

Media Contact:

Mariclare Hulbert, NCCAkron PR Contact

585.278.2302

mariclare.hulbert@gmail.com

**THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHOREOGRAPHY-AKRON ANNOUNCES
ALICE SHEPPARD & LAUREL LAWSON OF KINETIC LIGHT
AS THE 2025 KNIGHT CHOREOGRAPHY PRIZE RECIPIENTS**
*– Made possible by Knight Foundation,
This Award Invests In the Future of Dance –*



Alice Sheppard and Laurel Lawson of Kinetic Light in *Wired*.

Image Description: A close up of Alice and Laurel suspended in the air, arms outstretched and clasping each other's hands. Alice is a multiracial Black woman with coffee-colored skin and short curly hair; she wears a shimmering deep red costume. Laurel is a white person with cropped hair; she wears a shimmering gold costume with thick black shoulder straps. The dancers are upside down and horizontal at the same time, their wheels shining and facing out. Photo Robbie Sweeny.

AKRON, OH (October 14, 2025) — **The National Center for Choreography-Akron (NCCAkron)** today announces choreographers **Alice Sheppard** (New York, NY/Los Altos, CA) and **Laurel Lawson** (Atlanta, GA) of disability arts company **Kinetic Light** as the latest recipients of the \$50,000 Knight Choreography Prize. Made possible by Knight Foundation, this award is designed to support the artistic experimentation and career longevity of choreographers in the United States. Each year the award honors a living choreographer or artist collaborative whose body of work is distinguished not only for their artistry but also for their originality of thought and impact. The award celebrates choreographers who provide significant contributions to the dance field, expand audiences for dance, and ensure the artform has a prominent place in U.S. culture. Kinetic Light will receive an unrestricted cash award of \$30,000, plus \$20,000 in programmatic support over two years, to be co-designed with NCCAkron.

Founded in 2016 by Sheppard, Kinetic Light is an internationally-renowned disability arts company known for ambitious, immersive multimedia performance works that emerge from disability culture and are centered in Kinetic Light's signature approach to aesthetically and artistically equitable access. Laurel Lawson is a choreographer, designer, and artist-engineer; they lead Kinetic Light research and development initiatives in tech, access software and product development, and access education curriculum Access ALLways. Alice Sheppard is the Artistic Director of Kinetic Light as well as a choreographer, dancer, arts researcher, writer, and sought-after speaker.

"Alice and Laurel, together with Kinetic Light, have made tremendous waves across the disability arts, dance, access, design, and technology fields," says **Christy Bolingbroke, Executive/Artistic Director of NCCAkron**. "They have an intentional and inventive approach to world-building through disability arts, tech R&D, administrative practices, and the accessible experiences they create for audiences. At NCCAkron, we often say 'everything is choreography,' and Kinetic Light truly exemplifies that principle."

Kinetic Light's repertory includes *DESCENT* (2017), *Under Momentum* (2018), the aerial work *Wired* (2022), the virtual reality experience *territory* (2025), and *The Next TiMes* (2025), created in collaboration with Kinetic Light artists and collaborators including Michael Maag, Jerron Herman, Kayla Hamilton, Tatiana Cholewa, Colin Clark, Kiira Benz, and many others. Brian Seibert of *The New York Times* notes "Kinetic Light, a disability arts ensemble whose work is made by and for disabled people, has an ethic and aesthetic of access that is exceptionally thoughtful and thorough." Emily Watlington of *Art in America* shares "Kinetic Light allows disability to transform everything about the working process and the product."

"Kinetic Light's work emerges from the intersections of artistic access, disability aesthetics, and disability culture; it is connected to the rich traditions and exciting contemporary conversations of disabled artists in all artistic fields," shares **Alice Sheppard, Founder and Artistic Director of Kinetic Light**. "This award enables us to deepen and expand. Our work is possible due to the contributions of the entire Kinetic Light team, and we are grateful."

"We are honored to receive this award in recognition of Kinetic Light's choreography of performance, which in addition to dance encompasses design, access, tech, research, product development, and audience experience. Access is multifaceted and ever expanding. Access is art," comments **Laurel Lawson, Kinetic Light Access & Technology Lead**.

About the Knight Choreography Prize

With an initial investment of \$5 million from Knight Foundation, NCCAkron was established in 2015 to address research and development opportunities in dance. This nonprofit organization has become an intellectual matchmaker between national choreographers and the robust cultural ecology in and around Akron, OH, as well as operating as a hyperagent for dance across the national landscape. Over the past decade, NCCAkron has worked with more than 800 dance artists across 100 U.S. cities. In 2022, Knight Foundation invested an additional \$1.5 million to establish this annual unrestricted cash and programmatic award for choreographers and sponsor it in perpetuity.

The Knight Choreography Prize is designed to support the artistic experimentation and career longevity of choreographers in the United States. NCCAkron intends for the award to provide essential time and space for the creative process, for research, and for rigorous play and positive failure. NCCAkron commits to co-create activities and residencies with artists as equal

partners and promote equity in the arts by elevating underrepresented voices that are a valuable part of the 21st century dance ecosystem and the future of the artform.

NCCAkrón invited dance artists, dance stakeholders, and NCCAkrón alumni across the U.S. to nominate a choreographer for this award. An NCCAkrón committee then selected five artists from that nomination list, based on established criteria, and those artists were invited to submit application materials. The final selection committee comprised NCCAkrón alumni, board members, and Knight City artists. Miami-based choreographer Rosie Herrera was named the inaugural recipient of the Knight Choreography Prize in May 2024, and Shamel Pitts (Brooklyn, NY) received the second award in October 2024. Hereafter, the Knight Choreography Prize is announced once a year, in the Fall.

Laurel Lawson (any pronouns) is a founding member and Access & Technology Lead for Kinetic Light. Choreographer, designer, and artist-engineer, they lead research and development with initiatives such as [Audimance](#), the company's app which revolutionizes audio description, and novel artistic haptic experiences. Lawson brings decades of experience in product design and facilitative leadership to access and technology work. Their work with immersive embodied experience platforms lives at [The Choreodaemonic Collective](#), where they co-lead a collective of artist-technologists. Lawson's work has been recognized with a 2019 DFA Fellowship, made possible with funding from the Doris Duke Foundation, a 2023 Creative Capital Award, and a 2025 Jacob's Pillow Lab residency. Lawson is also the CTO and co-founder of [CyCore Systems](#), a systems engineering consultancy which specializes in solving novel, multi-realm problems of all sizes for a global clientele.

Alice Sheppard (she/her) is the Founder and Artistic Director of renowned disability arts ensemble Kinetic Light. A UCLA Regents Lecturer; United States Artists, MacDowell, and Disability Futures Fellow; Creative Capital grantee; and Bessie Award winner, Alice creates movement that emerges from her understanding of disabled expression, seeking to find the maximum expression of disability in all her different embodiments. Engaging with disability arts, culture, and history, Alice's commissioned work attends to the complex intersections of disability, gender, and race. In addition to performance and choreography, Alice Sheppard is an independent arts researcher whose dance and disability writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, peer-reviewed essay collections, and such academic journals as *Catalyst*, *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, and *Movement Research Performance Journal*.

About Kinetic Light

Founded in 2016 by Alice Sheppard, **Kinetic Light** is an internationally-recognized disability arts ensemble. Working in the disciplines of art, technology, design, and dance, Kinetic Light creates, performs, and teaches at the nexus of access, queerness, disability, dance, and race. Kinetic Light is led by disabled artists; disabled artists create, design, and perform the work. The company's work speaks to and emerges from disability aesthetics and disability culture, and it is connected to the rich traditions and exciting contemporary conversations of disabled artists in all artistic fields. In Kinetic Light's work disability is not a deficit, it is a powerful, intersectional creative force that is essential to artistry. Access is integral to the art, creative process, administrative work, and audience experience. kineticlight.org

About NCCAkron

The National Center for Choreography-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.

A discrete organization of its own, separate from The University of Akron but with offices based there, the establishment and general operation of NCCAkron are made possible by Knight Foundation.

About Knight Foundation

We are social investors who support a more effective democracy by funding free expression and journalism, arts and culture in community, research in areas like artificial intelligence, and the success of American cities and towns where the Knight brothers once published newspapers. Learn more at kf.org.

###