

Attached are three artist statements from the 2015 McKnight Fellows in Media Arts. These examples are provided as a reference to help you write your own artist statement. Do not copy anything directly from these statements; the intention of sharing them with you is to see what the 2015 panel positively responded to when they were reviewing applications.

If you'd like help writing your artist statement, we encourage you to contact Noah Keesecker of Springboard for the Arts: [noah@springboardforthearts.org](mailto:noah@springboardforthearts.org). For a small fee he will help you review your artist statement (and indeed your whole application). Noah is a professional in artist development and a previous recipient of a McKnight Artist Fellowship.

## ARTISTIC STATEMENT

Slice-of-life stories do not interest me. Cinematic journeys with cathartic experiences and empathetic characters are what I yearn for.

My films use surrealistic settings with a large scope to open the imagination and ignite the curiosity of an audience. My characters have small, relatable stories with authentic moral dilemmas that play in contrast to that scale. The effect of this allows viewers to 'escape' and let their guard down, which in turn allows me to open them to ideas and emotions.

*In short, I take people far-far-away to look at themselves up close.* This sets my films apart from parochial cinema, and propels them to play on a global stage. Film is mass-media and is therefore most effective when it reaches a mass audience to elicit a collective catharsis.

My approach requires a unique skill set that includes experience with professional actors, ability to lead large crews, technical aptitude, expertise in screenwriting, and an understanding of the industry. Having recently completed production of my first feature film, my career is primed to reach a new level.

The first influence towards this aesthetic came as a young boy. While not the best film I've ever seen, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* made a significant impression at just the right time. It was the first film that made me 'gasp'. My limited cinematic experiences had me believe that these aliens would do harm as they passed over Devil's Tower. Then the movie shifts our empathy and communicates with us in the only way that makes sense - music. *Because of this scope and spectacle my imagination had been opened. My empathy for the characters peaked and the story became indelible.*

Charlie Chaplin's approach is one that I share; *The use of dialogue in cinema is a failure of visual storytelling.* Hitchcock's use of juxtaposition exemplifies what can be done to create the 'third idea'. Show a banana peel, show a man walking, show a banana peel. The idea of the man slipping is created in the mind of the audience. The more 'third ideas' the better the film.

Currently, my films exist on the border between realism and surrealism. Cinematography, sound, and music work to create a recognizable but mysterious world. This design forces the audience to attach to something familiar - a character experiencing a moral dilemma. This is not a new concept, but my world view and aesthetic make it unique. Rather than quantifying this in words, I prefer to let the work speak for itself.

Documentary films commonly use *sympathy* to make a political or social comment. Though *empathy* my audience experiences a journey as if in a first person perspective. The emotions of the protagonists become the emotions of the audience. The ideas I'm proposing become ideas created in the minds of the audience as if they were their own.

Recognizable characters experiencing life in large scale settings. Through this 'escapism' approach I am able to engage, entertain, and inform so that my work may be seen by a mass audience. With over twenty-years of experience in every aspect of film production, my career is now at a tipping point to reach a higher level.

Artist Statement: Ann Prim

Imagined, interior regions, projected as exterior landscape.

Time, space, vivified objects, disembodied sound, music and a mélange of languages: these are some of my filmic elements.

Fragmented vignettes conjure the secret life of objects — both found and collected — that reside in a world within the real world. The illogic of dreams that embraces visual and aural disorientation, erotic overtones and inventive fables, all form an armature upon which my experimental dramas are built.

My narrative work is freely infused with many of these experimental elements. I am always seeking alternatives to the linearity of narrative construction. In this realm whether experimental or narrative — conjoined story fragments challenge the viewer to form a narrative linkage.

The characters that inhabit my stories tend to dwell outside social norms and exist in the space between and in the process of becoming. They reside in microclimates of desire, longing and alienation. Their hermetic environments, closed and static, is an experimental element carried over and translated into my narrative work. This is actualized through the use of small rooms, tight framing and creating a curiosity for what is occurring just beyond the frame.

I approach filmmaking from an artist's perspective incorporating my knowledge of art, music and photography all of which is coupled with an obsessive creative inquisitiveness. I truly love compressing a film's drama into a brief space of time. For me 'short form' is the poetry of cinema and not a way station to a feature length film.

I will continue to explore what is just beyond the frame. This curious methodology can only lead me to larger rooms and perhaps even an anamorphic vista.

## Artist Statement – Tom Schroeder

I am an animator working in a traditional, drawn character style and, recently, I've been animating to documentary audio footage. Animation attracted me initially because it demands multi-disciplinary thinking. My educational background is in literature, so I first approach a film as a narrative form. The story is then communicated through the language of film, translated into visual staging and sound design. But because the films are conceived and executed one frame at a time, the process of making them often resembles the work of a painter or illustrator more than it does a live action filmmaker. Each film challenges me to develop my storytelling skills as a filmmaker and my design intelligence as a fine artist, and also to explore the expressive relationship between the style of the animation and the content of the story. Animation has given me the range of expressive possibilities to continue to reinvent my approach to my material.

The next film I'm preparing to make is an animated portrait of my friend Dave Herr, beginning with materials that we generated together on super 8 film in the late 1980's. I expect the finished piece to run between ten and fifteen minutes. Dave Herr, who died five years ago from a brain tumor, was the best friend and most sympathetic collaborator of my adult life. Dave and I met in 1987 and immediately appropriated the chicken coup on his family farm in western Wisconsin as our music rehearsal space and the barn as our animation studio. Especially excited by the Brother's Quay film "Street of Crocodiles," we built sets and shot experiments in mimicry of the Quays' style. We shared a sense of possibility and curiosity that was satisfied purely with the process of animating itself; we didn't imagine that there should be an audience for what we were doing. In the absence of having been to film school, I think of this now as my education in animation. Over the years, Dave and I both stayed in Minneapolis and continued to collaborate on film, video, animation and improvised musical projects. Despite the fact that some of our collaborations were professional commissions or commercials, we always maintained a mutual interest in the open-ended, process-oriented experiments.

I've waited five years since Dave's death before starting this film, because I felt it necessary to gain a little emotional detachment before approaching the material. The starting point for the work will be the super 8 footage we shot together in the barn twenty-five years ago. (I've uploaded a short clip to vimeo if you want to get a sense of what this looks like: <https://vimeo.com/123299494>). I'll pay for a good HD telecine transfer of this film and use the imagery as the initial irritant in getting the ideas moving. I also have many hard drives of Dave's later design and animation work in the original After Effects and Photoshop files with all of the layers intact. This gives me the ability to manipulate, animate, reconfigure and exploit all of this content toward my thematic ends. In addition, I plan to use the immense archive of recorded music that I have of Dave and I playing together as the initial basis of the soundtrack. Animating with the same sense of open-ended adventure that Dave and I shared in the late 1980's, I will generate a series of episodes that I structure as a film using the advanced experience that I have as a filmmaker now. The finished piece will be a portrait of Dave Herr, using many of his own creative materials, an examination of the evolution of friendship from youth to middle age and, finally, an evocation of the emptiness that results from the death of a close friend. As with most of my films I begin with personal, local and specific material and hope to bring out the more universal resonances and themes for an audience.

The production of my films and my teaching at The Minneapolis College of Art and Design have really began to interact well in the last few years. I teach what I learn making the films and I hire my former students to work on my films when I have the money to do so. The two films that I've submitted as work samples were completed with crews of MCAD graduates. I teach an experimental animation class at MCAD that is very much in the spirit of my "barn" period with Dave. I plan to hire a couple of recent graduates who have excelled in this class to help me generate visual ideas and to contribute a genuine element of enthusiasm and inexperience to my dialogue between youth and middle age.