

# Why include performance?

A Faculty Resource Guide for  
Curricular Engagement  
with The Prior



**PRIOR**  
Performing Arts Center



## Curricular Engagement with The Prior



**The Prior Performing Arts Center supports meaningful engagement with the arts for students across the College,** advancing the Holy Cross' commitment to inclusive excellence by exposing students to models of creative practice that emphasize process, experimentation, and risk. To date, more than half of the College's 64 academic units have hosted or required attendance at events at The Prior. We look forward to partnering with colleagues from every department to foster innovative experiential learning opportunities inspired by the multidisciplinary arts, and we welcome your ideas about ways you might draw on the center's unique resources in your teaching.

**Prior Presents is the keystone of the center's public-facing programming, merging thrilling live events by visiting artists with robust educational and outreach activities.** Defined by exceptional artistic quality, interdisciplinary impulses, and the potential to spark both wonder and reflection, this annual series celebrates artistic risk-taking and the exchange of ideas and perspectives from around the globe.

**For each event in the Prior Presents series, we are pleased to offer a brief, accessible resource guide offering multiple points of departure for preparation and conversation.** Email Marta Beyer at [mbeyer@holycross.edu](mailto:mbeyer@holycross.edu) for the guide related to any event of interest in the upcoming season.

## Opportunities



Jha D Amazi of MASS Design Group, 2025

### **Over the past two seasons, Prior staff have facilitated the following opportunities for engagement with Prior Presents:**

- Brought artists into classrooms for student-driven, course-specific Q&As.
- Produced faculty-led dialogues with artists.
- Designed a cluster-wide Monsterrat event including self-reflection, group movement, and other participatory activities.
- Hosted up-close demonstrations.
- Conducted art-making activities.
- Supported faculty in designing assignments connected to specific live events in the series.
- Suggested relevant possible readings and model texts to inspire follow-up assignments.
- Facilitated masterclasses and writing workshops.

### **Prior staff is also available to:**

- Visit your class to offer pre-event preparation or lead a post-event discussion.
- Work with you on pre- or post-event lesson plans to supplement your class's experience with a particular artist-in-residence.



## Why include performance?



Sphinx Virtuosi, 2025

**How can engagement with live performance enhance student learning of topics that are far removed from a given art form? Put another way, why include live events from Prior Presents in your syllabus?**

**Consider whether any of the following impacts of live events overlap with your learning goals for students.**

**01**

**Live events provide an experiential mode for instruction that can enliven the routine of reading, lecture, and note-taking.**

**02**

**Live events are always cultural productions in context, speaking to a particular cross-section of time, place, culture, and personalities.**

[Material on this and the next two pages adapts very closely a [faculty guide](#) produced by UMS, a performing arts presenter at the University of Michigan and a winner of the National Medal of the Arts. UMS's other white papers for faculty on integrating the arts into curriculum include [Performance as a Tool for Inclusive Teaching](#) and [Discussing Performance in the Classroom](#). If you are interested in accessing or collaborating on Holy Cross-specific resources in this vein, please reach out to [mbeyer@holycross.edu](mailto:mbeyer@holycross.edu).]



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Mfoniso Udofia's *Sojourners*, 2024

03

**Live events ask students to absorb and analyze high degrees of complexity.**

Performances are dynamic, complex systems, encompassing the interaction of performers with each other, performers with technical aspects of theater, performers with audience, performers with “text,” performance with the culture at large, and more. Students must pay attention to detail, and quickly assess which details are important.

04

**Live events require physical and mental presence for an immediate, multi-sensory experience;**

they are distinct from screen-based representation and abstract theory. As one professor says, “It’s live, and it’s real.”

05

**Students must actively engage in making sense rather than passively reviewing information.**

This sense-making can itself be a creative act.

06

**Live events often support multiple viable interpretations.**

The outcome may be ambiguous, encouraging personal meaning-making for the individual, and questions and conversation among the group.



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07

**Live events demonstrate innovation.** Performances are artists' creative answers to questions; they are the embodiment of new ideas. Performance frames familiar issues in new ways, challenging students' habits and certitude.

08

**Live events require empathy,** an appreciation of the human condition, and recognition of the "other." It invites audience members to inhabit worlds distant from their own.

09

**Live events can provide a memorable experience for students, contributing to the development of the whole person.** Many students have never seen a live concert, theater or dance performance, or lecture in a space like the Boroughs Theatre or the Luth Concert Hall.

10

**Live events build community.** Students share a unique, unifying experience.



## Faculty and students on performance



**"It was good for students to see a working writer [and] to have them understand that writing, publishing, and even the endeavor of being a college student is a process."**

–Oliver de la Paz, Faculty, on Aimee Nezhukumatathil's public lecture

**"I really enjoyed analyzing the choreography choices Camille made. It also showed me the importance of storytelling through movement."**

–Student on Camille A. Brown & Dancers' performance

**"The performance was also an experience, having never been to a violin concert before. It was challenging, but also fascinating to decipher abstract takes on musical pieces."**

–Student on Johnny Gandelsman's performance

**"The concert itself was a fantastic cultural experience. Students learned about jazz as well as the history of boarding schools in the U.S. and they were able to hear multiple Indigenous languages spoken."**

–Sarah Klotz, Faculty, on Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band's performance

**"The performance, production, and communication from The Prior were all excellent."**

–Morris Collins, Faculty, on Prior Presents

**"Individual feedback was fantastic -- it was great to hear advice on how I could improve my work from someone who has spent their life composing and producing music."**

–Student on Jeremy Flower's residency

**"I was able to see another side of the play beyond the written text. It added a lot of emotion which I think is important. I think the company members provided interesting perspectives and I really enjoyed getting to ask them questions in class."**

–Student on The Acting Company's residency with August Wilson's *Two Trains Running*