

# Why Every Artist Should be a Great Storyteller

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## A good tale yields many benefits.

So you're a visual artist and you rely on the visual element of your work to sell it and captivate viewers in a single glance. But while art does indeed speak for itself, it only tells part of your story. The other, often-overlooked part is "Who is the person behind the signature scribbled on this amazing piece?"

While it's impossible to pinpoint a tangible career-elevating payoff to telling your story, there are clear benefits. In today's competitive marketplace a good story can say things about your character that your art can't, which can help give you an edge over similar artists being considered for a project. It also allows you to make connections with new audiences who might not understand art the way critics do, but who appreciate your work based on how you make it.

Storytelling might seem like an additional "to-do" that you don't have time or resources for, however, it simply requires using your words and talking about yourself (and likely something you love). As Simon Sinek says, "People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it." And it should provide some kind of return on your time investment, as the best kind of storytelling serves as **marketing** that doesn't feel like traditional **marketing** at all.

When you communicate your inspiration and efforts behind your pieces, you allow viewers to see your art through your eyes. This gives the viewer something tangible to share with others in conversation – something that a two-dimensional piece rarely can do on its own terms. Like any craft, there is a certain rhythm and structure that leads to a successful story. Follow these four guidelines to artfully tell your narrative and ultimately expand your audience reach.

### 1. Learn the Storytelling Basics

You likely have an "About" profile on your website, but if it's missing an arc it's time to inject it with some life. Stories have a three-part structure with a beginning, middle, and end. The first part opens with an intriguing introduction, the middle develops that detail into the crux of the piece (the main driver of the narrative) and the end leads to how the main character accomplished their objective. Along the way, elements of surprise and eclectic characters keep things interesting. Think about your artistic journey and how you can divide it into three parts.

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Start by catching the reader’s attention with a strong hook – a few lines that focus on what is the most unique thing about you and your artistic evolution. Maybe as a child your grandmother took you to her painting class and that time fostered a love of painting? Maybe there is a moment when someone challenged your dream to become a sculptor and you used that as fuel for your career? Or maybe you have lived all over the world and the different cultures have greatly impacted your **design** style? The introductory anecdote should be compelling and full of details, so you can build the rest of your story around it by answering how that moment led you to what you create today. Finish the bio by highlighting your biggest career accomplishments. Need an example to get you started? Here is one from French-American artist [Gwenn Seemel](#) that we like as a muse.

## **2. Invite People into Your Process**

Now that you’ve firmed up your bio – which you can use anywhere from your website to your pitch deck to your gallery exhibitions – consider other ways to share your story, like through your creative process.

Artists have a rep for being territorial about people entering their sacred studios. When their supporters only see the final masterpieces, though, they can’t fathom the marathon hours, painstaking process, and level of detail that goes into the artwork. So pull back the curtain and invite the public in by using video clips, photo, and text together. It’s easier than it sounds – there is probably already a photographer or videographer in your tribe, so commission them to capture various shots of your studio and key stages of creation.

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To do this, write out an “objective sheet” detailing the overarching story you want to tell, and the shots that will bring this to life. This could include a shot of your workspace, any production machinery or workspace décor, or action shots, which capture you at the beginning, middle, and end of your process. If you’re more comfortable on camera, you could produce a video short.

Just look at what street artist Don Rimx has done with his process shots. He regularly invites the public into his process and recently his [video “Friction”](#) caught the attention of corporate audiences who now commission his work. In the time-lapse video, Rimx shows all of the movements it takes him to paint a mural, as well as incorporates outside voices who comment on the work-in-progress. Rimx’s act of artistic vulnerability widens the reach of those who can experience his work, and it’s paying off.

## **3. Share Your Creative Routine**

Do you always find that people are asking you if you have any creative rituals? As mundane as

this question might seem to you, [an entire book has been written about the daily rituals of artists](#), and translated into multiple languages! Rituals are fascinating because they're not limited to specific fields or artistic disciplines, so people are inspired to apply what works for artists to their own work. And, frankly, people love hearing the war stories about people making something – that makes you real and relatable and it's human nature to respect someone who works hard.

For this, examine how you create. What do you do that's different? Maybe you balance your artistic side with a full-time career elsewhere, so you can only work late at night? Or maybe you go off into the desert to create in a space that is completely free of distraction? Like your bio, be specific on the details. Your objective here is to give your fans something to grasp onto. People likely can't get behind someone who says "I only paint when I feel inspired." But they can applaud someone who says they go into the studio every morning at 7 a.m. and often has to work for several hours before they find the groove of a project.

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UK-based multi-media artist [Kirsty Elson](#) crafts miniature homes, boats, and lighthouses out of driftwood, and draws inspiration from her seaside surroundings. When she collects driftwood at the beach, she either knows immediately what she'll create or the wood sits in her shed for years until she does. [In this video](#), Elson discusses the full cycle of creating her art including how she gets it in the hands of customers around the world.

#### **4. Tell your story in different ways on multiple mediums**

The idea of a "story" has been with us since the beginning of time, but today what that looks like can range from the traditional body of text to a one-sentence Instagram post. That gives you many channels to explore. If you have a weekly newsletter or blog, those are natural places to begin sharing your processes and routines. If you're still building out your reader list, you can test out the various **social** media channels to see what drums up interest and feels most natural. You might find that it's easier to share your process shots on a medium like Instagram due to its visual nature, while you can better articulate the finer points of your creative routine through blogging.

If writing is not your forte or you're pressed for time, another way to tell your story is to include brief captions below artwork on your website describing the inspiration/idea behind each piece. A few years ago, [my firm](#) was charged with publicizing Strong Families "Mama's Day Our Way" campaign—a national initiative led by Forward Together where more than 20 artists were commissioned to create e-cards for mothers who are often overlooked in the mainstream celebration of Mother's Day. Strong Families wanted to reach both sites that focus on parenting and LGBTQ issues and the mainstream press. To make the campaign about more than the image on the cards, we asked the artists to share why they wanted to be involved in the campaign and what was their inspiration behind their card image.

By having our artists discuss their works from different perspectives, we were able to capture the attention of a range of publications, including [Salon.com](#), the *New York Daily News*, *Buzzfeed* [Advocate.com](#), [Jezebel](#), and [PolicyMic](#), who ran pieces on the campaign and included the artists' quotes in them. During the pitch process, the approach to capture the artists' voices and stories allowed my small, scrappy firm to edge out larger agencies to lead this campaign and resulted in us getting work on future national campaigns.

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At its core, storytelling is about making an authentic, human connection. When people feel like they're part of your artistic process, and you're willing to share a glimpse into your journey, they'll root for you and support your work. [Seemel](#) said it best, "Trying to be an artist helps you to appreciate the tenacity it takes to market yourself successfully as an artist. This might lead you to support the efforts of artists in your life by promoting their art or buying it."

Storytelling, when done right, will increase your influence and have existing and new audiences talking about your work in a digestible fashion that feels natural, and produce a ripple effect of supporters who want to invest in your art – and you.

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