Ghanaian scholars, and one scholar who has worked extensively in the country in response to the “minimized contributions of African artists and scholars based on the continent to knowledge production, scholarship, and global discourses on art.” This important emphasis on African and Africa-based authorship in the global academy (specifically in the arts of Africa discourse) grows out of “the emboldening belief in locally grown research” (Kwami 2019: 53). Locally grown research that is cutting-edge, such as the work by blaxTARLINES, seeks ways to shift beyond individualistic models of research in the arts and humanities more broadly. The work of blaxTARLINES is that is brought together in this special issue contributes meaningfully to questions raised recently in various African Arts articles that emphasize the value, and indeed the necessity of experimental and collaborative models that open up spaces beyond solo authorship, capitalist-driven competition, and the commodification of knowledge and creativity (Baasch et al. 2020; Folaránmi 2019; Simbao et al. 2018; Simbao et al. 2017).

For blaxTARLINES, it is the “ardent spirit of experimentation” that has pushed art training at KNUST beyond “colonial parochial definitions and practice of fine art” where the classroom was a site of “struggle … and ineptitude or bland artlessness” (Bodjawah, Kofigah, and Ampratwum 2018: 31, 33). Upon his appointment as a lecturer at the Kumasi Art Academy in 2002, Kwaku Boafo Kissiedu, who was about ten years younger than the youngest lecturer at the department in the time, sought ways to inject life back into theusty art department he had inhabited since he enrolled as a student in 1992. Some of the things that were of concern to him were the armchairlike approach to art making that disregarded first-hand sources, the reliance on printed images and photographs as source material, and the general lack of criticality. Kissiedu was first taught by karl Kachá seidou when seidou was a teaching assistant at KNUST in 1994. When seidou was employed as a lecturer in the Fine Art Department in 2003, Kissiedu found a formidable senior colleague to work with. As colleagues who developed a legendary friendship, they began to implement the blueprint for this artistic revolution already developed in seidou’s PhD thesis.8

In November 2018, a group of blaxTARLINES artists and writers traveled to Makhanda in the Eastern Cape, South Africa where they participated in the workshop Publishing and Research of the South: Positioning Africa (PROSPA) run by the Arts of Africa and Global Souths research program at Rhodes University.1 The goals of the workshop were to plan this special issue on blaxTARLINES; to engage in a dialogue about the roles of publishing and collaboration in arts and research programs; and to provide participants with the opportunity to meet with postgraduate students and participate in a studio critique (Figs. 1–2). The workshop was cohosted by Ruth Simbao and Stephen Folaránmi (who at the time was a postdoctoral fellow in the program), and they were joined by the Arts Council of the African Studies Association (ACASA) President Elect/VP Peju Layiwola from the University of Lagos. Cognizant that karl Kachá seidou at times refuses to travel (particularly beyond the African continent due to his Pan-Africanist beliefs and ideals), the presence of the blaxTARLINES godfather was momentous. Other blaxTARLINES participants were Ibrahim Mahama, Dorothy Amenuke, Edwin Bodjawah, George Ampratwum (Buma) and Kwaku Boafo Kissiedu (Castro). During our dialogue on “reaching sideways” and forms of collaboration that resonate with our respective programs, Layiwola remarked on the importance of these collaborations taking place on the African continent, for “most of the times we find ourselves meeting our African brothers and sisters in the US or Europe.” Stepping into his shoes as the blaxTARLINES ambassador, Kissiedu shared an Asante Twi proverb that speaks to the need for academics to collaborate and to be flexible.