

Neema Interview.m4a

Emeline [00:00:00] It is November 3rd. We are here with Neema at the Trinity Raether library. It's 8:46 a.m. and Emeline and Catherine are here to interview Neema about their mural. So first, could you just say your name is and grace at Trinity?

Neema [00:00:32] Yeah, my name is Neema Kimondo I'm a psych major and I'm a junior at Trinity.

Emeline Okay, so how did you become involved in the neighborhood?

Neema Um, I started getting involved through the Underground and Temple of Hip-Hop, which are very connected when I look back at the history of the two. Um, but more so through Temple of Hip Hop. Since that, my position in that organization allowed me to meet with, um, artists from Hartford like Linda Luz and John Macy like. And through my connection with them, I've been able to work on my craft and also support other artists in the area as well. Um,

Catherine so you mentioned Linda Liz how or where and how did you guys physically meet and how has she had any?

Neema Yeah, so when I first joined Temple of Hip-Hop, I was the graffiti coordinator, and Linda Luz has was already working with Temple of Hip-Hop at the time. And then I was just assigned to work with her and then for my role, would scout locations together, would talk to shop owners, would look at graffiti artists and see if they would be interested in participating in any type of hip hop. The graffiti section. That's how I work with her.

Emeline How has like the neighborhood of Frog Hollow specifically influenced your art and what have you learned about the community?

Neema I've learned a lot about the community through art coming to truly I think I was very confused about the area. I'm from Chicago, I'm from a really big city and coming to Hartford and especially as a district student was a bit hard for me to kind of adjust to things. But it was I don't know, it just goes back to the organizations I was I was a part of like Temple of Hip-Hop and Underground. Casting me like those organizations and businesses allowed me to connect with people a bit more and feel more comfortable. And once I started doing more comfortable on campus, I started to explore and outside of campus life outside. It allowed me to. I think I learned a lot because even now I have the opportunity to help out with an awesome mural. I'm also helping out with a mural on Zion and Summit Street because I've been able to put myself out into the community more and connect with organizers.

Emeline Wow, I wasn't aware that you were actually working on murals in Frog and Frog Hollow, and so what has that process been?

Neema It's been pretty cool. I'm not working on the mural exactly. I'm on the committee for it, and so I help with their social media. And as of now, we've just been doing tabling and talking to the community about the art that they would like to see and put up the artists that are interested in participating in the opportunity. Like, I'm doing artist call outs. I'm trying to see if I could get Trinity students involved.

Emeline Yeah, yeah. I'm curious to know how is the community responded to your table? Do you get any indicators of how they respond to public art?

Neema they respond pretty well, and I think Hartford has been putting a bigger initiative to get more art in the area. Even this project, it was it came from the city and then I learned about it from Carlos, from. The community has responded positively, especially with our tabling. I know a lot of people show up and they give their input as to what they would like to see for the mural. So for those on street mural is a lot of people and an aspect of community involved unity and more representation of Hartford and symbolism around.

Kristina [00:05:31] Could you kind of explain more about and what you all do? Yeah. Uh, the Cheney chapter Temple of Hip Hop,

Neema [00:05:41] um, we're an organization that plans like a hip hop festival every year and in the spring. And we try to highlight every element of hip hop to the best of our abilities, we have graffiti artists, we have break dancers, B boys do girls. See, as we try to do that, we try to have headliners. I'm blanking. And producers, sorry. There we go. And producers.

Kristina And how do you go about choosing those like artists and producers and different performers in the field, in general.

Neema in general It's a lot of group work, so we'd sit down and we'd have conversations about like for this year, what do we want to highlight? So for example, last year we did past, present future, and this year we're focusing on legacy. And we just in time to have conversations around that, and when it comes to taking performers, we just put two names out and then we also do list names where we listen to different artists and we decide whether or not we would like to meet up with them to perform.

Have you ever chosen Hartford community members to perform? Is the Hartford community involved with that at all or?

Neema Yes. They're more involved when it comes to like the B-Boy B Girls section. We do youth for change. They part take when it comes to the graffiti artists who mainly do Hartford. And then for performers. Sorry, I'm blanking.

Emeline No worries. It's OK. The answers. The kind of more questions that you may have. But what was the inspiration behind the mural in the underground, that training? And what did you first envision to look like and has it met those expectations?

Neema Yes, it met all the expectations. It was started by my friend Tiana, and she came up with the idea of having a mirror in the underground prior to the mural, the space was yellow and there were a lot of things in the space that didn't need to be there, like boxes and hangers and stuff, we don't need that. And then we just had the idea of painting the walls to represent the community that enters the underground and is typically very artistic people, people who love music. We also include elements of LGBTQ a representation. And just overall, very creative people, and I think that's what those are, the types of people that endorse this or something.

Kristina And the design did change over time, and was it pretty consistent from start to finish?

Neema It changed over time. Tiana, her ideas were more like she knew what she was going to do prior and like is going to be a brick wall and this is going to be this. For me, it was more fluid. As time went on, I realized there were aspects that I wanted to change, so I added more swirls. I added more colors. I ended up wanting to do different colors, I would switch colors last minute. But we in general, we just work differently, but at the end, I think it was a pretty

Catherine and what effect do you hope the morale has on trainees, students, faculty, just community general as it relates to the greater Hartford as well?

Neema Oh, I've actually been able to hear people's responses about the mural and it's been positive. I think. Having that space, especially the history of the underground, has always been known as that edgy, like creative hot spot for kids. And I think the mural helped complete the whole look. It feels very inclusive, it feels very cool, and I think it just adds to the comfort of this base.

Emeline Again, I say to you, I think it's like super welcoming and like it really like draws you and you're like, Whoa, what is this?

Kristina Yes, it's. It's so cool. This is a random question, but like can anyone from Hartford come, just like in the underground to come get coffee or whatever is an open space.

Neema Yeah,

Catherine that's awesome. Does that happen often or is it just students?

Neema It's mainly students, but we do encourage people from off campus to come. For example, a few days ago you had a MF DOOM mask making event and people from off campus came to the event.

Kristina Do you have any plans for any more murals at either the Frog Hollow neighborhood or around Trinity?

Neema As of now, I'm I'm on the committee for the arson murals. I think we're going to aim to get that done in the spring. And I'm also on the committee for the Zion and Summit Street mural, which is also going to be completed in the spring. And Tiana is trying to navigate the Charleston House mural. And then I'm working on a mural for for that, I'm still trying to figure out the dates, but she's out there. What you like? Why?

Emeline What draws you to murals and like, why is that like your chosen mode?

Neema I've actually never done murals. the underground area was my first ever mural, and I've never done in real prior to that. I've always done small scale pieces, but I think murals are very enticing to me because the process before painting of like brainstorming like, what am I going to put this? What am I going to put on this wall and how does it best represent the community that I'm trying to portray? I think that process is interesting to me, because it requires a lot of reflection and it requires a lot of communication with the people who are in the community, like, what do you guys want to see? Those are my favorite elements of working on murals where I get like community input and reflecting on my relationship with the community.

Catherina And so that being said, these upcoming murals, do you have any idea what to do? We're just listening to the community.

Neema So for the ASA euro, which is the one, we had a discussion yesterday, a lot of it is like we want to hear community input. So we're doing like student surveys to see and also having representatives from student organizations be a part of the process so that they could communicate what the what their organization would like to see. And so far, for the US and really thinking community, we're thinking storytelling, food and flora fauna.

Emeline Do you have any last thoughts or like anything you want to add about?

Neema I think a lot of people tend to underestimate the talent that Hartford has because it's not a big city. But I've been blown away by the talent that I've seen here, especially with like Linda Luz, like I work with her and she's also a really good friend of mine and Being able to see how she interacts with the community and the events that she puts up and She also is like a teacher, and I'm like, that's really cool, you know? Um, and I don't know like seeing these artists even with like John Macy and I'm just like, Wow, like there is talent here in Hartford And I would hope that where people could begin to recognize that and continue to fund that in the future.

Kristina Could you just add a little bit more about how Linda Luz has impacted you or what your relationship with her is like?

Neema Um, yeah, I met her my sophomore year at Trinity and this was prior to my when I started feeling comfortable putting myself into the community because I wasn't even really comfortable in Trinity as a whole. So she's the person to scout locations and to talk, to shop owners, to talk to graffiti artists. And it was through my connection with her that gave me the confidence to start doing that on my own without her help. I so appreciate your help, but I feel more confident doing it on my own.

Kristina Thank you so much for your time and do these. Can we take a picture? Yeah.