." **Cara Ober**, artist, editor, *bmoreart.com*, Baltimore, MD

————— "An article in Artforum will always be an article in Artforum. But an Artforum critic's pick is pretty good. The hierarchy of print and online might not change, but I think it's going to become way more lopsided. There will be a hundred times more online content about art than there will be print content." **Benjamin Sutton**, news editor, *Hyperallergic*

————— "Press is press. What a gallerist is looking for here is: One, are people writing about your work and Two, who is writing about your work. Just because a talented writer writes about you online rather than in print doesn't change either of those." **Edward Winkleman**, cofounder, *Moving Image Art Fair*; author, former director, *Winkleman Gallery*, New York, NY

———“I’d lie to you if I told you it wasn’t upset-  
ting to have someone say your work sucked. I try to  
be philosophical and say that good art has never  
been about being popular. You can rationalize why  
it’s not such a bad thing, but it still stings. It’s like  
when someone tells you your work is ugly, they’re  
saying you are ugly. You’re still like, ‘Oh, gee, I’m  
sorry that I’m ugly.’ You take it personally.” **Fred  
Tomaselli, artist, Brooklyn, NY**

———“I think the lack of press is worse than  
bad press. If you are making work no one cares  
much about, that’s a much bigger problem. For  
an artist’s career to be very well respected and  
discussed, you need all the signifiers of quality to  
kick in: curators, critics, galleries, and collectors.  
That includes coverage in the art magazines.”  
**Knight Landesman, publisher, Artforum**

———“There are many, many contexts where  
the first introduction people have to your work is  
the written word. What you write about your work  
ends up in press releases and reviews. If you can  
write, it gives you so much more control.” **Edward  
Winkleman, cofounder, Moving Image Art Fair;  
author, former director, Winkleman Gallery,  
New York, NY**

———“Do I read artist statements? No! I don’t  
know who came up with that idea, either. Why make  
the work if you’re going to write the statement  
about it?

“Everyone wants things to be packaged and  
predigested so there is very little effort on the part  
of the viewer to come to terms with it. For me, much  
of the work remains ambiguous and I don’t expect it  
to offer up answers immediately.” **Shane Campbell,  
Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago, IL**

Should you include bad press? People are divided on this one.  
We pretty much agree with the old adage that says there’s no such  
thing as bad press. Our rule of thumb is to include all press—even  
negative press—unless the review is a total train wreck, either  
because it is extremely critical (as in, “that show was an unmiti-  
gated disaster” or “this artist has no talent whatsoever”) or  
because it fundamentally misrepresents your work.

In assessing how negative a negative review is, try to be  
aware of how sensitive you are and be careful not to interpret a  
mixed review as an extremely negative one. The fact that a critic  
didn’t like your favorite piece in a show, for example, is not a  
reason to exclude the review from your résumé, especially if the  
rest of the article was complimentary. Remember that it is very  
difficult to get any press in the first place, so it’s a big deal if your  
work is commanding attention—regardless of the critic’s  
conclusion.

## ARTIST STATEMENT

When you apply for a residency, grant, or academic program, you  
will almost always need to submit some kind of statement. If  
there is one universal truth in the art world, it is that everyone  
dreads writing an artist statement. And plenty of gallerists will  
tell you they never read them. So why do you have to write one?  
Especially now, before anyone’s asked for one?

Because a lot of people in the art world *do* read them, such  
as curators and selection committee jurors. And they take them  
seriously.

The reason to write one now is that it takes most people a  
long time to come up with something they like. The process is  
painful enough, frankly, without a deadline looming. If you start it  
now, you can put it down and take a break without feeling the  
pressure to finish; after a few days, you can pick it back up with a  
fresh start. Even after you’ve “finished,” you may reread it a  
month later and decide to rewrite some parts. And the cold, hard  
truth is that you will, eventually, have to submit one. Better to  
have a solid, general statement that you can tailor to specific

opportunities as they arise than to scramble at the last minute to write one from scratch while putting everything else in your application together.

Keeping the function of an artist statement in mind will help you write one. Your eventual reader will look to your statement to get a better understanding of *what* you are trying to do in your work and *why*. That doesn't mean positing a comprehensive theory of your place in art history or psychoanalyzing your motivation—attempting either can be bad for your health (and worse for your statement). You just want to describe, as simply as possible, what it is that you do, or show, or say, with your art, and what it is that makes you interested in doing, showing, or saying that. If there is something unique or important to you about your process, talk about that, too.

Sometimes artists complain that it is impossible to convey the true nature of their work through images. Well, this is one of the only places where you get to explain, *first person*, what's missing. In that way, an effective artist statement is essentially a concise, written version of the conversation that might take place during a studio visit. Your statement is a chance to introduce that person to your art. Just remember that your reader is often going to be someone who didn't get a degree in studio art, who has never tried to do what you're doing, whose idea of what's "obvious" is very different from your own.

Also keep in mind the length: one hundred to three hundred words. That's less than one page of this book. Never go over a page.

There are many ways to tackle a writing project, so adjust our advice to your style. The best way, we think, to end up with a good artist statement is to follow these steps:

### 1. *Brainstorm.*

Jot down all your ideas in whatever order you think of them. The point is to get all your ideas on paper until you've thought of every aspect that's important or related—you'll cut down later, so let the ideas flow at this stage. Be yourself and think hard about where the work is coming from. Use all the W's—who, what, when, where, why—and, especially for process-oriented work, the "how."

————— "Eventually someone is going to request an artist statement, whether it is required for a grant application or someone is writing a press release for an upcoming exhibition. My suggestion is to start with something basic—a few sentences—and then tailor it as needed. It is important to give the party requesting a statement exactly what they are asking for. This most often involves simple and clean language. If the request is for something descriptive, writing something poetic is shooting yourself in the foot. Start with language that articulates the foundation of your beliefs and practice. Then elaborate; cut; redo. If it's unclear what someone is looking for in a statement, ask the person to clarify. And don't be afraid to ask for an example." *Michelle Grabner, artist, educator, critic, curator, Milwaukee, WI*

————— "I've told a few artist friends to get somebody else to write their artist statements. If they have a writer friend or somebody that they can trade a drawing for a press release or a statement, they should." *Benjamin Sutton, news editor, Hyperallergic*

————— "A poorly written artist statement is not a significant turnoff because visual artists are not always good writers. They should not be summarily dismissed because they can't write well about their work. I think that idea is absurd." *Dexter Wimberly, executive director, Aljira, Newark, NJ*

————— "You can work in drastically different mediums, but it needs to be clear that it's still from the same brain." *Denise Markonish, curator, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA*

—“You’re good at what you are good at. Writers are not asked to be visual artists; no one is asking that visual artists become highfalutin writers for their artist statements. The goal of your artist statement is to clarify and state your intentions. Do not add florid language and overthink it. The jargon isn’t necessary or desirable. Most of the time, especially for emerging artists, it can create a stumbling block between your reader and your work.” **Sarah Lewis, author, curator, assistant professor at Harvard University; former member of President Obama’s Arts Policy Committee**

—“No amount of poor padding with theory is going to make work look any more convincing or intriguing than it already is. I look at everybody’s images first. Then I go to project statements. Then I read the artist statement. I am looking for plain language: ‘I am doing this and I am going to do this thing with it.’” **Shannon Stratton, William and Mildred Lasdon chief curator, Museum of Arts and Design, New York, NY; founder, former director, Threewalls, Chicago, IL**

—“Last year, I applied for a grant and I didn’t get it because my artist’s statement was ‘insufficiently earnest.’ I resented having to write the statement at all, so I made it sarcastic and funny and I lost the grant because of that. So, if you want to succeed, don’t do something stupid like that and piss people off.” **Bill Davenport, artist, critic, Houston, TX**

—“If more artists wrote honest artist statements, they would be more meaningful. I often find that they write what they think the art world wants to hear. Which is never what I want to hear.” **Denise Markonish, curator, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA**

## 2. Outline.

Look at all the words and ideas you have on paper and put them into an order, a structure, that makes sense to you. Not everything from your brainstorm needs to end up in your outline. Only a small percentage of what you’ve jotted down will get to the heart of what you’re doing.

## 3. Draft.

Take your outline of ideas and turn each line into a full sentence, tying them together into paragraphs. Don’t worry about how things sound at this point; just bang out the sentences quickly and as naturally as you can.

## 4. Edit.

This is when you worry about how things sound. Get rid of jargon. Trust us here: even the most complicated and profound concepts can be explained clearly, without relying on jargon. And three syllables are not always better than two. You’re not out to impress people with your vocabulary (or your thesaurus). If you want to impress them, come up with a direct, honest description that leaves your readers feeling





like they understand more about your work than they did before reading your statement. One very effective way to start editing is to read your statement out loud to someone who knows you well enough to say whether it sounds like *you*.

5. If you're not happy, begin again!

6. *Proofread.*

By the time you get to this step, you will have reread your statement so many times that you cannot possibly expect to hunt down every typo. Ask someone to do it for you. Put it down for a week, then proof it again yourself.

7. *Don't skip step 6.*

As your work evolves, you should update your artist statement so it's true to what you're doing now, not five years ago (or even six months ago).

We are not including sample artist statements because your statement needs to reflect what is unique about *your* work and be written in *your* voice. Reading other people's statements won't help you achieve either goal. Following the instructions above, however, will.

Or, you can get someone else to write your statement for you. A writer friend is the obvious choice, but an artist friend who understands your work may have an easier time writing your statement than his or her own.

Even when you are coming up empty, thinking about your statement makes you think about the work. It makes you think about your influences, your peers, your place in art history, your process, and your goals. These are all good things that will improve your practice.

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### *Give Us a Break*

We now present a short list of phrases that plague artist statements every year. Do yourself (and your reader) a favor and don't use them. It's not that these kinds of phrases aren't sincere. They just won't help anyone understand your work or your intentions.

"My work is intuitive."

"My work is about the macro and micro."

"My work is about the organic and synthetic."

"My work is a personal journey."

"My work is about my experiences."

"I pour my soul into each piece."

"I've been drawing since I was three years old."

If you find yourself identifying with these sentences, or you've written one (gasp!), think about the underlying reasons for the statements. Almost every artist could say that his or her work is "intuitive" or a "personal journey," so what makes your process or journey different? What inspires you? If you dig deeper, you might find a way to explain the overall sentiment in a more personal and original way.

That said, under no circumstances should you claim, as we have seen in some artist statements, that "My work is unlike anything that's been done before." All work is like *something* that's been done before. Know the history and context surrounding your work. People want to know how you're taking what's been done and making it your own.

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You should always write a cover letter when you submit materials, whether they ask for it or not. (We'll explain how to write a cover letter when applying for a grant or residency in chapter 6.) This is your chance to demonstrate how much you know about the program and why you, in particular, belong in it. Go through a mini version of the same process you used for your artist statement—brainstorm, outline, draft, edit—to write your cover letter. Similar guidelines apply: be direct and simple and avoid metaphysical complexity and pseudointellectual jargon.

For email submissions, the body of your email acts as your cover letter so it should follow the basic format below (without the addresses). *Never* CC a bunch of people with the same submission. Send your submissions one at a time, using people's full names (never "Sir or Madam" or "To Whom It May Concern"). If you think emailing a form letter to a bunch of people at once will save you time, you might as well save even more time and not send anything at all.

Tips when writing a cover letter:

- Show passion for the space/opportunity.
- If it takes a tremendous effort to think of why you would be good for the venue or the opportunity, maybe it's not that great of a fit after all.
- Highlight the most important entries in your résumé.
- Never use "I hope to" when you can say "I will." Or "I try to" when you can demonstrate that you *do*. Be confident. Instead of "I hope to hear from you," say "I look forward to hearing from you." Etc.
- Use the active voice, not the passive. Bad: "The piece *was completed* in April." Good: "*I completed* the piece in April." Avoid "to be" whenever possible, and pull the action out of nouns and adjectives where it tends to hide in passive sentences.

Address how you will add to what they're doing. What interesting dialogue will your work contribute to/inspire? Be specific! Name other artists they show and how your work relates.

LETTERHEAD

Date

Contact Name

Venue Name

50 Cranberry Street

Louisville, KY 12345

Dear Contact Name:

Start by saying who you are and what you want. If you share an acquaintance with the person you're writing to, mention the name of the acquaintance.

Explain why you think you're a good fit for the venue. Show the venue that you understand what it is and what it does. Say what makes you interesting and how you will contribute. Say "Thank you for the opportunity" or something along those lines.

Sincerely,

Sign your name

Type your name

Artist Name, 20 Pineapple Street, Los Angeles, CA 90001  
www.artistname.net

—————"I am looking for nouns. Nouns and verbs. Anything that starts off too flowery, I crumple up and throw away." **Leigh Conner, CONNERSMITH, Washington, D.C.**

—————"I will read artist statements but artists don't have to be great writers. Actually, many of them are terrible writers, which is fine, since that's not the primary "language" of theirs that I'm listening to. If they have taken the time to write a text, I will read it and it can often be quite useful, though artists shouldn't be overly concerned with crafting a perfect, publishable piece.

"While it's great that art schools spend more time teaching practicalities, sometimes it can backfire and all the statements begin to sound the same. I prefer how different the conversations can be. Much like being friends with someone, they don't tell you how to be friends with them. They act a certain way and you know." **Shamim Momin, director/curator, LAND, Los Angeles, CA; former curator, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY**

—————"One of the nice things that we are sometimes fortunate to do is sit on panels for awards and residencies. Those are invaluable opportunities to see things we haven't seen before. I am always curious to see the way an artist articulates what they are doing in the studio visit or as an artist statement that gets briefly read in the half-light of a projected image." **Franklin Sirmans, director, Pérez Art Museum Miami; former curator of contemporary art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art; former curator of the Menil Collection, Houston, TX**

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**Should I pay to submit work to a show?**

Paying for people to look at your work can become very expensive, very fast. Sometimes it's justified, as with nonprofits that use the money to cover the costs of processing applications (in addition to the labor involved, submission platforms charge a fee) and exhibiting work. That said, *do your research* and make sure you understand where the money is going. If it looks sketchy, it may very well be.

——— *"I would definitely research the venue and the jurors. With the Internet, you can find out pretty fast if this is the right show to apply to. There are higher-profile ones and when you are starting out, applying can be a good idea. It can be expensive though, so you really want to do your homework. Make sure your work is the kind that institution has shown before and that the curators are interesting."*

**Andrea Pollan, owner, Curator's Office,  
Washington, D.C.**

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Be smart about when you send in a submission. Most gallery folks have Sundays and Mondays off, so if you send something at 10 p.m. on a Saturday night, your email will be buried by Tuesday morning when they're back at work. Look at the venue's schedule so you don't email the staff the day of an opening (or the day after), when no one will look at your submission and your email will quickly fall to the bottom of everyone's inbox. The same principle applies to art fairs: find out which ones the venue participates in and hold off during the days just before and after. (Obviously, if someone asks you to send in your materials on or by a certain date, that trumps these general guidelines.)

Galleries tend to have more group shows in the summer and are therefore most open to considering new artists in late winter through early spring, when those shows are planned. If you hear through the grapevine about a particular theme for a show that a gallery or curator is working on and it relates to your work, go ahead and send them an email. But read chapter 7 first.