Over the course of this semester, ‘Performing Hartford’ has provided us with several opportunities to witness live performances by artists who embody the local Hartford community. Through each of these performances, it has become abundantly clear that the presumption that Hartford lacks an artistic community is untrue and is in fact thriving and continuing to diversify. The unique work and past experiences of these artists show the gradual development of this underlying artistic community in Hartford as a collective effort and how this links other artists with each other from other communities as well. Therefore, I have chosen to showcase some of these artists and their unique works as well as provide firsthand advice from them to potential artists.

The first artist we were given the opportunity of witnessing live was Zulynette who identifies herself as an artist, author, poet, and social worker. As a Chicago native, Zulynette came from a low-income and culturally diverse background which is represented through much of her art and poetry.
Zulynette is known for using art as a means of reflecting on herself and poetry to present her view on important topics to the world. Her performances are filled with cultural pride, effective communication, and artistic confidence.

Zulynette is always expressing her views through a culturally aware and artistic lens. Some of her poems include ‘My Name,’ ‘Rough Around the Edges,’ and ‘Powerhouse’ which represent her strong connection with her cultural heritage. Zulynette’s painting, ‘How to Kill an Artist,’ is one that shows her hanging herself at one of her previous jobs. While this painting received a fair amount of criticism, it truly depicts her character which is a strong, cultural artist who responded to the criticism with nothing but confidence. Through her journey as an artist, we see how one’s culture and upbringings affect us, and this is something she urges artists to embrace as it will help inspire art and fuel determination.

The second artist that I would like to showcase is Deborah Goffe, who is the author of ‘Orienting Ourselves to See’ and ‘The Keeping.’ She is also an artist and dance cultivator who was born and raised in a suburb outside Hartford resulting in
her having a long-standing history with the city and has played a significant role in the upbringing of Hartford’s dance community by creating and connecting different dance ecologies.

Deborah’s many initiatives throughout her artistic career have made her a well-known figure in Hartford’s artistic community. One of her initial projects ‘Drink to This,’ helped local Hartford artists interact with each other through expressing poetry and ideas. Over the years, Goffe has transformed her intentions and artistic values by creating her own company called Scapegoat Garden. Deborah dedicates her success as an artist to her work ethic and determination to expand the artistic community in Hartford along with inspiration from other artists.

Some of her famous works include ‘Privy’ as well as other interdisciplinary collaborations that are performed in studios. Her efforts to make her work
impactful for the community as well as create dance ecologies that are inspiring and have resulted in her becoming a key figure in the artistic community.

Next, we have Jolet Creary, a dancer, and choreographer involved in Hartford’s hip-hop community. In 2017, she founded Studio 860 to collaborate with different hip-hop artists from the underground community. Her efforts have played a significant role in expanding the hip-hop community through dance festivals and collaborative performances.

During some point in her career as a dancer, she realized that she wanted to bring hip-hop to Hartford and allow others to each their various styles of hip-hop. She points out how hip-hop is much more than just a broad dance category and involves many different styles and techniques. She is an expert in choreographing dances and creates unique performances by incorporating various artists and hip-
hop styles. More importantly, Studio 860 was created with the intention of artists having the opportunity to present their story through dance.

Her famous works include ‘Paradox’ which is a series of short dance videos showcasing different hip-hop artists and their styles. She uses visual effects and other choreography techniques to further bring out the essence of the performance. Creary has played a significant role in transforming the hip-hop community in Hartford and creating an environment for various artists to interact and teach dance.

The final artist I would like to showcase is Sistah Anyango Asantewaa who is a dancer, fitness professional, and holistic coach. She is the founder and CEO of Fly Fitness Healing and Arts which strives to help one become a better version of
themselves. Anyango is known for using techniques and mindfulness as well as incorporate her own experiences to evoke change in others.

Anyango believes that we can better ourselves by being more aware and grateful for things in everyday life. She incorporates this belief along with her optimistic view on life into her performances to make them more energized especially when dancing. Anyango has used her past experiences as reasons for why she does what she does and believes that being able to collaborate with others is vital. She has also played an important role in bringing artists in the local community together through performances.

One of her famous performances called ‘La Sala Femme’ shows the collaboration between different artists and their styles and is unique as it doesn’t have a particular style. Anyango believes that artists must be confident in themselves and find their respective passion in order to find purpose in their careers.
Thinking as an Artist

Whether you are an artist who pursues theatre, dance, or painting, all artists are driven by ideologies and aim to seek the answers to similar questions. Artists are constantly asking themselves questions regarding their work and what the future will entail regarding their potential careers but tend to forget the purpose behind their art and how it has helped them grow and reflect on a personal level. This section provides firsthand advice from successful artists who answer students’ questions to guide them through their journeys as artists and for those thinking about pursuing art.

Art and Identity: two of the most asked questions are what it means to be an artist and how has it shaped your identity?

According to Jolet, what it means to be an artist to her is being able to connect with people as that it what fuels her passion. She would rather be able to provide art and experiences to people as it makes her happy to perform and create environments for people to work and be a part of. Art, and dance specifically for her, was a way of escaping reality and expressing herself when it seemed impossible.
Jolet found that art has shaped her identity through her journey and continues to do so. Growing up she wanted to find a place that would accept her as an artist and so she decided to create a space where she could be accepted with no prior criteria. Art shapes each one’s identity differently and our purpose behind the art is what makes it unique.

To Zulynette, an artist's duty is to reflect the times and thus the artist also needs to keep up with the times. Creativity is what inspires an artist to reflect the change around us and this is where an artist's strength lies.

Art in Hartford? People often ask, does Hartford really have an artistic community? Evidently, it does.

Zulynette responds to this question by confirming that yes, there is an abundance of opportunity in Hartford. In fact, being an artist in a city like Hartford helps prevent you from getting lost in a place like New York filled with thousands of various artists and allows you to be unique. The obscure artists you have conversations with and the creative people you meet are more meaningful than the big artists you see on screen or read about.
Performing as an Artist: Potential artists are always concerned with questions regarding performance and whether their work will be accepted by the community. One might ask, how does it feeling when you are performing for an audience? Do you get nervous?

Deborah Goffe’s response to this is that depending on where you perform makes the performance more personal as it reveals more about yourself and makes you realize different performances and different crowds require different settings which also influences how you feel.

Zulynette states that confidence comes through competence and that repeating what you want to say makes you more confident. It is natural to feel nervous while performing but use it as your strength to have the determination to execute your performance to your best.

But what if your work receives criticism? Zulynette explains how she was criticized for her painting, ‘How to Kill an Artist,’ but she stood by her art, and trusted her artwork more than others criticism. She urges artists to stand up for their work as there is a meaningful purpose behind it.
Art and the Future: artists are constantly thinking about what the future holds in terms of the artistic community and as well as their careers? One might ask how does one know what to do after their education as an artist?

According to Goffe, she was unsure after leaving a place like graduate school what she was going to do. She was too comfortable with her space and people; however, she knew something about her aesthetic, and this opened endless possibilities for her. She knew her aesthetic and she knew where she wanted to be which was home, back in Hartford. She met people she wanted to work with and explains how it's really a process of experiencing different things and having a purpose.