

## Why Write A Bio?

People interested in your art love to know another 'layer' rather than just looking at your work. They want to know what makes you tick, where your work is coming from, and maybe where it is going.

This advice below is gathered (ok, stolen) from many sources. Artsy is one – go to their website and look for more. This is mostly adapted from an Artsy article by Jessica Bachus

### Hit these Points with a bio

- The bio should summarise the artist's practice—including medium(s), themes, techniques, and influences.
- The bio should open with a first line that encapsulates, as far as possible, what is most significant about the artist and his or her work, rather than opening with biographical tidbits, such as where the artist went to school, grew up, etc. For example: *John Chamberlain is best known for his twisting sculptures made from scrap metal and banged up, discarded automobile parts and other industrial detritus.*
- The profile should be between 80 and 140 words. The ideal bio is ~120 words, though a tightly written 80-word bio is preferable to a longer bio that includes repetition and filler sentences.
- Write in third person. Yes, it seems weird we you write it in this detached manner but it will read better on the walls of a gallery. You can sprinkle some quotes in there too (when you write those it will feel even weirder!).

### Why 120 Words?

Researchers have found that visitors lose interest in wall labels after 150 words. Leave your reader wanting more by limiting your word count to **~120 words**. At most, a reader should take away **one or two key points**.

#### EXAMPLE

##### **John Chamberlain**

John Chamberlain is best known for his twisting sculptures made from scrap metal and banged up, discarded automobile parts and other industrial detritus. "My work has nothing to do with car wrecks," he has said. "I believe common materials are the best materials." With its emphasis on paint finishes and the raw materials', lines and seams, his work has been described as a kind of three-dimensional abstract expressionist painting. While his breakthrough work dates from the 1960s, most recently he has worked with large-scale photography. (85 words)

#### EXAMPLE

##### **Chris Schanck**

Furniture designer Chris Schanck is interested in materials and design processes that are not traditionally associated with luxury, mass-production, and standards of perfection. "If we accept the idea that an object doesn't have to be reproducible and doesn't have to mimic a commercial form, or process, then what are the limits of that?" Schanck asks. Among his best-known pieces are those that comprise his "ALUfoil" series, in which industrial or discarded materials are covered in aluminium foil, painted, and then sealed with resin. The final pieces are both durable and light. His methods characteristically involve both marginalised techniques as well as the help of marginalised members of his community. Schanck has a background in commercial model-making, and has produced commissioned works for Tom Ford. (124 words)

## Questions and Prompts to help you get started (Not all of these will be relevant)

### Physical

- What medium/media do you work in?
- What is your style like?
- What work or works can you talk about that will give a visual description of the above qualities?

### Subject matter

- What are common or characteristic themes in your work?
- What subjects drive the works or provide underlying themes?

### Art-Historical

- Who are your influences?
- Who are your peers or teachers?

### Popular Culture

- What areas of the arts or popular culture does this artist incorporate into his or her work?
- What other areas of the arts or popular culture does this artist engage with? E.g. creating theatrical sets, costumes, music videos, etc.

### Quotes

- Can any of the above questions be answered in a brief (1–2 sentences), engaging quotation from the artist?

## 6 Most Common Mistakes in Artist Bios

### Hyperbolic praise

Readers do not respond positively to unsubstantiated claims about an artist's importance (e.g. "Artist X is considered one of the most important artists of the post-war period," or, "Artist Y is widely regarded for her beautiful work"). Most readers will see right through trumped-up language and, even worse, may become suspicious of everything about you from then on. Don't hard sell. Numerous studies have shown that the hard sell doesn't work, especially for younger audiences who respond most positively to simple and authentic messages.

### The "laundry list of accomplishments"

Keep exhibition highlights and accolades to a minimum. These lists are tedious to read in prose format. They also take up precious space, which you could otherwise devote to a real discussion of your practice. There are certainly instances where it makes sense to include outstanding prizes or exhibitions. Try to find a way to naturally include mention in the normal flow of the text.

### Artspeak

Academic jargon and pseudo-theoretical writing are almost universally despised. We simply won't accept it – it doesn't fit with our philosophy and we don't want to have to explain what it means. If your bio is not clear, and in plain English, it won't get printed. Do not alienate your audience by giving them sentences they can't understand.

### Spelling and Punctuation

When writing, some best practices are:

- Make sure you have the spell check function turned on, and that your language preferences are set to UK English
- Have at least one other person, if not two, read over your text