

## The National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron

### NEWS RELEASE

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AKRON, Ohio — The **National Endowment for the Arts** Chairman **Mary Anne Carter** has approved more than \$84 million in grants as part of the Arts Endowment's second major funding announcement for fiscal year 2020. Included among this cohort is an Art Works award of \$25,000 to the **National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron**. This is one of 1,015 grants nationwide that the agency has approved in the Art Works category, and one of three granted to dance organizations in Ohio.

"These awards demonstrate the resilience of the arts in America, showcasing not only the creativity of their arts project but the organizations' agility in the face of a national health crisis," said Mary Anne Carter, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts. "We celebrate organizations like NCCAkron for providing opportunities for learning and engagement through the arts in these times."

NCCAkron began the process of applying for this round NEA funding in May of 2019. Some of the residencies highlighted in NCCAkron's application and receiving support through this NEA award include:

- Dancing Lab: Intersectional Identities, with **Lionel Popkin** (Los Angeles, CA) and other South Asian artists
- Dancing Lab: LGBTQ+ Dream Lab with **Sean Dorsey** (San Francisco, CA) and other LGBTQ+ artists
- A creative residency with **John Heginbotham** (New York, NY) as the culmination of his three-year research residency at NCCAkron

"Artists are equal partners in NCCAkron's programming," said NCCAkron's Executive/Artistic Director **Christy Bolingbroke**. "Our residencies and labs arise out of iterative conversations with artists across our field. The process can take anywhere from 15-18 months from the start to arrival at a program together. Parallel to those discussions are the various funding cycles and opportunities to support those dreams together. When these artists committed to the possibility of working with us a year ago, we could not have predicted the moment we would be in right now as a field and society. Receipt of critical support like this means it is both a time to celebrate and

continue to innovate around how we can best work with artists, meeting them where they are at and with what they need most - money.”

Dancing Lab activities are a unique residency format larger than a single artist’s next project and representing a reflexive opportunity within community. A lead artist co-curates a learning cohort of artistic colleagues with NCCAkron towards the ultimate goal of exchanging knowledge and exploring shared questions. Past Dancing Labs have centered female choreographers, Native/Indigenous intelligence in contemporary dance, screendance, dance as cultural diplomacy, immersive media, and physically integrated dance. In the virtual space, these sponsored Dancing Labs under NCCAkron’s latest NEA award will begin to meet regularly right away with the expectation of being able to convene physically together in some way or other a year from now.

Bolingbroke elaborated, “As a *national* organization we often reflect on what it means to be a ‘center’ when we are neither in the physical center of the country or the perceived center of the dance universe. The aftermath of COVID will likely prevent us from bringing people to Akron for some time, but we see this as an opportunity to reach artists in their home environments all across the country.”

For **Dancing Lab: Intersectional Identities**, Lionel Popkin (Los Angeles) is the lead artist and other South Asian artists: Parijat Desai (New York City), Sujata Goel (Harrisburg, PA), Hari Krishnan (Middletown, CT), Meena Murugesan (Los Angeles), and Pramila Vasudevan (Minneapolis).

Says Popkin: “This Dancing Lab will be a gathering space for multiple artists all contending with questions of South Asian representation in the Euro-American context. Our space is an opportunity to unlink orientalist visions of Classicism with how brown South Asian bodies can dance, perform and interact. Even our initial meetings and conversations have proven to be inspiring synergies of possibilities and support.”

For **Dancing Lab: LGBTQ+ Dream Lab**, with Sean Dorsey and other LGBTQ+ artists: Lilly Valore (Boston) and Randy Ford (Seattle).

Says Dorsey: “I’m so grateful and excited about the powerful and thoughtful support of NCC Akron -- during this critical time of uprising and resistance, our Lab will give me and my collaborators time and space to connect, dream, mourn and imagine. As a trans artist-activist this is an enormous opportunity.”

A little over three years ago, Bolingbroke began a conversation with choreographer John Heginbotham about fostering a relationship with NCCAkron around research and development. In 2018, Heginbotham's first visit included a Research Residency with the composition faculty and students in UA's School of Music and early exploration in new technologies. The following year, Heginbotham and his eponymous company's Managing Director Andrea Lodico came to Akron discussing choreographic administration as well as researching a new work centered around music composer John Cage and his affection for mushrooms and mycology in the nearby Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Dance Heginbotham's Creative/Technical Residency subsidized with this NEA support is envisioned to cap off this multi-year experiment and investment.

Heginbotham says: "My time at NCCAkron has been valuable in unexpected ways. I suppose that truth can be alternatively described as *completely* expected considering that exploration is at the core of my activity with this incredible organization."

A complete 2020-21 season will be shared via NCCAkron's website later this year.

### **About**

The National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron (NCCAkron) supports the research and development of new work in dance by exploring the full potential of the creative process. In addition to offering studio and technical residencies to make new work, activities focus on catalyzing dialogue and experimentation; creating proximity among artists and dance thinkers; and aggregating resources around dance making. For more information, visit [www.nccakron.org](http://www.nccakron.org).

### **Funding Credits**

The establishment of NCCAkron is made possible by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

### **Lead Artist Biographies**

#### **Sean Dorsey (San Francisco, CA)**

Sean Dorsey is an award-winning choreographer, dancer and writer. Recognized as the U.S.' first acclaimed transgender modern dance choreographer, Dorsey has toured his work to 30 cities. SF Weekly named Sean Dorsey Dance as "San Francisco's Best Dance Company", and Dorsey was named in Dance Magazine's 25 To Watch. He was awarded a Dance/USA Artist Fellowship, 5 Isadora Duncan Dance Awards, and the Goldie Award for Performance. Dorsey has also received support from the National

Endowment for the Arts, National Dance Project, National Performance Network, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. He has worked for equity for transgender and gender-nonconforming artists for 20 years, and he is a leading national advocate for Trans Equity in dance. Dorsey's program TRANSform Dance provides trans-supportive education, engagement, and advocacy to forward trans equity and justice.

**John Heginbotham (New York, NY)**

John Heginbotham was part of the Mark Morris Dance Group (1998-2012), and he founded Dance Heginbotham in 2011. Recent projects include John Adams' *Girls of the Golden West*, directed by Peter Sellars (San Francisco Opera 2017, Dutch National Opera 2019); *Candide* with the Orlando Philharmonic (2016) and *The Knights* (2018, 2019); and Daniel Fish's 2015 Bard Summerscape production of *Oklahoma!* (Off-Broadway 2018, Broadway 2019) which won the 2019 Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical. Heginbotham received the 2014 Jacob's Pillow Dance Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship (2018), a City Center Choreography Fellowship (2017-18), and an NYU Center for Ballet and the Arts Fellowship (2016). He is the Director of the Dartmouth Dance Ensemble, and he is a founding teacher of Dance for PD, a collaboration between the Mark Morris Dance Group and the Brooklyn Parkinson Group. NCCAkrón will host Heginbotham for a Creative/Technical Residency that will be a culmination of his 3-year Research Residency.

**Lionel Popkin (Los Angeles, CA)**

Lionel Popkin is a choreographer who values bodily experience as the primary way we orient ourselves to our world; seeking hybridity over homogenization and the gloriously confused over the need for oversimplification. Popkin has toured and performed at Danspace Project, Abrons Arts Center, Dance Theater Workshop, The Getty Center, REDCAT, The Skirball Cultural Center, Jacob's Pillow Inside/Out Series, ODC, London's Place Theater in London, and China's Guangdong Modern Dance Festival. Popkin has received support from the National Performance Network's Creation Fund, the National Dance Project Touring Subsidy, the Center for Cultural Innovation, the Puffin Foundation, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and the Durfee Foundation. Popkin is a Professor at the UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance and is a certified teacher of Skinner Releasing Technique.

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