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**The National Center for Choreography - Akron Announces the Thought Partners for its Creative Administration Research Program**



From left to right: Antuan Byers (Eric Politzer), Byron Au Yong (Brennen Smith), Francine Sheffield, Huong Hoang, Indira Goodwine (Ra-Re Valverde), John Michael Schert, Mengtong Guan (Zhang Ting), Pamela Green (Christina Holder), Priya Sircar (Avram Dodson), and Tonya Lockyer

AKRON, Ohio (March 22, 2021)—**The National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron (NCCAkron)** announces the Thought Partners for its newly launched **Creative Administration Research (CAR)** program. Thought Partners are paired with a choreographer in the dance field to investigate administrative practices that support the artist’s creative practices. Thought Partners include **Antuan Byers** (New York, NY), **Byron Au Yong** (San Francisco, CA), **Francine Sheffield** (Richmond, VA), **Huong Hoang** (New York, NY), **Indira Goodwine** (Boston, MA), **John Michael Schert** (Boise, ID), **Mengtong Guan** (New York, NY), **Pamela Green** (Durham, NC), **Priya Sircar** (Miami Beach, FL), and **Tonya Lockyer** (Suquamish, WA).

With lead support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Creative Administration Research program fosters a national think tank of up to 20 dance Artist Teams between now and June 2023. These teams include the choreographer, Thought Partner, and NCCAkron staff members. Each Artist Team engages in an artist-dedicated Investigative Retreat, with time and space to identify administrative experimentations that support creative practices. Rather than reinforce the one size fits all approach, Creative Administration Research invites Artist Teams to imagine multiple ways forward. The paired Thought Partner provides additional accountability and a sounding board in between Investigative Retreats.

Current Thought Partners include arts administrators, artists, funders, presenters, and those who work outside of the dance field. Thought Partners were identified through participation in NCCAkron's CAR Work-In-Process Series of discussions, which brought together 41 thinkers and leaders across the arts sector to reflect and imagine a twenty-first-century dance ecosystem. NCCAkron curated a selection of potential Thought Partners from the pool of participants for possible pairings, and choreographers made final selections.

The first cohort of choreographers began their Creative Administration Research in Fall 2020 including **Jaamil Olawale Kosoko** (Mengtong Guan), **Raja Feather Kelly** (Byron Au Yong), **Brian Brooks** (Huong Hoang), **Rashaun Mitchell + Silas Riener** (Tonya Lockyer), and **Ronald K. Brown** (Pamela Green).

Tonya Lockyer, whose Investigative Retreat with Rashaun Mitchell + Silas Riener happened in January 2021, explains, "I'm honored to collaborate with artists and NCCAkron to help create transformational change that will strengthen, position, and sustain dance artists, now and into the future. I know first hand, both as an artist and curator, the power of focusing on an artist's trajectory and the many arcs of inspiration and strategy that bring dance to life, and make a life in dance possible."

A similar timeline and process are set for the second cohort of artists, who were onboarded in early 2021. The cohort includes **Abby Zbikowski** (Francine Sheffield), **Bebe Miller** (Antuan Byers), **Marjani Forté-Saunders** (Priya Sircar), **Kate Wallich** (Indira Goodwine), and **Banning Bouldin** (John Michael Schert).

Indira Goodwine, whose Investigative Retreat with Kate Wallich is this month, explains, "NCCAkron's Creative Administration Research program provides an opportunity to intentionally merge a choreographer's creative practice(s) with emergent administrative strategies that support their career trajectory and overall desired social impact through dance. It not only creates additional pathways to better support individual artists but also places a high value on the stewardship of trust that must be built amongst all members of the dance ecology for equitable transformation to occur in our field."

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation funding also enabled NCCAkron to hire Kat Wentz as Program Manager as the organization's second full-time employee in Fall 2020. Wentz reflects, "It has been a privilege to observe and work with the Artist Teams through these Investigative Retreats. Each retreat has provided new insight into each choreographer's needs in addition to overarching pain points in the field."

In summer 2021, NCCAkron will host another iteration of the CAR Work-In-Process Series to grow the pool of Thought Partners and continuously collect program feedback. The third cohort of choreographers and curated Thought Partners will be onboarded in early Fall 2021. All active Artist Teams will gather in Akron, Ohio, for a Summit Convening to exchange experiences and working knowledge in June 2022. During this time, an open application will be announced for a

fourth cohort to join the process. The application will be open to dancers, arts administrators, and funders to participate in the Creative Administration Research program. NCCAkron will document and share discoveries from this work through a publishing partnership with The University of Akron Press.

### **About NCCAkron**

The National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron 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 [nccakron.org](http://nccakron.org).

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

The Creative Administration Research program is made possible with lead support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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### **Creative Administration Research Thought Partner Biographies**

**Antuan Byers** (New York, NY)

CAR Artist: Bebe Miller

Antuan Byers is a dancer, creative entrepreneur, and arts activist. He graduated cum laude from the Ailey/Fordham BFA Program with honors in Dance, holds a Certificate of Fashion from the Parsons School of Design, and is an alumnus of Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. After touring internationally with Ailey II, he returned to Lincoln Center to rejoin the Metropolitan Opera Ballet as a regular performer. Antuan hosts The LLAB on the Pod de Deux podcast, a series on racial justice in the dance world, is a founding member of the Black Caucus at the American Guild of Music Artists, and is a steering committee member of the Dance Artists' National Collective. He is the proud Founder/CEO of Black Dance Change Makers. [antuanbyers.com](http://antuanbyers.com)

**Byron Au Yong** (San Francisco, CA)

CAR Artist: Raja Feather Kelly

Byron Au Yong creates across disciplines with an attention to intercultural collaboration and the ways people connect with the places they call home. Examples include the musical intervention *Activist Songbook* to counteract hate and energize movements and the comic-rap-scrap-metal-opera *Stuck Elevator* about an undocumented immigrant trapped in an elevator for 81 hours. Honors include a Creative Capital Award and Time Warner Foundation Fellowship. Au Yong teaches in performing arts and social justice at the University of San Francisco, located on occupied Ohlone land. [byronauyong.com](http://byronauyong.com)

**Francine Sheffield** (Richmond, VA)

CAR Artist: Abby Zbikowski

Francine Sheffield is a former company member of Urban Bush Women for 6 years, where she traveled and performed all over the world. She then went on to work as Artist Representative for Pentacle, where she booked engagements for emerging dance companies. With her knowledge of dance and skills in arts administration, Francine started Sheffield Global Arts Management in 2014. SGAManagement offers exceptional artist representation and consulting services for select established and emerging dance companies, with a focus on women and people of color. SGAManagement is now in partnership with Rhizome Arts Consulting to continue the work of serving and sharing the arts field. [sheffieldglobalarts.com](http://sheffieldglobalarts.com)

**Huong Hoang** (New York, NY)

CAR Artist: Brian Brooks

Huong Hoang is a New York based arts administrator for over 25 years. She is currently the general manager of The Joyce Theater Foundation, an international dance presenting arts organization. She began her professional life in the performing arts in various staff and managerial positions with the White Oak Dance Project, and has toured extensively with the company from 1995-2002. She has held positions at the Mark Morris Dance Group as general manager, and at Baryshnikov Arts Center as director of administration and finance. She has produced and toured nationally and internationally with the esteemed artist Mikhail Baryshnikov since 1995. Born and raised in Viet Nam, she is a graduate of the University of Michigan and the University of Pennsylvania. [linkedin.com/in/huong-hoang-49b4526](https://www.linkedin.com/in/huong-hoang-49b4526)

**Indira Goodwine** (Boston, MA)

CAR Artist: Kate Wallich

Indira Goodwine is the Program Director for Dance at the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA), where she directs NEFA's National Dance Project and major dance initiatives in New England. She previously served as the inaugural Managing Director of Camille A. Brown & Dancers (CABD) where she shepherded the organization through the attainment of 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, enhanced the institutional and individual fundraising efforts, and provided oversight of the development, implementation and continued growth of CABD's dance engagement program, "EVERY BODY MOVE." She is a 2016 New York Community Trust Fellow, American Express Leadership Academy Alumna, and Dance/USA DILT Program Alumna. Indira holds a BFA in Dance Performance from Florida State University and an MA in Performing Arts Administration from New York University. [linkedin.com/in/indira-goodwine](https://www.linkedin.com/in/indira-goodwine)

**John Michael Schert** (Boise, ID)

CAR Artist: Banning Bouldin

John Michael Schert is an artist, entrepreneur, coach and producer working in multiple sectors and translating across many platforms. Schert began his career as a ballet dancer with American Ballet Theatre and Alonzo King LINES Ballet after attending high school at The University of North Carolina School of the Arts. In 2004 he co-founded Trey McIntyre Project

(TMP), concurrently serving as the company's Executive Director, and a dancer, for nine years. From 2013 to 2017 he served as the inaugural Visiting Artist and Social Entrepreneur at The University of Chicago Booth School of Business. He holds an MPA; with a Certificate in Management, Leadership, and Decision Sciences, from the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government. [linkedin.com/in/johnmichaelschert](https://www.linkedin.com/in/johnmichaelschert)

**Mengtong Guan** (New York, NY)

CAR Artist: Jaamil Olawale Kosoko

Mengtong Guan, born in Beijing, is a creative producer and arts manager. She received a Master's degree in Arts Administration from Indiana University O'Neil School of Public and Environmental Affairs. Mengtong worked with Lincoln Center Festival in New York City as Assistant Company Manager, in 2014 she joined Ping Pong Productions in China and the USA after touring with Mark Morris Dance Group in China and has been leading the organization as Executive and Creative Director since 2017. She is an alumnus of Atelier for Young Festival Managers by the European Festival Association and Emerging Leaders of New York Arts Fellowship. Mengtong Guan currently sits on the Membership Committee of the International Society of Performing Arts. [linkedin.com/in/mengtongguan](https://www.linkedin.com/in/mengtongguan)

**Pamela Green** (Durham, NC)

CAR Artist: Ron K. Brown

Pamela Green holds a BA in Public Policy and a minor in Drama from Duke University and an MS in Arts Administration from Drexel University. She began her arts administration training at the Durham Arts Council and furthered her experience working for the American Dance Festival. She was managing director of the Chuck Davis African-American Dance Ensemble (1985-1989) and Director of Touring and Presenting for the NC Arts Council (1989-1992). In 1992, she founded PMG Arts Management, providing booking, management, producing and consulting services to well-established and emerging artists. She currently serves on the Western Arts Alliance board, where she co-chairs the Black Arts@ WAA committee, and the Duke Performances Advisory Board. [pmgartsmgt.com](http://pmgartsmgt.com)

**Priya Sircar** (Miami Beach, FL)

CAR Artist: Marjani Forte-Saunders

Priya Sircar is an arts advocate and artist with 20 years' experience serving communities through philanthropy, nonprofit management, and consulting. As director/arts at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, she oversees Knight's arts investments in cities across the United States where Knight has offices. She joined Knight from Lord Cultural Resources, where she specialized in strategic and cultural planning for arts, cultural, and heritage organizations and communities in the United States and abroad. A dancer-choreographer, actor and former musician, Sircar has performed around the country, directed movement for theatre, and produced and appeared in films that have screened in festivals including SXSW. Sircar holds a master's in arts administration from Teachers College, Columbia University, and a bachelor's in the interdisciplinary Plan II Honors Program from The University of Texas.

[linkedin.com/in/priya-sircar](https://www.linkedin.com/in/priya-sircar)

**Tonya Lockyer** (Suquamish, WA)

CAR Artist: Silas Riener + Rashaun Mitchell

Named “one of the key cultural change-makers in the Northwest” by The Seattle Times, Lockyer has been performing, making, facilitating, producing, curating, teaching and writing about performance, internationally, for three decades. A committed cultural place-maker, Lockyer was the inaugural Chair of Seattle’s first Arts District, a co-founder of numerous artist collectives, and the Executive Artistic Director of Velocity where she oversaw the transformation of a community arts center into a leading national nexus for new dance and performance. Lockyer continues to help artists grow their impact as a dramaturge, writer and strategic thought-partner. Her writing on performance is published in exhibition catalogues, international journals, and is required in college curriculums. [linkedin.com/in/tonya-lockyer-b249b916](https://www.linkedin.com/in/tonya-lockyer-b249b916)