



Your Portfolio – a must for all craft producers

Professionals, non-professionals, serious amateurs, and even not so serious amateurs must all keep a professional quality portfolio. Your portfolio is a permanent record of your work, your educational experience, where you sell your work, and insight into your creative process. It is an organized collection of high-quality images (digital, photos and/or slides) of your work, your resume or Curriculum Vitae (C.V.), your artist statement, your artist biography, an artist portrait, any press clippings/writings about you and your work, invitations to craft exhibitions you have participated in, along with your post cards, business cards, etc.

You will need it when you apply for an exhibition, a grant or scholarship, approach a gallery, apply for a bank loan, or just explain your work. It should be presented in a binder that is portable, easy to browse through and can be updated regularly.

If you have not yet put together a portfolio, here are some tips:

Along with professional quality images of your work and yourself, your portfolio will contain at least two and possibly three written documents. They are your resume (or Curriculum Vitae, or C.V.), your artist statement, and your artist biography. You may also want to include a price list and image list.

Your resume, or C.V., is a list of your education, work experience, teaching experience, exhibitions, collections, commissions, and other accomplishments and interests (including a list of any important articles printed about your work, media coverage you have received, galleries or agents who represent you, and any organizations you belong to). It should be no more than five pages long and it should focus on your most recent activity first.

Your artist statement talks about who you are and what motivates you creatively. It gives the reader insight into your creative process: why you do what you do, why you choose to work in a particular medium, and what ideas, issues or concerns you are attempting to express in your work. It should be no longer than one page (about three paragraphs).

Your artist biography is a concise overview of you and your work. It is generally a summary of the most important and relevant information about you as a craftsperson drawn from your C.V. and artist statement. Include a biography in your portfolio when there are things in your resume and artist statement that you want to highlight, bring attention to, or were not covered elsewhere. Your bio should be no longer than two pages. If your C.V. is more than 4 pages long, include a biography as a summary.

Writing an Artist Statement

Most people find it relatively simple to write a resume and bio, but an artist statement is often more challenging. I have read artist statements that range in size from a few sentences to many pages. Its length usually has nothing to do with the quality of its content. It attempts to answer the question: why did this person make this thing?

Here are some points to think about when putting your artist statement together:

Talk about your work itself. Explain about the materials you use and why you choose to use them. What are their features? Do you use recycled materials? Are they rare or collected materials? Are they produced locally or are they exotic? What is unique about them? Why are you using these and not something else? Talk about the skills

and techniques you have mastered in order to make your work. Have you developed any unique techniques? How long has it taken you to master these? How did you learn them and who taught them to you? How much time do you put into each piece? Do you use traditional techniques that have been passed on to you? Do you intend to pass on your techniques to others?

Talk about your inspiration. Some people think this is the key to an artist statement. However, all the artist statements I have read, the ones most useful are those that speak equally about the work and the artist's inspiration. Too often, statements that go on and on about esoteric things that don't have any real meaning or provide any insight into why the artist made this thing.

When you talk about your inspiration, talk about where you get your image source from and what attracts you to it. Is there anything about your personal heritage that inspires you? Are you interested in carrying on a tradition? Be honest here. If you don't know why you are attracted to using, e.g., textural elements in your work, just say you don't know why and then offer a few possible reasons... "maybe it is the tactile feel, maybe it is the emotional response I get from the combination of texture and colour...I don't know, but I do know when I am finished a piece that I am particularly proud of, it really doesn't matter why I chose to use the elements I did, I am just happy that I did".

After you answer these questions start to think about the purpose of your artist statement - to provide insight into why you make the things you do, what challenges you to continue making them, and what you hope to accomplish by making the things you do. Write it as if you are having a conversation with a friend who wants to know about your work.

Throughout your career as a craftsperson you will be called upon many times to explain what you are doing and why. A well presented portfolio of your work will go a long way to answer those questions for you.

- Jeff Collins