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**THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHOREOGRAPHY-AKRON ANNOUNCES
SHAMEL PITTS
AS THE 2024 KNIGHT CHOREOGRAPHY PRIZE RECIPIENT
– Made possible by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation,
This Award Invests In the Future of Dance –**



Photo credit (left to right): Shamel Pitts by Itai Zwecker and Alex Apt.

AKRON, OH (October 22, 2024) — **The National Center for Choreography-Akron (NCCAkron)** today announces **Shamel Pitts** (Brooklyn, NY) as the second recipient 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 will honor a living choreographer 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. Pitts will receive an unrestricted cash award of \$30,000, plus \$20,000 in programmatic support over two years, to be co-designed with NCCAkron.

NCCAkron Executive/Artistic Director Christy Bolingbroke shares, “Less than a dozen national awards for performing artists acknowledge excellence with unrestricted funds, even

fewer are dedicated to dance and choreography at the national level. With the creation of the Knight Choreography Prize, NCCAkron can continue to advocate for dance as a central part of U.S. culture, raise the profile of preeminent choreographers, and invest in the future of the artform.”

Bolingbroke continues, “After a multi-month nomination process and curatorial selection committee review, we are so pleased to award the 2024 Knight Choreography Prize to Shamel Pitts, an artist citizen using his choreographic voice to not only create but also connect through our complex humanity. We know he will continue to have a deeply felt influence across our field.”

Shamel Pitts is a performance artist, dancer, conceptual artist, choreographer, spoken word artist, and teacher whose work explores and embodies multiplicity, vulnerability, Afrofuturism, rigor, and connection. After graduating from The Juilliard School, Pitts danced all over the world with Mikhail Baryshnikov’s Hell’s Kitchen Dance, Ballets Jazz Montréal, and Batsheva Dance Company. Shamel Pitts is the artistic director/founder of TRIBE, a New York-based multidisciplinary arts collective. He has created a triptych of award-winning multidisciplinary performance art works known as his “BLACK series” which has been performed and toured extensively around the world since 2016. Candice Thompson of *Dance Magazine* says “Choreographer Shamel Pitts has been provoking audiences with multidisciplinary dance works that push against the boundaries of identity.” Full bio below.

Shamel Pitts shares, “It is incredibly propelling to win a prize that is designed to recognize and uplift a choreographer’s art by contributing to their life by way of unrestricted funds! I am grateful to NCCAkron for being an organization that offers such life enhancing support. I look forward to drawing closer to the NCCAkron team and using these funds to continue to invest in my arts collective TRIBE, as well as imagine what my life may now look like as I am being poured into.”

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. In just eight years, NCCAkron has worked with over 400 dance artists across 65 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.

NCCAkron invited dance artists, dance stakeholders, and NCCAkron alumni across the U.S. to nominate a choreographer for this inaugural award. An NCCAkron 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 NCCAkron 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. Hereafter, the Knight Choreography Prize will be announced once a year, in the Fall.

About Shamel Pitts

Shamel Pitts (Brooklyn, NY), a 2024 MacArthur Fellow and 2024 Doris Duke Artist Award recipient, is a performance artist, choreographer, conceptual artist, dancer, spoken word artist, director, and teacher. Born in Brooklyn, NY, Pitts began his dance training at LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts and, simultaneously, at The Ailey School. He is a first-prize winner in The National Arts Competition from YoungArts. Pitts went on to receive his BFA in dance from The Juilliard School and was awarded the Martha Hill Award for excellence in dance. He began his dance career in Mikhail Baryshnikov's Hell's Kitchen Dance and Ballets Jazz Montréal. Pitts danced with Batsheva Dance Company for seven years under the artistic direction of Ohad Naharin and is a certified teacher of Gaga movement language. Pitts created a triptych of award-winning multidisciplinary performances, with his arts collective TRIBE, known as his "BLACK series," which toured extensively to festivals & performance spaces around the world since 2016. He is an adjunct professor at The Juilliard School, a guest faculty member at Princeton University, New York University, and Wesleyan University, and was an artist in residence at Harvard University. He is a Princess Grace Award recipient in Choreography, NYSCA/NYFA Artist Fellow, Jacob's Pillow artist-in-residence, and 2020 Guggenheim Fellow.

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 the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

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