

NOTES FROM:

(ARTIST) LIFE SCHOOL

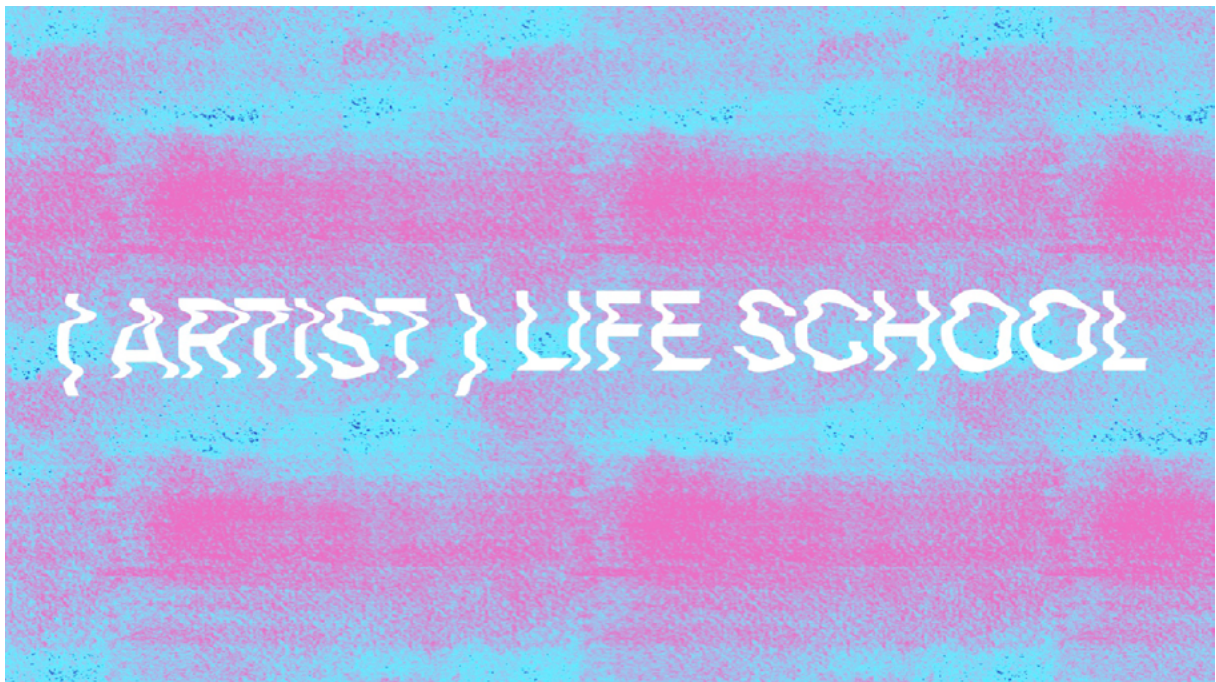
**HOW TO TALK ABOUT YOUR
WORK, WITH EMMA FITTS ON
24 NOVEMBER 2021**

**THE
PHYSICS
ROOM** CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

THE PHYSICS ROOM

CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

NOTES FROM (ARTIST) LIFE SCHOOL: How to talk about your work, with Emma Fitts on 24 November 2021



Design: Annamieke Montagne.

It's all well and good making the work, but talking about it to an audience can be another story entirely. What do you put in an artist bio? How far back should your artist CV go? What is a good structure for an artist talk? How long should an artist statement be? Our third seminar in the (Artist) Life School series covered some of the basics for when writing and talking about your work, both publicly and in proposals. Artist and lecturer Emma Fitts will shared her insights on how to engage an audience in the discussion of your work as well as some helpful tips on framing your bio and CV.

Please note: these notes are accompanied by a series of slides as well as an audio recording of the talk, with Audrey Baldwin, that is available the event page on our website via the link below:

<https://physicsroom.org.nz/events/artist-life-school-how-to-talk-about-your-work-wit>

HOW TO TALK ABOUT YOUR WORK

- Write honestly and clearly—it will set you apart from others and hook the reader.
- ‘Recent’ for your exhibition history is suggested to be five years, but this depends on how big the project is. If it’s large you may want to detail your full career.
- It is useful to have bios of different lengths. You can have one that is a few sentences long, one that’s a paragraph (about 250 words) and one that is a full page.
- A short bio should say just as much as a full page one.
- Paint a picture with words.
- Let people know your interests behind the final work.
- This gets easier as you become more established as you can use other people’s reviews and writing about you for inspiration—save what they say somewhere.
- Talking about the relationship your work has to contemporary ideas can draw people in.
- Saying why, how, where you make art will reveal ‘what’ you make. Avoid just just describing the work.
- See an artist’s statement as ongoing, evolving.
- Try talking about it conversationally with someone. Record it digitally or let them record it and just focus on describing it naturally, not how you think an artist should describe their work.
- See feedback as an exercise not an attack on yourself.
- Be ruthless with your editing.
- Language is malleable but make sure it suits your art and audience.
- Gallery website bios are useful for inspiration. Use sources like this to get an idea for what type of writing suits your work.
- Hook onto larger ideas, you have a limited amount of time and people are more likely to connect with larger ideas than specifics about yourself.
- Conversations with others don’t have to be a frustrating exercise in trying to explain and promote your art. It could be a job opportunity or give you ideas.
- Pay attention to what a potential employer asks of you in the application process. Don’t go over the word limit. You’re more likely to annoy them than hook them.
- You can play around with the format suggested, clarity is what matters.
- Artist review sites may have reviews of your work, which are useful to draw on in developing proposals or artist statements.

- Go to art talks, even if the artwork doesn't seem relevant to your practice. Familiarise yourself with how others present their work.
- Preparation is key in finding balance when you give a talk.
- Anecdotes are great but make sure each one connects back to a point related to your practice.
- Have talking points instead of descriptions of your art in art talks.
- In a talk, consider showing things that people wouldn't normally get to see, like your process or studio.
- Showing your failures can be useful, especially for other makers.
- In a talk don't just speak about what you have done in the past but what you're working on at present.
- Both the speaker and audience are vulnerable in a in a public speaking situation. Keep this in mind when preparing, and be open to questions: both asking and answering them!
- Feel free to make a power point format reflect your art, such as collage.
- Keep in mind tech hiccups. If it goes wrong, you're the one who gets embarrassed. So, arrive early and get involved.
- You can say no to being recorded.
- You can read parts of your talk, especially if you have good visuals that will keep people engaged.

ABOUT EMMA FITTS

Emma Fitts is a New Zealand based artist whose practice moves across the disciplines of painting, photography, and sculpture. Fitts studied Fine Art at the University of Canterbury, Ōtautahi, prior to Masters study at the Glasgow School of Art, Scotland. Her recent exhibitions include *Touching Sight*, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū (2021); *Paint etc*, Corbans Art Centre, (2020); *Softly Spoken*, Hastings Art Gallery, (2019); *Bright Cave*, Blue Oyster Art Project Space (2018); and *Necessary Distraction: A Painting Show*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (2016). Major solo presentations include *In the Rough: Parts 1, 2 & 3*, Te Uru (2019) and *From Pressure to Vibration: The Event of a Thread*, The Dowse (2017). Fitts returned to Ōtautahi in 2014 as the Olivia Spencer Bower recipient, was a McCahon House resident for winter 2018 and recently completed the Fulbright-Wallace residency at The Headlands Center for the Arts, California, USA in 2019. She currently lives in Ōtautahi and is represented by Melanie Roger Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau.

ABOUT (ARTIST) LIFE SCHOOL

(Artist) Life School is a series of seminars that bring together contemporary artists to further develop professional skills, and sets out to answer the curly questions around maintaining a practice out in the world. Ideal for recent graduates and emerging artists, each workshop will host an industry professional to discuss the realities of making, funding, and showing your work.