

The Artist Statement: Evolution

Coming up with the right language can be a boon to your marketing efforts. The right language helps you define yourself (before someone else does it for you); establishes your credibility; and helps you connect with audiences.

I've developed these pages to show, step by step, how I helped a client hone her artist statement. [Pattie Byron](#), who asked for my help in early 2004, has generously agreed to share these with you.



[Pattie Byron](#), *Twirling Skirt*, brass and stainless steel. ©The Artist

Pattie's Original Statement(s)

Version 1:

My art is about being authentic. Honoring my personality, background and integrity, It is about not faking it. To be authentic I need to be constantly raising the quality of my work and challenging my craftsmanship. My art communicates what I see, feel or an opinion I have. Sometimes the product is representational and other times it is abstract. As long as it is authentic, by my standards, I feel I am living up to who I am.

I am very interested in art history and love to research art from different time periods and cultures. If I can not find inspirations from what I encounter on a day to day basis, I visit a museum or read an art history book. Sometimes a single motif can launch months worth of work for me. Designs from the mid 1900's (works by Miró and Calder for example) has driven a lot of the designs I have been working with. I never use their designs (that would not be authentic) but I will pick out single elements to guide me and get me thinking differently.

The focus of my abstract work is on the basics, color, composition, the elements and principles of design. I want the viewer to bring the rest, they are free to tell me how it makes them feel or what they see or the memory they recall. It is about pure art rather than a theme or cause. my representational work is about using color to recreate the feeling of places I have been to. I have been recording the places I have been all of which has some impact on who I am and where I am going next. Perhaps it is a place similar to a place the viewer has come from or one they would like to find.

Regardless of the style or medium I am working in I am constantly checking myself against my criteria for "authentic". It keeps me well, authentic.

Version 2:

Currently my work is about celebrating and combining mediums. It is intriguing to cut out delicate flowers from the cold, industrial metal or to contrast opaque metal with translucent glass. The focus of the abstract work is formal: color, composition, the elements and principles of design. Viewers are invited to interpret meaning based on their own memories and bank of knowledge. More representational work uses color to recreate the feeling of places I have visited. I have been recording the places I have been all of which has some impact on who I am and where I am going next. Perhaps it is a place similar to a place the viewer has come from or one they would like to find.

My original thoughts were:

- Your statement is supposed to be about the current direction of your work. Leave out any references to the influences other artists.
- "Authentic," mentioned three times here and a hot word in coaching circles, doesn't mean anything to the reader and doesn't help them understand the work itself and what it's about. Leave it out.
- "Celebrating mediums" needs to be fleshed out. What, exactly, is that supposed to mean to a non-artist?

I also felt there was something she wasn't telling me in her statement. I wrote back.

A: Why do you choose metal?

P: Metal is a strong medium and it is physical work. I enjoy the challenge. I also like the potential that metal has-it can be used in interior and exterior spaces and you can create very large and durable pieces. It can also be interrupted into building structures and usable pieces such as furniture.

A: How do you think your work is different from other metal artists? Do you have a unique approach to the metal or a unique technique?

P: I think my work is unlike other metal artist because I hand grind unique patterns into the metal. It adds an extra layer of design-the design I cut out of metal and then the grind design. I have a background in oil painting and I apply the idea of layering paint to my metal designs. I also combine the metal with other materials such as collage, glass, ribbon, and beads.

A: Are your abstract shapes based on anything?

P: The abstract shapes are always based on a realistic object or idea. First I draw a representational object and then I begin simplifying and purifying the shapes. Currently my work is about body movement. Dance, running, jumping, using muscles, etc.

A: What do you mean "celebrating"?

P: Celebrating means finding joy in what the medium offers. For example, I "celebrate" the reflective qualities of metal and enjoy how the metal absorbs the colors around it.

A: In the metal pieces? Please describe.

P: This is directed at my paintings and I feel the statement should be about my metal only.

A: How long have you been recording the places? What kind of places? In what way do you record? Written? Photos? Sketches?

P: Again, this is about my paintings and I do not want to include it.

Aha! We are narrowing it down. She had tried to use a single statement to cover different types of work, without really distinguishing them. She's realizing that she needs to be specific in order to connect with the reader. I'm fascinated by these words: physical work, challenge, body movement. They brought more questions to mind.

P: I think my work is unlike other metal artist because I hand grind unique patterns into the metal. It adds an extra layer of design-the design I cut out of metal and then the grind design. I have a background in oil painting and I apply the idea of layering paint to my metal designs.

A: Actually, lots of metal artists apply a decorative surface. Can you tell me more about the patterns you use? It doesn't have to be wholly original. I'm just trying to call attention to the special qualities of your work.

P: I also combine the metal with other materials such as collage, glass, ribbon, and beads.

A: Collage isn't a material. What do you mean by this? That you collage the glass, ribbon & beads?

P: The abstract shapes are always based on a realistic object or idea. First I draw a representational object and then I begin simplifying and purifying the shapes. Currently my work is about body movement. Dance, running, jumping, using muscles, etc.

A: This is interesting! Can we concentrate on the body movement thing? Is there any reason you are focusing on this? (a background in dance, etc.?)

Then it got really interesting when Pattie wrote back . . .

Pattie wrote:

The decorative patterns I apply are many times dictated by shapes in the metal and the purpose of the piece, for example if the piece is about jumping I apply a lively line that suggests explosive movement. Other times I draw inspiration from the design industry, textiles, pottery, or architectural motifs. Most metal artist will apply one uniform pattern on the metal. I will layer pattern over pattern (like one does with paint) to create depth.

I collage photographs, magazine and newspaper clippings or colored tissue or decorative papers on to the metal.

I have always been an athletic soul. I run, play volleyball. I ski, hike, and weight lift. In the past I was a gymnast and played basketball. I have three joyfully active kids that also inspire my work. Twirling Skirt was a result of my daughter bouncing in the room in her very best "twirling skirt" to show me how it flared out when she would spin. A Run In The Park is a piece that will communicate what the landscape looks and feels like when I run. The grinding represents the blurred and jarred picture I see and the shape explains zigzagging through the park and the piece undulates suggesting the hills in the terrain. I am amazed at our physical abilities and how much we express through movement. Alive! is about the excitement of being alive the swoosh is an active shape that suggests the title. I guess with this group of work I am exploring and making note of how we live in a physical world.

I had all the material I needed . . .

Here's what I came up with--all based directly on Pattie's words . . .

My work explores and documents the joy of physical movement, from dancing to running and everything in between.

I equate metal work with my athletic endeavors. Forcing the material to conform to a vision is challenging, physical work. The large, abstract shapes almost always begin with something witnessed in daily life or experienced on a run. They are engraved with layers of ornamental patterns that reinforce the theme.

Then I quickly wrote back and suggested we should change the word "work" in the third sentence to "labor" since we had used "work" in the two previous sentences. Pattie trusted this and now has a new statement:

My work explores and documents the joy of physical movement, from dancing to running and everything in between.

I equate metal work with my athletic endeavors. Forcing the material to conform to a vision is challenging, physical labor. The large, abstract shapes almost always begin with something witnessed in daily life or experienced on a run. The sculptures are engraved with layers of ornamental patterns that reinforce the theme, while their reflective surfaces react to surrounding color as a dancer responds to music.

Pattie's work will, undoubtedly, grow and change as she matures as an artist. As she said, it isn't all about movement. But this statement can help illuminate that particular body of work.

Your statement is not static. It's not something you put on the shelf and use only when you need it. It develops along with your work.