

Media Contact:

Mariclare Hulbert, Publicist

585.278.2302

mariclare.hulbert@gmail.com

**THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHOREOGRAPHY-AKRON
HOSTS FREE, PUBLIC CONVERSATION AND PERFORMANCE
WITH CHOREOGRAPHER HELANIUS J. WILKINS**



Clockwise from top left: Helanius J. Wilkins and Brandon Welch in a Washington DC *Choreographic Ritual* (David Dowling), Helanius J. Wilkins (Christopher Michael Carruth), and community participants in Lafayette, LA (Paul Kieu)

AKRON, OH (May 6, 2024) — **The National Center for Choreography - Akron** (NCCAkron) will host two free, public events as part of visiting choreographer Helanius J. Wilkins's Creative Residency: a community conversation on May 13 and a performance at People's Park on May 18. Each activity is connected to [*The Conversation Series: Stitching the Geopolitical Quilt to Re-Body Belonging*](#), an ongoing and always shifting dance and social change work, confronting and celebrating heritage, resiliency, justice, and hope.

Helanius J. Wilkins (Boulder, CO) is an award-winning choreographer, performance artist, educator, and artist-activist. His creative research and projects are rooted in the interconnections of American contemporary performance, cultural history, and identities of Black men. The concept for ***The Conversation Series: Stitching the Geopolitical Quilt to Re-Body Belonging*** emerged following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the social turmoil that the country was experiencing. Wilkins began walking up to 16 miles per day through his own neighborhood to alleviate the fear of being in public he had developed during that time. He intentionally walked the same path at the same time each day, hoping to reorient his relationship

with the community he lived in. Wilkins shared: “Walking . . . feels like an act of courage and a personal protest. I continue to hold space to be seen, to be heard, to be felt, simply to breathe.”

His walking practice expanded into *The Conversation Series*. This multi-year work will require Wilkins to travel to all 50 US states, Washington DC, and five inhabited territories, stitching together a dance-quilt to broaden our understanding of what it means to be American and sew ourselves together anew. Thus far, Wilkins has facilitated 61 community engagements in 10 states, with 8 choreographic rituals and 2 stage productions.

NCCAkron is hosting Wilkins for a Creative Residency the week of May 13-18, 2024, which marks the return of his artistic process in the state of Ohio. He was previously on the ground in Akron March 2022 for a series of community walking tours of Akron and again September of 2023 for the first *Belonging Conversation Community Gathering* hosted by Summit ArtSpace. Wilkins was in town for the community celebration of [Little Amal’s Walk Across America](#) and was so taken with People’s Park during that event that he chose to share a Choreographic Ritual performance at the Park on May 18, 2024.

Event Details

Belonging Conversation Community Gathering

Monday, May 13, 5:00 – 7:00pm

North Hill Library – Conference Room, 183 E Cuyahoga Falls Ave, Akron, OH 44310

Join NCCAkron for a conversation facilitated by artist-activist Helanius J. Wilkins, designed to bring together an intergenerational and inclusive group of Akron residents to center community and connections to place.

[Free. RSVP](#)

Choreographic Ritual

Saturday, May 18, 2024, 3:00– 4:00pm

People’s Park, 760 Elma St, Akron, OH 44310

Join NCCAkron and choreographer Helanius J. Wilkins for *Choreographic Ritual* – a free, site-based performance offering inspired by the Akron community. This is the culminating event for a series of community engagement activities.

[Free. RSVP](#)

###

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

About Helanius J. Wilkins

Louisiana native and Colorado transplant Helanius J. Wilkins is an award-winning choreographer, performance artist, educator, certified Colorado Change Leader, and activist (artist-activist). Wilkins's creative research and projects are rooted in the interconnections of American contemporary performance, cultural history, and identities of Black men. His projects examine the raced dancing body and ways ritual can access knowledge. He uses remembering to piece together and liberate Black identity through performance. Having choreographed 60+ works, honors include the Pola Nirenska Award for Contemporary Achievement in Dance (DC's highest honor, given by the Washington Performing Arts Society, 2008) and the Kennedy Center Local Dance Commissioning Project (2002 & 2006). Foundations/organizations, including NEA, NEFA National Dance Project, and National Performance Network (NPN), have supported his work. He founded and artistically directed Washington DC-based EDGEWORKS Dance Theater, an all-male dance company predominantly of Black men that toured nationally and internationally (2001 - 2014). He is the Associate Chair and Director and an Associate Professor of Dance at CU Boulder. He is a member of the National Board of Directors of the American College Dance Association (ACDA) for the Northwest region and completed a 4-year term to the Colorado Council on Creative Industries as appointed by Governor Jared Polis in 2018. His current work is a multi-year, multi-outcome art and humanities work titled *The Conversation Series: Stitching the Geopolitical Quilt to Re-Body Belonging*. www.helaniusj.com

Funding Credits

This Creative Residency and the development of *The Conversation Series: Stitching the Geopolitical Quilt to Re-Body Belonging* were made possible in part by the National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron (NCCAkron) and funding from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Conversation Series: Stitching the Geopolitical Quilt to Re-Body Belonging is a National Performance Network (NPN) Creation & Development Fund Project co-commissioned by Redline Contemporary Art Center in partnership with CSPA Legion Arts, Dance Place, The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, and NPN/VAN. The Creation & Development Fund is supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts (a federal agency). For more information, visit www.npnweb.org.