

# **Artist Statement Writing with Ellen Angus**

**The Art of Becoming That Which One is not and that Which One Already Is.**

*A workshop for New Midland Group and 1525 collective*

*Nottingham Contemporary 4th October 2021.*

## *A proposal*

My main thinking about this session was to reflect on the many different iterations of an artist statement, that over time this piece of writing that often uncomfortably pins ones practise down is constantly shifting and takes on different shapes, masks, performances. I see the artist statement as something that is on the one hand often quite performative – creating an explanation of your practice but on the other hand it can feel like truth saying, bearing all. It can change depending on its context- perhaps an application for a funding bid, perhaps a university application etc.

Some artist statements seem to take on a life of their own - going rogue, reeling in the surreal or the fictive. I myself have followed a variety of rabbits down different rabbit warrens. At times, whilst writing an artist statement, I might think I have found a kind of context that all my work sits under neatly until one work would rebel and become tyrannical and then set up camp somewhere else causing everything to shift over, giving me a totally different perspective to the one that I had before. At other times I felt I was casting ahead- looking towards future work and becoming completely bored of the 'older' work that I was attempting to relate my statement to. How are you suppose to write an artist statement if you are changing/evolving and shapeshifting?

So, I suppose I'm saying all this in order to say writing an artist statement is far from easy- and I struggle with it along with just about everyone else I know. So we are going to unpick some of the things we struggle with and see what correlates with the group. And we are going to look at the ways in which the process of writing an artist statement can be in itself transformative, perplexing and exciting because it gets you really looking, reflecting and examining the work, its purpose and your reasons for making it. In the afternoon we're going to look more closely at our own past, present and future artist statements and selves. During the day we will move around the room.

There is room here to chop and change and collaborate on how we want to use our time. We will take an look at our own artist statements – past and present artist statements- the ones we choose to bring – what worked about that particular iteration and what didn't. Have we discovered anything through this process? Practical exercise- to write 200-250 words this could be the beginning of your statement or it could be random words that aid your process. For those that feel comfortable we will read them out (for the length of time that a match takes to burn out.)

Then we will talk collectively about the process of becoming and evolving and our relationship to flux and our relationship to stillness/ inertness. Finally we will reflect - What does it mean for time to slow down, how has the pandemic affected peoples view of themselves/art making/ artist statements. I suppose how the process of forming an artist statement provides a moment to reflect on the ways in which we evolve/don't evolve/the need to evolve/the need to reflect and need to just be...

Participants should bring a past and current artist statement if they have them. If they do not have them then that is ok!

## ***What took place?***

During this session we introduced ourselves and our practices and we spoke about our own experiences when writing artist statements. We spoke about institutions and funding bodies and the time and energy that goes into constantly applying for opportunities and the kind of power dynamics that this sets up for an artist and the feeling of exploitation around this kind of labour which is never taken into account. We wrestled with this as a group.

During our discussions, one participant suggested we create dark statements for each other. These dark statements were ways for us to be creative when writing about our own work. We gave ourselves license to write however we sought fit. We created them for each other, for our new and old friends, comrades, companions. For the people around us that we go to for support and those people that we give support to. The people we want to be around.

This resulted in some really amazing work for some people they were stepping stones to constructing a professional statement for others they were creative pieces, some more like poetry, art works in themselves.

We then looked at a text by Gilda Williams- How to write an artist statement and we approached the text with a critical eye. As a group there was a sense that a lot of us were irritated by the text..It felt like it was provoking us to almost do the exact opposite. What it would be like to write an artist statement that went against these very defined structures?

After this we generated A.I artist statements - which put me in mind of some of the Surrealists approaches when stimulating creative activity and writing by using chance within assemblages of writing. Using A.I to construct a statement means you give up control over the writing. However we learnt that sometime the algorithm is deeply flawed as one of the generators we used came back with some problematic and racist statements for our participants. That's the problem with the internet when algorithms are designed by inhumane humans.

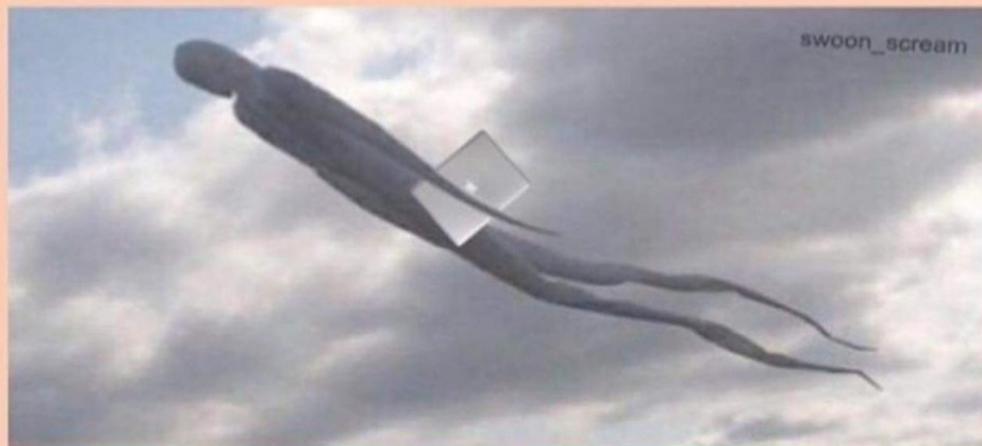
By the end of the session we decided that we no longer wanted to construct an artist statement for a professional body, the dark statement and creative approach had become more important. and instead we split up into smaller groups and got to know each other more.

friend: hey come over let's hang out

me: can't. trying to save money and be productive today

friend: bring your computer to my place, we can just lay around working on stuff near eachother snacking and sharing songs and memes and thoughts here and there and I won't demand your attention or get weird when you go into a phone-scrolling trance and I won't make you go to an expensive cafe in 40mins of traffic just to sit down and gossip until we go home drained and broke and wrongfully psycho-analyzed... my fridge is fully stocked and the energy at my place is super chill rn

me: omw



Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/aredotna/>

## **Quotes and Readings whilst in the space**

### **Joan Didion Preface to Slouching Towards Bethlehem a non-fiction work**

*I am not sure what I can tell you about these pieces. I could tell you that I liked doing some of them more than others, but that all of them were hard for me to do, and took more time than perhaps they were worth; that there is always a point in the writing of a piece when I sit in a room peppered with false starts and cannot put one word after another and imagine that I have suffered a small stroke, leaving me apparently undamaged but actually aphasic. Aphasic means involving or exhibiting loss or impairment of the power to use or comprehend words. Loss of Language.*

**Didion's writing to me offers up a brave vision of the world..terrifying and tender and ominous and most importantly uniquely her own. What writers do this for you and why..?**

### **GILDA WILLIAMS**

- + attracts interest in your work—from gallerists, collectors, awarding bodies, admissions officers, university boards; other artists, and more;
- + reflects your art and true interests believably back to you;
- + assists you in your thinking as you continue making art;

*Usually, the boredom factor is in exact proportion to the degree of imprecision; smart detail will make your statement stand out and hold interest. Be specific; your statement should be uniquely applicable to your artwork alone. Avoid overused art metaphors; re-read about concrete nouns and adjectives, and creating images through words. Usually, your readers are looking for what honestly motivates you and keeps you going.*

### **One Continuous Mistake- Four Noble Truths for Writers by Gail Sher**

#### **International Art English**

[https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/16/contents/international\\_art\\_english](https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/issues/16/contents/international_art_english)

#### **Artist Statement Generator**

<https://hyperallergic.com/63686/the-best-artist-statement-generator-ive-seen-yet/>  
(info about generator)

<https://500letters.org/index.php> Jasper Rigole

<http://10gallon.com/statement2000/>

<https://www.artbollocks.com/generator.html>

## *Summary*

In the end the group collectively made the decision to not write professional artist statements but left instead with a piece of writing that fulfilled their need for the day. We had really generous discussions with participants contributing and collaboratively steering the workshop.

*Many Thanks to ;*

*Colette*

*Wingshan*

*Nellie*

*Caine*

*Lachlan*

*Quinn*

*Leonor*

*Ann-Marie*

*Roo*

*Millie*

*Shadia*

*Sahjan*

*Aisling*

*New Midland Group and Nottingham Contemporary*