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**NATIONAL CENTER FOR CHOREOGRAPHY- AKRON ANNOUNCES  
VIRTUAL DANCING LAB WITH SOUTH ASIAN EXPERIMENTAL DANCE ARTISTS**



Artists (L to R): Lionel Popkin (Steve Gunther), Hari Krishnan, Meena Murugesan, Parijat Desai (Nic Petry), Pramila Vasudevan (Bobby Rogers), Sujata Goel (Jasper Haynes)

AKRON, Ohio (May 17, 2021)—The National Center for Choreography at The University of Akron (NCCAkron) announces **Dancing Lab: South Asian Experimental Dance Artists (SAEDA)**. As a collective, SAEDA fosters a space for diasporic dance artists of South Asian descent to discuss shared and divergent artistic processes and disrupt representations of South Asian bodies. SAEDA also aims to create and sustain a network of peer to peer artist-led communication that promotes a system built on artistic growth and community health. In late 2019, NCCAkron and **Lionel Popkin** (Los Angeles, CA) curated and invited the participating artists: **Hari Krishnan** (Middletown, CT / Toronto, ON), **Meena Murugesan** (Los Angeles, CA), **Parijat Desai** (New York, NY), **Pramila Vasudevan** (St. Paul, MN), and **Sujata Goel** (Harrisburg, PA).

NCCAkron Dancing Lab programs are invitations for rigorous play and positive failure around a specific issue, idea, or dance field-wide trend. Connecting across geographical distances and subsidizing creative time without an expectation of a final product, artists share their working knowledge and develop new ideas through personal introspection and group reflection.

Over the past year, the cohort met virtually to create a support network among the artists and further conversations of how performance can frame individual expression and cultural transmission within the South Asian community. During these monthly exchanges, the cohort discussed the assumptions, expectations, and limitations of experimenting with contemporary movement while also being judged by the classical aesthetics of traditional Indian performance.



Desai describes, “Forming SAEDA with artists who share my ethos of experimentation and community—albeit in distinct and very different ways—and to be supported in meeting regularly has all been a boon. It has sparked ideas but has also helped me to feel part of a shift, a larger artistic movement.”

From June 4 - 8, 2021, the cohort will virtually convene to question, manifest, and plan future iterations of their network. During the convening, an invited guest speaker will lead a discussion around South Asian activism. NCCAkron team members **Christy Bolingbroke**, Executive / Artistic Director, and **Kat Wentz**, Program Manager who have worked with Popkin the past year, will join the cohort to exchange knowledge and reflect on their partnership in this effort. Popkin reflects on the overall opportunity, “NCCAkron's early support for SAEDA was essential, affirming, and a kind of sustenance for the project and the group.”

Moving forward from the initial support of NCCAkron, SAEDA has secured additional funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support this work for the next two years. Wentz explains, “It’s rewarding to see SAEDA continue their work with funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. As an artist-advocacy-led organization, this type of longitudinal investment resonates with NCCAkron’s values and goes beyond simply a transactional relationship.”

On Thursday, December 16, 2021, at 7 PM ET, the cohort will participate in a virtual Dancing Conversation event with NCCAkron to reveal how dance processes the world beyond the studio and the stage. The virtual event will premiere via NCCAkron’s YouTube channel. The event is free and open to the public. For event updates, sign up for NCCAkron e-blasts at [nccakron.org/engage](https://nccakron.org/engage).

Lead support for Dancing Lab: SAEDA came from the National Endowment for Arts.



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### **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](https://nccakron.org).



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

Dancing Lab: SAEDA is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts. To find out more about how National Endowment for the Arts grants impact individuals and communities, visit [www.arts.gov](http://www.arts.gov).

### **Artist Biographies**

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

Lionel Popkin is an artist born and raised in what is now called Indiana to an Indian mother and a Jewish father. His mixed-race and malleable identity markers create a questionable position within the racial and social discourse formed by the twin sins of genocide and slavery that engendered the power structures in America. His work questions how bodies, objects, and media are allowed to exist in time and space. Lionel was a member of the Trisha Brown Dance Company from 2000-2003. He is currently a Professor of Choreography at UCLA and is a certified teacher of Skinner Releasing Technique. [lionelpopkin.org](http://lionelpopkin.org)

#### **Hari Krishnan** (Middletown, CT / Toronto, ON)

Hari Krishnan is a dance artist, scholar and teacher. Artistic director of inDANCE and Chair of Wesleyan University's Department of Dance, he is an award-winning dance-maker, commissioned internationally for his bold and transgressive choreography. Interested in queer subjectivities in South Asian and global dance performance, his choreography explores post-colonial complexities in Indian dance and queer themes, as well as the intersection of traditional and global contemporary dance forms. His extensive body of work is based on critical perspectives on bharatanatyam, fused with contemporary global dance styles and postmodern social critique. His pieces are bombastic, boldly confronting political and sociological issues. [indance.ca](http://indance.ca)

#### **Meena Murugesan** (Los Angeles, CA)

Meena Murugesan is an award-winning video and dance artist who creates experimental non-linear narratives with moving images at the intersection of live performance, video art, and social justice issues. Rooted in the movement practices of bharatanatyam, improvisation and somatic bodywork, as well as the visual practices of projection mapping, collage, and contemplative documentary, Meena centers a de-colonial, anti-caste, feminist, queer, dravidian, and melanin-rich creative liberatory practice. Meena designs multi-channel video installations for live performance with directors and choreographers such as Jaamil Olawale-Kosoko, taisha paggett, d. Sabela grimes, Marjani Forte-Saunders, D'Lo, among others. Meena is currently working on two self-directed performance/video projects - KARUPPU and The South Asian Melanin Project. [meenamurugesan.com](http://meenamurugesan.com)



**Parijat Desai** (New York, NY)

India-born, U.S.-raised choreographer Parijat Desai creates hybrids of contemporary, Indian classical, and Gujarati folk dance; theater; and other forms to articulate a South Asian American experience through the body and to challenge ideas of cultural purity and fear that underlie nationalism and xenophobia. Parijat also leads Dance In The Round, sharing circle dances from Gujarat, India. By reframing these roots practices, she seeks to support community well-being and solidarity across justice movements by creating collective dance spaces for people across age, ability, caste, and gender. She began Parijata Dance Company in 2000 in Los Angeles and is now based in NYC, ancestral lands of the Lenape peoples. [parijatdesai.org](http://parijatdesai.org)

**Pramila Vasudevan** (St. Paul, MN)

Pramila Vasudevan is a cultural worker and transdisciplinary artist. She is the founding Artistic Director of Aniccha Arts (since 2004), an experimental collaborative producing site-specific performances that examine agency, voice, and group dynamics within community histories, institutions, and systems. She is the director of Naked Stages (since 2016), a program for early-career performance artists at Pillsbury House Theatre. She has been honored by the 2017 Guggenheim and 2016 McKnight Fellowships in Choreography. [aniccha.org](http://aniccha.org)

**Sujata Goel** (Harrisburg, PA)

Sujata Goel is an Indian-American choreographer and dancer currently based in Pennsylvania. After her training in bharatanatyam at Kalakshetra (Chennai), Sujata worked with Padmini Chettur Dance Company and studied at the Performing Arts Research and Training Studios (P.A.R.T.S) in Brussels. Her work has been performed at multiple festivals across Europe, Asia and in New York City at American Realness.