

Do Ya EVN Art
Mate??

How to write for the arts!

Art

UNSW Student Life

@ ART & DESIGN

Contents

Grant applications

- What you need to know
- How to
- Example

Artist statements

- Why they're important
- How to
- Example

Press Releases

- What, Why?
- How to
- Examples

Reviews

- Why? For artists and writers
- How?
- Example

Profiles

- (for Why you need to know this
yourself and others)
- How to
- Examples

Feature Articles

- (essays) What are they? (Pro tip: Not
essays)
- How to
- Examples

Catalogue essays

- Yep, this one is an essay.
- How to

Getting Published!

Do ya even art mate??

Even if writing isn't a strength of yours it's something everyone in the arts will need to do at one stage.

To be the best artist, designer, curator you can be you will need to write about yourself and others at some stage. This publication has been put together to help you with form, style and language to make sure that your writing can be as great as the rest of your work is.

This publication is the product of the 2013 Writers Coordinator Kate Britton, 2014 Writers Coordinator Maria White and 2015 Writers Coordinator Lucinda Davison.

It has been put together to let you know why writing is something EVERYONE in the arts should know how to do. Good writing sets you and your practice ahead, it ensures you can clearly express your ideas and present your best self to funding bodies, galleries, the press and arts publications.

Enjoy it maaaaate!



Grant Applications

The average success rate for Australia Council grant applications is between 15 and 20%.

Presenting your work in the right way to funding bodies, potential exhibition or residency venues, or prizes is essential.

Every award or grant you apply for will be different; but there are some general rules of thumb that can help you get to that next round.

The details of what, when, where, and how should be clear and simply described. Include direction to more information. Include information about yourself. Think about who you are speaking to, and about whom the audience for your work is.

In reality, many details may be finalised as a project unfolds. Funding bodies understand this. Be as detailed and accurate as you can, and acknowledge information you are missing. The most important thing is to avoid sounding vague. Funding bodies need to trust that if they award you, you will deliver.

How?

- Do your research. Who are you applying to? Sadly, grants and awards are not always given on an artist's merit alone; institutions will also have their own agendas. If your work ties in to this, you are more likely to be funded. Read application guidelines and terms carefully. Read about the organisation's mission and goals. If you are applying to City of Sydney, for example, read the Cultural Policy. Relate your work to the organisation's goals.
- Use their language. If Arts NSW says it's 'all about partnerships', talk about partnerships. Before awarding any funds, an institution will have to demonstrate how a chosen project aligns with their goals. Make this easy! Relate your work to relevant institutional policies and goals.
- Describe the work simply. As with a press release, it should be very clear from a quick read what your project is, what it looks like, how it is experienced, and how it will be executed. Your work may be complex, but if it is so complex that it can't be explained, it is likely it won't appeal to funding bodies, which need to fully understand what a work is before committing to it.
- Clearly state your expected outcomes. When an organisation spends time or money, they want to see results. Clearly state what the outcomes, benefits and milestones of your project will be. Will it employ local artists? How many? Will it reactivate a disused space? Where? Will it engage a local community? How? Make these things clear, bearing in mind that (especially for public funds) the more 'measurable' the outcome, the better. How will you demonstrate if your work has achieved its goals? Giving a sense of this will make your application stronger.
- Include logistical details. Unlike media, funding bodies have a keen interest in the logistical details of how your project will be executed. Don't be vague – explain exactly how you will spend the time and money at your disposal. An application can be detailed and specific without being a novel – keep it as succinct as possible, while providing a level of detail that will assure funders that you are capable of executing the plan you present.
- Provide a budget. Almost all major funding bodies will require a budget with applications. A detailed budget should not list 'materials' at \$1,000. It should list individual materials, their cost per unit, required number, and (where possible) the supplier. Itemise your budget as much as possible, bearing in mind that you may have to acquit to this at a later date.
- If in doubt, ask! Almost all awards, tenders, and funding rounds will have an information service. Don't submit something if you are uncertain about the details – get online or on the phone and talk to someone. Finding someone within the organisation that can advise you on your application can be invaluable.

Example!

Julie Ryder 'On fabric: natural dyes & mordant printing' workshop - Sophie Kingsford-Smith.

I am applying for an Art & Design grant to assist in funding my place at a technique-based workshop run by Australian artist Julie Ryder, 'On fabric: natural dyes & mordant printing'. The workshop will be held over the course of five and a half days from Monday 5 – Saturday 10 January at the Sturt Gallery in Mittagong, NSW. This is an extracurricular activity that I believe will be of significant value to my emerging career as a fine artist and contribute to the development of my graduate attributes through assisting to develop the interdisciplinary nature of my work, and inform my understanding of the historical and cultural context of my practice.

Julie Ryder has become an important artist for my emerging practice. Her work predominantly deals with the historical textiles tradition of natural dyeing (dyeing with natural resources, such as plant materials). Dyeing textiles with natural substances has been used for at least 6000 years across various cultures, for example, it has become an important cultural practice in India, Japan and South America (Dean 2010, p. 12).

Ryder's practice differs from other artists dealing with natural dyeing as she approaches this technique from a scientific perspective; Ryder has a background in microbiology, hematology and pathology, and she often works in collaboration with scientists, which has included Ryder developing her own experimental method of dyeing cloth with moulding plant materials (Peoples 2009).

Likewise, my emerging career is steeped in approaching natural dyeing from an art/science intersection. Specifically, my practice is focused on investigating the processes involved in natural dyeing, such as the chemical reactions that occur during the natural dyeing process, and how these can be framed within a poetic perspective.

'On fabric: natural dyes and mordant printing' is directed at teaching a natural dyeing-based technique called 'mordant printing', which is a technique I did not have the opportunity to learn during my studies at UNSW Art & Design (formerly COFA) as it was not offered as an elective or as part of my Textile Art bachelor degree. Mordant printing is considered as a valuable textile technique, being used throughout African, European and Asian cultures for centuries (Dean 2010).

I believe this workshop will assist in rigorously developing my emerging career as a practicing artist through; enhancing my understanding of natural dyeing techniques, including mordant printing, as cultural practices and historic traditions; providing me with the opportunity to engage with an artistic whom has a strong scientific understanding of natural dyeing; and finally, adding to my technical vocabulary as I will be learning a new technique.

Subsequently it could be argued that attending this workshop will assist in filling a gap in my knowledge of traditional textile techniques and interdisciplinary art/science practices. I believe that this knowledge would also be of value to other students interested in textile art, textile design, interdisciplinary art practices especially art/science intersections, art based cultural practices and historic traditions, sustainable and environmentally friendly technologies, and the wider Art & Design community.

Thus through ARC assisting in funding this project, they would also be investing in the enhancement of the UNSW Art & Design community knowledge bank. Information I gain, including technical, historical and cultural, will be shared with the wider Art & Design community through writing an article/series of articles for one of the Art & Design publishing platforms, such as COFAtopia, highlighting what mordant printing is, how it is done, the ecologically sustainable benefits of the technique, and locating the significance of the technique within a historical and cultural context.

If successful, the Art & Design Grant will be used to assist in covering the cost of the workshop (\$690). I have attempted to keep costs to a minimum where possible; accommodation costs have been eliminated and living expenses significantly reduced as I will be staying with family whom live in Mittagong, and travel expenses will only consist of petrol money (c. \$50) as I will have access to a car for free. I will cover the material costs (\$50). I have already paid a \$200 deposit to secure my place at the Julie Ryder workshop and to demonstrate my commitment to, and enthusiasm for, this project. Thus I am asking for financial assistance in paying the remainder of the workshop cost (\$490).

As a full time student and emerging artist financial support for extracurricular creative endeavours is invaluable, and thus funding from ARC will be acknowledged in the article/s I write for Art & Design publishing platforms, as well as in any other research material published or exhibition promotional material that results from the workshop.

Artist Statements

At some point in your career as an artist, it is almost inevitable you will be asked to provide a written description of your practice and body of work in the form of an artist statement. These statements serve to provide insight into the themes your work explores, your broader practice, your goals and frameworks.

An artist statement can potentially be used in a number of forums. It can be published to accompany exhibition texts or catalogues. It can be used as a resource by media or researchers. It can be included in applications for funding, space, or awards. In each of these contexts, it should be a resource for readers to understand your practice as a whole – its overarching mediums, concerns, and subjects



How?

- Plan your statement. Ask yourself questions about your work that you want to answer in your statement. Think of words that you feel describe your practice. Think about your influences. Create a list of words related to these things, and think about how you can use these words in your statement.
- Answer the basic questions what, how and why. As with a press release or a grant application, an artist statement should – as simply and briefly as possible – explain what your work is (medium, scale, context, audience experience), how it is made and how it relates to previous work or influences, and why you have made it (what questions are you trying to answer, what are you responding to with the work, who is it for, etc.).
- Keep it short and simple. Your work may be complex, varied and filled with infinite and changing meanings. This doesn't mean your artist statement has to be. Providing insight into your work does not necessarily take away from an audience's ability to experience the work openly. Your statement should be a short, interesting and enlightening read, not an arduous and confusing endurance task – some of the best artist statements are only a few sentences long!
- Use language that suits your work. Your artist statement is a reflection of your work. If you make work about skate culture, don't write like Derrida. Use terms and styles that match your work. There is certainly a time and a place for academic writing, but your artist statement is for broader audiences, who may be deterred by overly complex terminology.
- Pay attention to the overall structure. Don't just string sentences together one after the other as they come to you. Take time to structure your statement in a way that is logical, easy to read, and flows easily from one sentence or paragraph to the next. A common approach is to begin with an overview statement, then move into more detail about specific ideas how your work relates to these, your practice over time, and a concluding statement summing up these points.
- Proofread your work and get a second opinion. This is true for all writing, but especially true of writing about your own work. It is easy to assume that things you take to be self-evident are communicated in your writing. A different reader, however, might have a different opinion.

Example!

The Invisibility of Blackness

Amala Groom

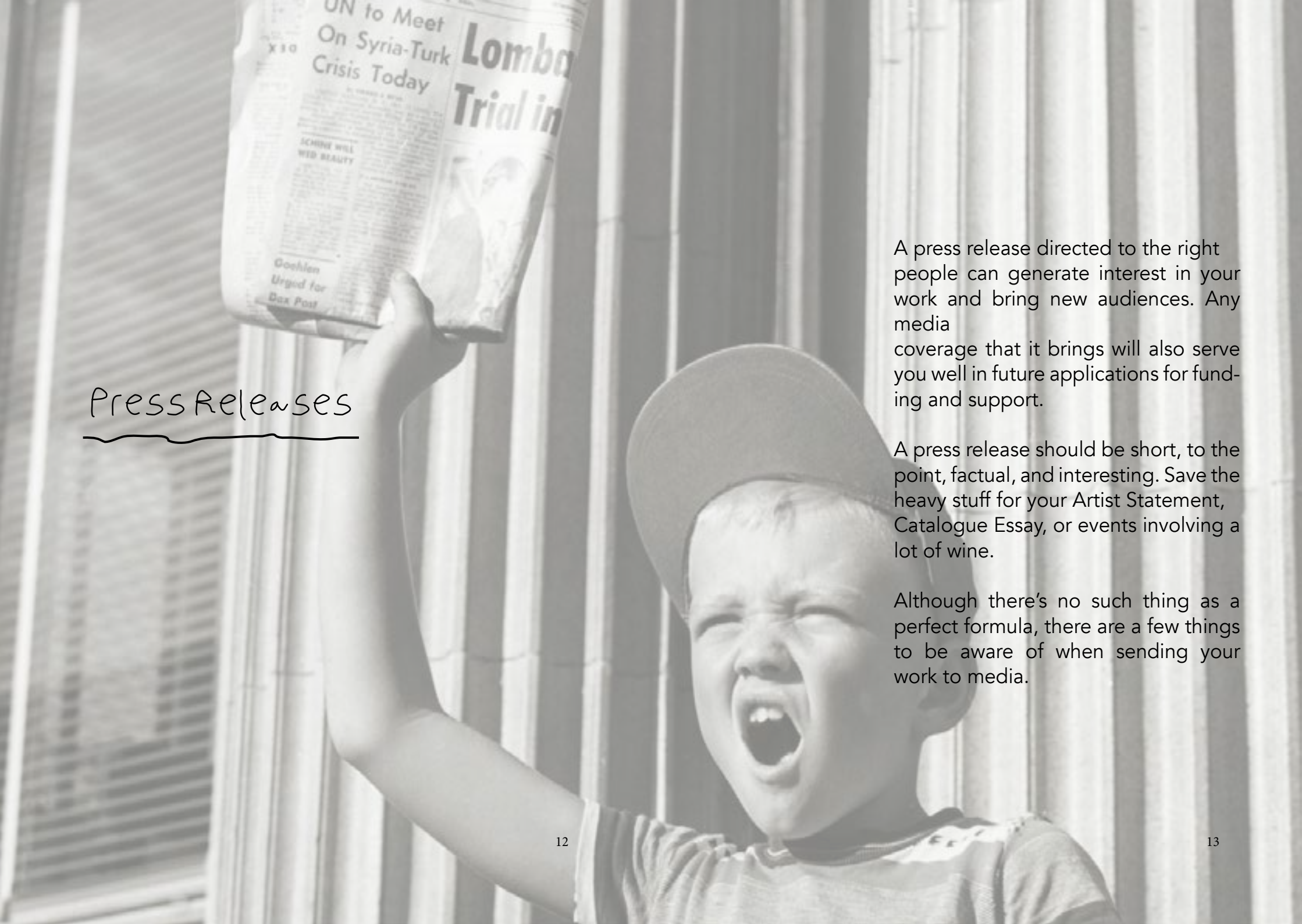
Artist Statement

The piercing gaze of the artist in the performance work *The Invisibility of Blackness* is at once confronting, as it is defiant. The work reads as reclamation of identity and embodies the essence of cultural authority passed down since time immemorial. The use of repetitious language unites the artist's matriarchal lineage with the present. Exercising dualistic reference, the work moves from daughter to mother to grandmother as the light fades until we are in total blackness.

Pre contact, Aboriginal people were invisible in the eyes of the colonial project, hidden from invasion under a sophisticated veil of an egalitarian society maintained under a strict social order.

Today, as the most researched people on earth, Aboriginal people are often the most invisible in Australian society. Our lands, territories and resources have been and continue to be illegally invaded and pillaged. Our holistic legal system with its focus on spiritual awareness has been usurped by the colonial project, which under its own system maintains no lawful claim to the invasion of Australia.

Recessive genes fade the skin rendering our Aboriginality invisible in the eyes of white Australia. Policy is written about us without us as if our right to self-determination is invisible. 244 years post invasion we are still prisoners of war in our own country and sadly, our birthright to practice and maintain culture remains invisible in the eyes of many.



Press Releases

A press release directed to the right people can generate interest in your work and bring new audiences. Any media coverage that it brings will also serve you well in future applications for funding and support.

A press release should be short, to the point, factual, and interesting. Save the heavy stuff for your Artist Statement, Catalogue Essay, or events involving a lot of wine.

Although there's no such thing as a perfect formula, there are a few things to be aware of when sending your work to media.

How?

- Keep it short and to the point. Most journalists and writers are time poor. When they pick up a press release, they may spend only a few seconds glancing at it to determine if it is something their audiences will be interested in. Unless your project is a major show, festival, or project with a lot of content, therefore, stick to one page max per release.
- Lead with details. Every media write up will need to include the basics – when, where and for how long your work is taking place. There's nothing more annoying than having to search for this information. It should be clear on your release – up front, in bold, in bullet points, etc.
- Provide a catchy headline. If a journalist only reads one thing, this will be it. Headlines should be clear, to the point, and descriptive. This could be as simple as the work's title and location. If a reader doesn't know what it is about after reading the headline, they probably won't read on.
- Describe who you are. They don't need your life story, but it should contain some basics – where are you from? What is your main practice? What else do you do/have you done? If you are emerging or early career, one to two sentences are enough.
- Describe the work in simple language. Your reader may not care that your work is a post-post-structuralist reading of Lacan's mirror theory paying homage to early Fluxus practice. Describe your work in clear simple language that everyone finds accessible. Don't just provide a conceptual justification of the work - describe it! What does it look/sound/feel like? What does it do? Why should the

reader be interested in it?

- Describe how it is experienced. Communicate how your work is experienced can be key getting a story written about it. Devote a sentence or so to describing how audiences will encounter it. What should people expect to encounter?
- Know your angle. What is it about your work that is new or exciting? What's unique about it? Think about what it is that will make your work stand out from the pile. Is it the first time it's been done? Will it appeal to a particular audience? Think as well about who you are sending the release to – is it appropriate for their audiences?
- Direct the reader to more information. Anyone wanting to pick up your story will need more information. The easier this is to find, the better. Do you have a website? Include the link. Are you available for interviews? Say so, and include contact details. Do you have great images of your work? Point your reader in their direction. You might want to include a 'hero image' with the release, but you should be ready to supply a range of extra hi-res images – promptly!
- Added extras. Once you've got these basic elements, you can think about what else you might like to include in your release. You might want to include a quote/s that media can use directly (these should be brief and conversational, punctuating text rather than becoming a main feature). If your work has received previous acclaim, you might want to include a quote. Don't go overboard with extras – think about what they are adding and if you really need them. It all comes back to the first point – keeping it short, sharp, and to the point.

14

Example!

In time and place: remnants of home

Gillian Lavery

Press Release

A house fire in December 2012, resulting in the loss of the artist's studio and artwork, prompted this body of research. In time and place: remnants of home navigates the terrain of grief and loss, the questioning of material worth, and the purpose of art practice that arose as a consequence of this experience.

Ideas of time, memory and value coalesce through a process-based art practice. The territory of drawing is approached from a background in textiles emphasising materiality and accumulative gestures, mark-making in ink, pencil and thread. The material residue of the fire, including a salvaged spinning wheel, inform the bodies of work within the exhibition, mapping the experience of the fire.

This show opens on the 28th of April at Kudos Gallery, 6 Napier Street, Paddington NSW 2021.

Dates: 29 April- 2 May 2015

A review is published after a writer has seen the work. This will not usually involve direct input from the producer, but rather assesses how effective or enjoyable you found the work or show to be.

Artists, writers, curators and all arts professionals in between should know how to write a review. They're important in assessing the art that surrounds us. Writing reviews will sharpen your abilities to write about your own art or curatorial practice and are essential for arts writers to know.

Reviews should contain your judgment of a work or a show, but what you write must be justified. If you loved it, you have to explain why. Were the ideas complex and challenging? Was it an innovative use of exhibition space? If you want to critique what you're reviewing you must explain why you are unsatisfied.

In a review it is important to give details so that readers can make up their own mind. You should provide description so they can imagine what the work looks, sounds, or feels like. Paint a picture of what the experience was like, make the reader want to experience it too!

Reviews

How?

- Again, do your research! For a review you will need to know what you're talking about. This is the fun part: go to the show, see the works! Talking to staff at the gallery, reading the catalogue essays, room sheets and artist statements are the best method of research.
- Plan your review: It is best to know what you would like to say about what you are reviewing. Planning will ensure that what you have to say will be clear, concise and cohesive.
- Title your work: This could mean using the show's title, it could be a pun, a short catchy observation. A title is important to let readers know what your work is going to be about and reviews especially should have them.
- Watch your language: When writing a review your language should be accessible, professional and descriptive. While there is room for some personable language it is important to be as descriptive as possible to convey the feeling of the works or show you're reviewing.
- Keep it short..ish: Reviews should be around 500 words in length. Obviously this isn't universal, but most will be around that mark. It's important to remember that a review is not an essay. It should be your value judgement of a show or work that you've seen, it should be concise and informative.
- Include information: Providing information at the end of your review is really important. It should include the dates the show is on, the location of the gallery, links to any relevant places including ticket details when applicable.
- Proofread, edit and get others opinions: All great writing happens in the editing process. Making sure you have others to read over your work is important, they can tell you if your writing is communicating your ideas well, if you need to be more succinct or if your grammar needs checking.

Example!

Taking Refuge in art - Annaliese Alexakis

United by a concern for the welfare of Australian immigrant detainees, The Refugee Art Project is a not-for-profit grassroots initiative that allows asylum seekers to find refuge in art.

They conduct regular workshops at Sydney's Villawood Immigration Detention Centre for a few hours a week, their self-expression allows refugees to exist as people, not victims of war living in constant fear of being returned to the countries from which they have fled. Through art, these detainees are able to convey things they might otherwise find difficult to put into words.

The result is deeply personal and highly provocative.

Perilous sea journeys, family left behind in war torn countries, mental illness, uncertainty, frustration, fear, hope, death and endurance have all marked the lives of these people and is reflected in their artworks. There are significant therapeutic benefits of art in this instance, with their self-expression allowing for reconciliation of past traumas. One refugee saying: "When my drawings are clean, I feel that my heart is clean." However, branded as "mental illness factories" by several advocates, refugees in detention centres live under conditions of extreme mental duress. Many of them suffer from anxiety and depression, which often translates into self-harm and suicide. Furthermore, the witnessing of these acts is traumatising for other detainees within the centre.

Whilst these art classes are greatly appreciated by detainees, they cannot improve an individual's wellbeing within this context. Director of The Refugee Art Project, Safdar Ahmed, said "One of the main difficulties is that refugees are allowed very few materials in detention. This is because the mental health of people kept inside our detention centres is so

poor that it's automatically assumed they will try to harm themselves." Their experiences of trauma and exile are rendered using materials such as instant coffee powder diluted in water and brushes fashioned out of cat fur and plastic cutlery. One refugee created a replica of the Sydney Harbour Bridge using glue and straight spaghetti.

These artworks embody the power of these individuals to transcend their environment and make the ordinary, extraordinary. Such art creates beauty in a place where there is none.

Outside the walls of Villawood, The Project hold public exhibitions and have a number of zine publications, which enables these men, women and children alike to enter the public discourse on their own terms, beyond the barbed wire that incarcerates them.

Ahmed says exhibiting the works aims to combat stereotypes surrounding asylum seekers. "Hopefully it will present a deeper picture or understanding of refugees themselves – not as suffering victims who deserve our pity, but as complex individuals who demand as we all must to be treated with justice and fairness." Refugees in detention have been stripped of the basic agency that ironically they believed they would reclaim once they reached our shores. The Refugee Art Project relies on autonomous and creative expression to counter this tendency for refugees to be made anonymous and disempowered. Indeed, these powerful works tell a very different story from the dry, dehumanising statistics about refugees that dominate mainstream media.

To these people, art is more than just a therapeutic outlet. The very nature of the journey an immigrant must take to reach this country reveals a profound independence; they are not victims, they are fighters. The Refugee Art Project allows asylum seekers to keep fighting, even behind bars.


Profiles

Increasingly, publications are interested in exhibition or artist profiles, as opposed to pre- or reviews.

Profiles differ from reviews as they are factual or reflective surveys of a show or artist, they are not overly critical and should not provide negative commentary.

Less like a biography of an artist, profiles should focus on the practice but should still be more professional than personal.

A profile can include quotes or input from the artist or creator if desired and should be kept short and sweet.



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How?

- Know the background: A profile means that you are writing a short statement about an artist. You have to know about their education, shows, awards to write about.
- Use the language of the publisher: When writing a profile it's important to use the language of the publisher, if it's a radical zine something more colloquial might be more appropriate. For a publication with wide distribution its best to keep it strict and professional. This will change for every profile.
- What is central to the practice: Because profiles are short and factual it is important to only include information that is central to the practice of the show or artist you are profiling. Again, the language should be accessible and concise.
- Make it short and sweet: Profiles should be about 200-300 words. This means your writing should be clear and get straight to the point. There is not a lot of room for personal language here, best save that for a review.
- Link-it-maybe: Depending on the place of publication links to the artists website or where the reader can find their latest show could be applicable. If they are, like a review they are best kept until the end.

Example!

Abdul Abdullah: Eleanor Holden

Abdul Abdullah is a Sydney-based, Western-Australia born artist. As the son of a sixth-generation Australian and Malaysian Muslim, he had the unique experience growing up of trying to reconcile being both a proud Muslim and Australian. This experience informs his art as he seeks to explore the identity of marginalised groups, and to "effect positive change by introducing or emphasizing elements to the discourse that are often overlooked."

His practice is primarily based in painting and photography, recently however he has delved into other multimedia platforms, saying of his work: "I build images." His recognition, both nationally and internationally, is steadily growing, receiving accolades such as the Blake Prize, being a three time Archibald Prize finalist, and will soon be featured in the London based art fair Art15.

He credits his brother Adbul-Rahman Abdullah as a big influence and sounding board from the beginning of his practice. However, the two artists have had different experiences growing up, with Abdul Abdullah being more politically minded.

The Muslim experience changed after 9/11, and not being politically engaged following it was difficult. Abdullah originally studied journalism at university, looking to pursue this political interest, before using art to explore these themes. In light of this, it isn't hard to see why groups such as proppaNOW, who share similar experiences of marginalisation and explore political themes, have influenced him.

Abdullah's works are strong and striking,

with a bold use of colour and shadow. He often features himself, both through painting and photography, further highlighting the personalised struggled of marginalisation. Abdullah cites 'It doesn't matter how I feel' and 'I wanted to paint him as a mountain' as some of his favourite works. These two vastly different pieces emphasize his range and differing practices. 'I wanted to paint him as a mountain', highlights the depth and textural qualities of his painting, while also carrying across symbolism from Planet of the Apes, in the form of the ANSA logo, utilised in his Siege series to convey the other. In contrast to this work, 'It doesn't matter how I feel' is visually much calmer, yet still challenges the viewer's perceptions of the other and displacement.

Abdullah is not intentionally provocative, but he certainly doesn't shy away from any provocation caused. His work is responsive to the context around it and acts to hold a mirror up to society. This becomes inherently politicized, especially in light of an increasing Islamophobia within conservative Australia, with people not liking their reflections. In terms of the recent bout of anti-Islamic episodes, including the responses to the Sydney Siege and the Reclaim Australia Movement, Abdullah states they have not changed his views or practice, instead viewing them as being "symptomatic of attitudes that have become entrenched in Australian society," something that he grew up experiencing. Muslims have time and time again been portrayed in the media as 'the bad guy' or 'dangerous', and the sense of being unwelcome and implied otherness informs his practice, without limiting it to a strictly Muslim experience.

Feature Articles



Feature articles allow arts writers the freedom to flex their literary and conceptual muscles. They are longer form pieces that have a sophisticated critical take on what they are writing on.

In a shorter preview, review or profile, the emphasis should always be on giving a sense of what a work or project is, and what kind of experience it provides. In a feature or catalogue essay, these elements are still present to some extent, however serve more to introduce broader critical commentary and conceptual framework than as the primary content.

How?

- Research, research, research: Feature articles require you to make an informed opinion. To do this you should be as knowledgeable as you can on the topic you are writing on. If it is an opinionated piece be aware of the debates surrounding what you are writing.
- Opinions, educated opinions: Most feature articles require a strong voice. By this what you are saying should have a narrative, idea or argument that you explore and resolve by the conclusion of the piece. Features require writers to be critical and the better features often are, just support what you are arguing.
- Supporting materials: Feature articles by and large do not need to be annotated or footnoted. You can reference supporting material by mentioning the authors name in the piece. Some publishers and publications allow footnoting, but this is very much a case by case basis.
- Be Clear. Be Direct: Try to avoid using obtuse or highly technical language (unless you are publishing in a technical magazine). Use the simplest language that you can to get your point across. Readers shouldn't have to read a sentence four times to get it. Good critical writing engages with complex ideas, but synthesizes them so a wider audience can understand.
- Build your argument throughout: Think about the point you want to make in advance and build your argument throughout the article; don't just drop it in at the end. Introduce it in the introduction and work from there. Although tangential writing can be used to great effect in some cases, it is the exception to the rule – generally you should focus on one main idea.
- Lively Language: Feature articles require language that is again simple and not overly technical. The language should be critical and somewhat sophisticated, but not overly poetic. It is better to maintain style that is critical with some flair.

Example!

'Australia and the Photograph' is provocative not for its inability to engage a relevant debate, but its inability to engage any debate at all.

I admit that I had high expectations of this exhibition. The Art Gallery of New South Wales claims the exhibition 'proposes a new way of thinking about the connections between photography, place, and identity.' I expected an engagement with the diverse and conflicting narratives of history and identity that shape Australia. Perhaps my expectations were too progressive for a state institution. However, the visitor expecting an affirmation of mainstream conservative values will be disappointed as well. 'Australia and the Photograph' does not live up to its frustrating title that anticipates a broad, all-encompassing consideration of the medium. Disappointingly, there is no clear message to be seen here, and this is the ultimate provocation.

Hypothetically, the exhibition could have presented a unified narrative of a conservative, masculine, white Australia. This would have at least incited debate about how this particular (and I would argue, dominant) conception of our nation is problematic. Conversely, the exhibition does not present a nuanced and diverse photographic history of Australia either. Each visitor, regardless of their social and political views, will be left grasping for something meaningful to engage with. The only thing to debate is what is not there: the prolific artists that are not included, the relevant questions that are not posed, the critical discourses that are not sufficiently engaged with.

I concede that ambiguity has the potential to be powerful. However, the vagueness and lack of concise curatorial direction

does not translate to an exhibition that is meaningful in its openness or assumption of neutrality. In 'Australia and the Photograph' ambiguity manifests as apathy.

Recent current affairs have brought our sense of identity and nationalism to the forefront of public consciousness. Abbott's 'Stop the Boats' policy and reactionary art campaigns such as Peter Drew's 'Real Australian Say Welcome' point to the divide that has emerged: you either support or refuse the acceptance of refugees to this country. All of this is reflective of the broader stigma of what is labeled as "Un-Australian". At the same time, there is increasing awareness concerning the rhetoric of Australia Day as Invasion Day. The Martin Place siege and reports of other planned terrorist attacks have incited cases of religious vilification. Some cried out that we had lost our innocence: global terrorism had reached our 'unblemished' shores. Others united in cultural acceptance under #illridewithyou. The Anzac Centenary has encouraged debate concerning the dominant narrative of Australian history. The dismissal of journalist Scott McIntyre from SBS following his critique of the 'cultification' of Australian's involvement in various wars is just one instance that reveals the media intolerance of alternative views of history.

If there ever was a stable definition of Australian national identity, all of these events have challenged it. It is these circumstances that exacerbate the massive disappointment that is 'Australia and the Photograph'. This exhibition had the opportunity to engage with and present the hugely varied experiences of Australians. There are more than four hundred images included in this exhibition. I can count on my hands the number of them that contribute to a

meaningful dialogue. Curator Judy Annear claims that Australian photography has been largely neglected since Gael Newton's groundbreaking 1988 exhibition 'Shades of Light' at the National Gallery in Canberra. Why then, does Annear include so few photographs from the last two decades?

An exhibition of such scale, informed by years of research, will automatically be positioned as a major event for Australian visual culture. Yet the exhibition primarily focuses on 'little-known' images of the nineteenth century. Clearly, these ordinary portraits and images of everyday life are 'little-known' for a reason. Offering equally little discussion, they neither contribute to the existing dominant visual narrative, nor do they subvert it.

The treatment of the iconic photographs included in the exhibition is similarly problematic. While Annear acknowledges in an interview that there is nothing inherently Australian about certain images such as Max Dupain's *Sunbaker* and David Moore's *Migrants Arriving in Sydney* this dialogue is not raised by the exhibition itself. These photographs remain stagnant, reaffirming the myths that exalt them. Certainly, a general audience will want to see famous images. But a general audience is also capable of critical engagement. How and why have these photographs been mythologized as iconically Australian? What have they contributed to our national consciousness?

There seems to be a tokenistic approach to image selection in this exhibition. One corner in the room titled 'Critique' is particularly alarming. These two walls contain, amongst others, Moore's *Migrants*

Arriving in Sydney, Mervyn Bishop's symbolic Gough Whitlam pours soil into the hands of traditional landowner Vincent Lingiari, Michael Riley's *Maria*, and Carol Jerrems' *Vale Street*. It seems the gallery has set itself a spatial challenge: how many ethnic and gender diversity boxes can we tick in just one corner of a major exhibition?

The result is a contrived attempt at conveying diversity. While John McDonald asserts that Aboriginal themes are over-emphasized in the exhibition, I argue that the quantity of images does not equate to a meaningful presence. The large number of ethnographic photographs does not adequately present the complex discourses informing the art practices of Aboriginal photographers and representations of their communities. The problematic practice of ethnographic photography in affirming the colonial gaze and denying the subject an individual identity is ignored. These images retain a glaring sense of oppression and conformity. JW Lindt's studio photograph of an Aboriginal man on the ground, with his head rested in a pathetic, stylised pose on the knee of a white stockman has been disturbingly interpreted by Rosemary Neill as suggestive of intimacy and companionship. Annear's statement that she "could have done a show about conflict (between Aborigines and settlers), but chose to do a show about active, useful lives" is even more shocking.

My frustration with the historical treatment of Aboriginal Australians extends to the treatment of contemporary works. Ricky Maynard and Tracey Moffat's photographs are installed so high on the

dimly lit wall of the 'People and Place' room that the visitor is simply unable to view them properly. I am unsure if this is a contrived reference to an Indigenous presence hanging above the colonial photographs displayed in vitrines below. Regardless, it just does not make sense. The endless presentation of similar historical photographs and portraits is another concern. Annear explains that her intention was to curate an exhibition dealing with the medium of photography, and how this medium came to invent Australia. Of course, the history of the photographic medium is fascinating. The opportunity to view original daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, stereographs and tintypes is rare and important for viewers so accustomed to the rapid processing and reception of digital photographs. However, there are two issues with this particular focus on the history of the photographic medium.

The notion of the physical photograph as a sacred or sentimental object is lost by the sheer multitude of the images included. Nothing stands out as particularly important, yet here is a rare opportunity to appreciate what physical photographs can mean to us. The examples of the elaborate cases traditionally used to protect such images beautifully reflect this sentiment.

Further, there is a confusing lack of attention given to the relationship between medium and content. Are we supposed to be appreciating the technological development that produced this type of photograph, or are we searching for a social content that reveals something of a particularly Australian consciousness? How do x-rays, solar eclipses, photographs of the moon and Antarcti-

ca shape and define Australia? Perhaps this is ticking the fashionable intersection-of-art-and-science box. What about the entire wall of Sue Ford's indulgent self-portraits? Here, ambiguity leads to confusion, and confusion in this case produces disinterest.

The generation of disinterest by such an ambitious exhibition is dangerous. In Australia we already suffer from the inferiority complex of the 'cultural cringe'. Yet there are such varied experiences of this country, shaped by local and global events, which deserve attention and are capable of evoking powerful responses. In considering our national identity, there are many possible trajectories to be explored: the vastness of the landscape and its visual colonization, the global export of the masculine, athletic Australian beach body, the challenges and inspirations of race relations, the isolation of a western nation within an Asian region. While the exhibition superficially ticks the box for many themes, the depth and intriguing complexity of these narratives is unsatisfactorily fleshed out.

The missed opportunity to engage with our history, whether as a source of conflict or pride, to question our individual identities, and to connect to broader narratives of multiculturalism and Australia's place in the globalised world is frustratingly provocative. 'Australia and the Photograph' affirms a sense of apathy when an enthusiasm for engaging with history in order to shape a progressive future matters most.

Words by Georgia Windrum

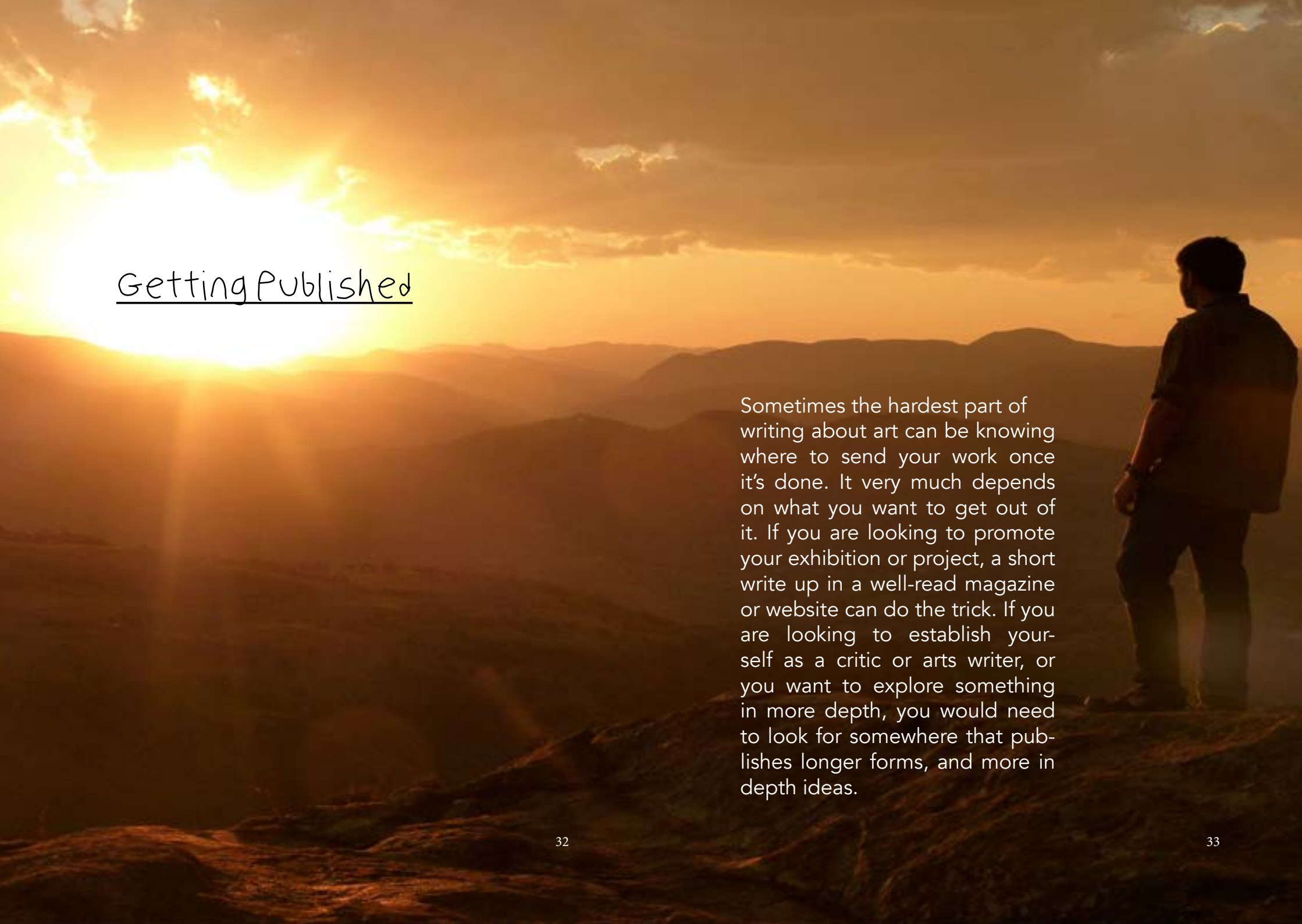
Catalogue Essays

Not all arts professionals will need to know how to write a catalogue essay in their career; however, they are essential for arts writers, curators or artists/Artist Run Initiatives (ARI's) to know.

Essentially, catalogue essays need to be much more professional and polished than feature articles which are opinionated and critical. Catalogue essays are specifically for use of an exhibition, they should survey the artists, themes and curatorship of the show.

How?

- Research, again: We keep repeating it, but only because it is important. Research for a catalogue essay is fundamental. The sources you use can be primary and secondary, but you must have sources and be well researched in the artist or thematic concerns of the exhibition. show, but making sure that the use of surnames to refer to artists, not abbreviating institutions names and formatting the titles of works are always important in a catalogue essay. It is the formal writing accompanying an exhibition, the writing should reflect the exhibition.
- Engagement: A catalogue essay should engage with the show, the artists and the themes of the exhibition. It should be a mix of description, explanation and sophisticated, researched presentation of the exhibition.
- Strategic Structure: Knowing a structure that works well with your skills is paramount, if you are stronger writing a biographical piece, lead with that information, if your strength is the thematic concerns, make this the structure of the essay. Whatever your structural strength is, work to it. Catalogue essays are a chance for you to show the full extent of your sophisticated art writing
- Looking at the language: Language for a catalogue essay should be formal, professional and somewhat technical. You may know the artists in the

A person is standing on a rocky ridge, looking out over a vast, hazy landscape at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the scene. The person is silhouetted against the bright light of the sun. The landscape consists of rolling hills and mountains, with the sun's rays creating a lens flare effect. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

Getting Published

Sometimes the hardest part of writing about art can be knowing where to send your work once it's done. It very much depends on what you want to get out of it. If you are looking to promote your exhibition or project, a short write up in a well-read magazine or website can do the trick. If you are looking to establish yourself as a critic or arts writer, or you want to explore something in more depth, you would need to look for somewhere that publishes longer forms, and more in depth ideas.

Where to Start

To establish yourself as an art writer you should focus on making sure you have had your name in as many publications or regularly in a couple as possible. Maintaining high quality work and knowing the style and regular content of publications is important. The easiest way to get your foot in the door of larger publications is to start building your body of work as soon as you can and to continually make it more complex and critical.

To think about publishing critical arts writing, you need look no further than Arc @ UNSW Art & Design! With the critical arts journal Framework!!

It comes out quarterly, and publishes feature articles of around 1,000 words, artist Q&As, artist profiles, and exhibition reviews, as well as accepting open submissions for content. Magazines like Framework are a great place to test out ideas, experiment with your writing, and get feedback from experienced writers in a friendly and non-threatening environment. It is also a great way to get your work out there and start building a portfolio.

Where to Send Press Releases

You can send your press release out as widely as you like, but often a targeted and well-planned campaign will have just as much or more effect as a blanket offensive. If you are a student having your first show, it's unlikely The Daily Telegraph is going to run a feature. If there's an interesting angle or idea, however, Concrete Playground or The Thousands might. Just remember that no matter where you send your release, it's likely to be one of dozens they get at the same time – think about why your project is relevant to them and make this clear! Find out who the best person to speak to is and make sure they get it.

Some good places to think about sending your press release are:

- The Thousands
- FBi Radio 94.5
- Concrete Playground
- Time Out
- Eastside Radio
- Alternative Media
- The Brag
- Art What's On
- Art Monthly's Art Notes section

Where to Publish Short Pieces of Writing

Many of the places you would send a press release are also good places to think about approaching to publish previews, reviews or profiles. While some publications will have only a small set number of staff, others have a wider pool of writers, and might be happy to add your name to their call out list. These smaller or more community-focused publications are another great way to build your portfolio early in your career, and can lead to publication in bigger forums.

They are also an invaluable way to improve your writing – being able to write a 180-word review and get your point across succinctly is a great skill that will benefit you in all forms of writing. If you are thinking about getting in touch with a publication, it's a good idea to find out exactly who you should be speaking to – is there a designated arts section? Does it have its own editor? Learn about the publication you are speaking to. When you write and introduce yourself, provide a bit of information (a couple of sentences not your life story), and a link to some of your work. Start with places like Alternative Media, The Brag, or Concrete Playground, and work your way up from there!

Where to Publish Feature Stories

It's usually a good idea to get a couple of articles in places like Framework or similar publications devoted to fostering emerging writers under your belt before you approach bigger publications. This is not to say if you have a totally brilliant article ready to publish you shouldn't approach Art & Australia with it – just don't expect that they'll jump onboard. A lot of places like that operate on commissioned or themed pieces. Some good places to send your work that are more receptive to emerging writers are:

- Runway Magazine. Runway also publishes critical arts writing, with a focus on local artists and exhibitions. They will sometimes take submissions and sometimes not, but it's worth keeping an eye on their website. Runway has recently switched to a digital format.
- Art Monthly. Art Monthly accept submission from writers. If you want to pitch an idea to the magazine, do so well in advance of when you'd like to see it published – it will most likely take several weeks to get a response as they have a very small core staff. When pitching, include a brief (1-2 paragraphs) summary of your idea, and a couple of lines on who you are.

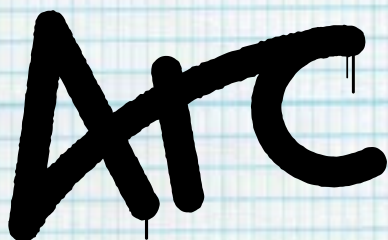
Residencies and Mentorships

A good way to develop a writing portfolio and make connections to publications and institutions is to explore doing a residency or mentorship program. There are a few well-regarded programs designed to support emerging writers that you could consider applying to, including:

- Firstdraft Writer In Residence Program. This 4-month residency aims at providing support to emerging writers and assisting in finding publishing opportunities. Writers are paired with a mentor to produce either exhibition reviews of Firstdraft shows or a sustained piece of critical arts writing. Applications are usually due for the year in May. A writers' fee of \$750 is provided.
- Gertrude Contemporary and Art & Australia Emerging Writers Program. This program, a partnership between Gertrude Contemporary and Art & Australia, pairs successful candidates with a mentor to produce one catalogue essay for a Gertrude Contemporary Studio 12 show, as well as a review for publication in Art & Australia. Applications for the year are due in February.
- Australia Council Arts Writing Residency. For more established arts writers, it is worth considering applying for this London residency at ACME Studios. Although previous recipients have been established writers, it is a fantastic opportunity to fine-tune your application skills. Who knows, you might just knock their socks off!

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