

# ARTIST GUIDE: TELLING YOUR STORY



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art works

# INTRODUCTION

One of the appealing things about buying work directly from the artist is that people like to know something about you, and to have an insight into how you created the object they've bought. The things artists often take for granted can be fascinating to others. Audiences, buyers and curators all want to know something about you and your work.

It's often hard to put down in writing something which you've been absorbed in for a long time. It's vital, though, that you go through this process. This guide will help you think about the things to include and how to tell your story. If you can tell your story well, it should work for the media, on your website, in social media or in an artist statement.

# GETTING STARTED

Getting started is often the most difficult part of writing about yourself.

Here are some questions to help you through the process:

## **What do you want to say?**

What are the interesting things about what you're doing? What do friends ask you about? What do other artists find most fascinating? It might not be the thing that you think is most important, but if that's what people are most interested in, it's a good way to draw them in. It can be helpful to chat with friends and colleagues to gauge what they find interesting about your work – it might not be what you expect.

## **Who do you want to say it to?**

Who's your audience? Are you writing an artist statement for an expert curator, or some visitor information for the open studios guide? Whoever you're writing for, the principles are the same – the style should be clear, and easy to understand for that audience. It's helpful to take a step back and see your art from the point of view of your audience and potential purchasers.

## **Why do you want to say it?**

What do you want to achieve? Do you want to encourage people to visit an exhibition or to buy your work? Do you want a curator to accept your work for an exhibition, or attract the attention of a journalist so they write an article about you? Have your goal in mind when you start writing. If your main aim is to sell your work, you may want to attract people's attention with interesting insights, but don't forget to tell them that it's also for sale.

## **How are you going to tell the story?**

Are you telling the story yourself or via someone else, such as a journalist? Are you talking live on air or is it written down? Will it be online or in print?

All these things affect how you tell your story. Read or listen to similar articles to give you an idea of what works best.

## **How long should it be?**

If you're writing an artist statement, it probably needs to be no more than half a side of A4. For a press release, the main information should take up around a side of A4. You can add more detailed information in the notes or as links.

When you're writing for your website, it's often a good idea to write in short chunks and then link to other pages for people who would like more detailed information.

For social media, there are limits. For example, Twitter limits posts to 280 characters, which can sometimes be a challenge. Facebook and other platforms have limits too, although in most cases, it's best not to go up to those limits, but to keep your posts short and to use images to illustrate. You can find out more about posting on social media in our Social Media Guide.

# ARTIST STATEMENTS

When you're writing an artist statement, remember to be yourself. Write the statement in the first person, for example "I make huge ceramic vessels inspired by the shapes and patterns of the natural world".

- Answer the questions Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?
- Include some information about yourself, where you're based, what you make, and dates of any important exhibitions or events – that's the Who? Where? What? and When?
- Write about the Why? and How? – what inspires you to make your work, and how do you create it?

# SOCIAL MEDIA

Say something interesting in a few words. Include images to show work in progress or behind the scenes. You can broadcast live to most social media platforms.

# HOW TO MAKE YOUR STORY NEWSWORTHY

Whether you're contacting journalists, adding your story to your website or sharing elsewhere, it's helpful to think about the things that might make it newsworthy.

- Am I breaking new ground? Is it the first/biggest/best? 'Firsts' make great news stories. Maybe you've invented a new technique, you're the first person from Somerset to exhibit at a new national venue, or you've created something new and different.
- Is it controversial? You might not want to court controversy, but if you do, it can make a good story. Maybe you're making a big statement, using your art in a local protest or to address an important issue.
- Does it link to a topical story? If there's something in the news that relates to your story, it might be a good idea to act fast and get your news out there while it's current.
- Is there a campaign, anniversary or event?
- Linking to local or national campaigns and events is a good way to get your story in the news. Local media like to make connections with things that are happening nationally, and if you can provide a local link, that could get your story in the news.
- What is unusual and interesting about it? There must be something unusual or interesting about your story – that's what makes it news. Talk to friends and family about your work to see what captures their imaginations – it's often a good guide to what might interest others.

# WHAT WILL ATTRACT MEDIA COVERAGE?

To attract media coverage, you need:

- A really good story
- Something current – an exhibition coming up, for example or a workshop you're running
- Journalists will want someone interesting to interview – that could be you!
- It's always a good idea to send images with your news stories
- Think about what the story might look like on TV – what is there to film? The reporter will need something interesting to look at as well as someone to interview.

# WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

Some journalists would rather have a personal email, while others still like to receive a press release. Either way, it's good to put one together to help clarify your thoughts and make sure you've got all the information you need.

Here's what goes in a press release:

- Date
- Write in the third person
- Use a short, eye-catching headline – you don't have to be clever. Just state simply what the story is eg "Local earth pigments used to create new landscapes of the Somerset Levels"
- Who, what, where, when, why & how? – make sure that you answer all these questions in the press release
- Attract the reader's attention in the first paragraph. This is the most important part of the press release. Tell the story in one or two sentences so that the persons reading it wants to go on to find out more.
- Not too long – keep to one or two sides of A4 with about three main points. Keep it simple, and use the press release to elaborate on the story you told in the first couple of sentences
- Make it easy to read – the person looking at this may not have much time and will be looking at lots of press releases. Make sure that you make the journalist's job as easy as possible
- Include a quotation from yourself (this should be in the first person); include something about why you made the work, what inspired you and your own thoughts on the story
- Add a quotation from someone else (also in the first person); ask them to say something about your work and why they like it



- Include event information, venues, phone numbers etc in the last paragraph. This is the information for the public that you want to be included in the news story
- Write 'ends' after information for publication
- Information after 'ends' is not for publication and includes your phone number, and any information about photo opportunities
- Make sure to include a contact name and number, and be available in case a journalist needs further information or wants to arrange an interview
- Include photos or details of photo or filming opportunities such as when you're installing an exhibition

# SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

DEVON OPEN STUDIOS

**Saturday 11 – Sunday 26 September 2021.**

Artists all over Devon will be throwing open their doors and inviting people to look behind the scenes of an artist's studio.

Over 300 artists are taking part in this year's Devon Open Studios which takes place from 11 to 26 September, with a range of free exhibitions, workshops and opportunities to see artists at work. Visitors to the county will be able to discover Devon's creativity, and locals will have the chance to celebrate the range of talent in the area.

The art and craft on display will include drawing, painting, sculpture, tapestry, ceramics, jewellery and glasswork. Artists range from new talent to experienced professionals, all keen to share their inspiration and creativity with visitors.

Five emerging artists have received bursary awards to support their participation in the event:

**Dinah Gibbons** will be showing her work at [The Angel Gallery](#) in Totnes. She embroiders items of lost clothing such as a dropped glove or found sock. She photographs each lost piece in its location, fascinated by how it found its way there. She then embroiders words and phrases inspired by her find and the feelings it creates – perhaps a question or statement.

**Ruth Helen Smith** has been inspired by local produce during the pandemic. With neighbours dropping round eggs and sharing plants for allotments, she began to think about how local produce brings community together, and how disconnected we are from the people and processes behind many items sold in supermarkets. Ruth began painting still lifes in illusionistic alcoves, reflecting on how

everything we bring into our homes marks a connection to the world. More recently in her paintings, these alcoves have become 'Wardian Cases', which were once used for transporting plants across the globe. Beyond their glass walls can be seen the paintings show views of the original homes of the produce depicted.

[Amelia Webster](#) paints portraits of everyday people. She enjoys spending time with someone, listening to what they have to say so that she can tell their story in paint. She has been creating portraits of business owners to celebrate her local high street. Amelia will be exhibiting her work at her studio in Old Pottery Court, Chudleigh.

**Nicola Barton** uses recycled silver to make handcrafted jewellery inspired by nature. Her imagination was captured by the mycelium of the honey fungus which she now uses to create textures in her rings, bracelets, brooches and other jewellery. Nicola will be exhibiting her work at Fursdon Barn Studio, Moretonhampstead.

[Alison Hannah](#) works with stoneware and porcelain, inspired by the moorland & coastline of Devon. She paints local scenes and has developed her own technique to add the paintings to her ceramics. Her own original poetic verse also features on some of her larger pieces, capturing the moments in both words and pictures. She will be exhibiting her work in North Huish near South Brent.

Painter **Anna Fitzgerald** is artist-in-residence at the [Powderham Castle](#), Kenton. She uses a full spectrum of colour along with metal foils to create an added dimension to her paintings which she coats with a smooth layer of resin. Her joyful, large-scale work is inspired angels and by folklore animals, especially foxes, badgers, stags and hares.

[Luna North](#) is moving from her attic and will be showing work in her brand new studio in Molland near South Molton. Inspired by the flora and fauna of her local area, she creates paintings and

prints of wildflowers, bees and butterflies. She explores the Devon hedgerows on Exmoor to walk and draw. Each picture aims to tell something about the story behind the plant, such as the primrose whose flowers stay open during the day and night, or the bee which lands on a delicate flower and bends the stem with its weight.

“Holidays to the South West are more popular than ever this year, and lots of people are taking day trips in the area, so we’re looking forward to showing local people and visitors the huge range of creative talent Devon has to offer.

“More artists than ever are taking part in this year’s event which offers a fantastic opportunity to meet artists working in their studios in some of Devon’s beautiful locations. During Open Studios, visitors will be able to see artists’ work, watch demonstrations and take part in activities. Of course, there’s also the opportunity to buy, and it’s much more satisfying to purchase a piece of art when you’ve met the artist, seen them working and heard about their inspiration.”

Devon Open Studios runs from Saturday 11 to Sunday 26 September 2021. Guides will be available from community venues, libraries and tourist information offices in early August. Devon Open Studios new website launches in late July.

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**For further information**

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