

PROF. ƙarî'ƙaçä seid'ou: CURRICULUM VITAE

ACADEMIC PROFILE

Name: ƙarî'ƙaçä seid'ou (FORMERLY EDWARD KEVIN AMANKWAH)
Date of Birth: 23rd August, 1968
Profession: LECTURER/ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE
Date of first appointment: MARCH, 2003
Present Rank: ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
Present Position: DEAN, FACULTY OF ART
Name of Institution: KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
Department: PAINTING AND SCULPTURE
Mobile: 00233-200-213128
Address: P. O. BOX UP 1230, KNUST
email: karikacza@gmail.com

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

ƙarî'ƙaçä seid'ou is an artist-intellectual, poet, teacher, mathematician, and associate professor of modern and contemporary African Art. Recognized as Ghana's leading figure in non-proprietary art, he conceived and implemented the "Emancipatory Art Teaching Project", which fundamentally transformed the fine art curriculum in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at KNUST at BFA, MFA, and PhD levels. His mentees and protégés now form the core of Ghana's Contemporary and Post-Contemporary art waves, flourishing as artists, curators, scholars, and cultural professionals. His impact has been acknowledged widely, especially in prominent art journals and media, including African Arts, Art Review, New York Times, The Guardian, and Financial Times. The Guardian refers to ƙarî'ƙaçä seid'ou as "one of the most significant proponents of art on the continent in the 20th century".

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2024/apr/08/barbican-pink-fabric-ibrahim-mahama-robles>

He has advised, collaborated with, and consulted for reputable artists, collectives, curators, contemporary art museums, art centres, academies, and alternative spaces in Africa and worldwide. He co-founded blaxTARLINES, an open-source and community-driven art collective inspired by his non-proprietary art practice and emancipatory pedagogy. In 2021, African Arts dedicated a special issue (Volume 54, Issue 2) to the achievements of both blaxTARLINES Kumasi and the "Emancipatory Art Teaching Project". Furthermore, blaxTARLINES has been repeatedly included in Art Review's Power 100, ranking among the world's most influential figures in contemporary art in 2022, 2023, 2024, and counting. In particular, the 2022 issue lauded blaxTARLINES as "a template for independent art scenes around the world," noting seid'ou's pivotal role:

[P]rofessor ƙarî'ƙaçä seid'ou developed an 'Emancipatory Art Teaching Project', which eventually led to a series of collectively curated multigenerational exhibitions that prioritised a dynamic, democratic approach over any specific media. This has helped form an ongoing, shifting group of collaborators, and to inspire a web of affiliated projects and collectives throughout Ghana.

ƙarî'ƙaçä seid'ou continues to mentor a large number of faculty members, students at the Faculty of Art, and artists across Ghana and beyond. Although deeply influential, he chooses to work with quiet discretion—preferring to remain incognito and operate silently from He prefers to work silently, from his base within Africa.

CURRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION (DEGREES)

1989-1993 [Certified August, 1993]: BA (Art), First Class Honours Degree - [Mobil Award – Best Student in Painting/ Best Student in College of Art]

1993-1996 [Certified February 1997]: MFA- [Profiled in Atta Kwami's *Kumasi Realism*]

1997/1998 [Certified February, 1998]: PGDip (Art Education) [Best Thesis]

2001-2006 [Certified June 2006]: Phd (Art Education)- [Silver Award: Best PhD Thesis Prize in Humanities (2008), Awarded by the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences]

2010-2014 [Certified June 2014]: Bsc (Pure Mathematics), Second Class Upper Honours Degree

PROFICIENCY CERTIFICATES (PROGRAMMING, COMPUTING, ICT, LANGUAGES)

2002: C++ Programming: African Virtual University/Kumasi Virtual Centre for Information Technology (KVCIT).

2002: M.I.T. JAVA Revolution Course [Massachusetts Institute of Technology/African Virtual University]

2003: Microprocessor Laboratory African Regional Course on Advanced VLSI Design Techniques [International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP, Trieste)/College of Engineering, Kumasi]

2004: French Language: Diplôme D'Études en Langue Française (DELF)

2005: Parallel Computing: LINUX Clusters for High Performance Computing [ICTP/KNUST]

2005: Microprocessor and Microelectronics Laboratory on FPGA and VHDL for Research and Training in Africa [ICTP/INFN/KNUST]. [FPGA DEVICE ARCHITECTURE EXPLORATION & CONFIGURATION].

* Research Topic: Placement & Routing in Deep Submicron FPGA Architecture.

UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION – ABRIDGED

2017-2018: Head, Department of Painting and Sculpture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, (KNUST)

2018-2019: Dean, Faculty of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)

2019-2020: Dean, Faculty of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)

2021-2022: Vice-Dean: Faculty of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)

2022-2024: Dean, Faculty of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)

2024-2026: Dean, Faculty of Art, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)

GRADUATE THESIS SUPERVISION

kařĩ'kächä seid'ou has supervised more than fifteen PhD candidates and eighteen Master's students.

Currently, four of the PhD graduates and two of the Master's graduates he has supervised are lecturers in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at KNUST.

ACADEMIC/ART PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES – ABRIDGED

2024. Art Review Power 100 Honouree-blaxTARLINES Profile: Annual ranking of 100 most influential figures in the art world. <https://artreview.com/artist/blaxtarlines/?year=2024>

2023. Art Review Power 100 Honouree-blaxTARLINES Profile: Annual ranking of 100 most influential figures in the art world. <https://artreview.com/artist/blaxtarlines/?year=2023>

2022. Art Review Power 100 Honouree-blaxTARLINES Profile: Annual ranking of 100 most influential figures in the art world. <https://artreview.com/artist/blaxtarlines/?year=2022>

2023: Assessor for Promotion (Associate Professor Rank): University of Education, Winneba (UEW).

2023: Assessor for Promotion (Associate Professor Rank): Takoradi Technical University (TTU).

2022-2027: Co-Principal Investigator, *Ghana 1957 – African Art after Independence* [Exhibition Project to

Commemorate Ghana's 70th Anniversary]. Partners: University of Michigan Museum of Art.

2020-2022: Consulting Curator: – Kelas Bareng (Joint Class Series) and experimental pedagogic model curated jointly by blaxTARLINES Kumasi, Städelschule Frankfurt, Nordland kunst- og filmhøgskole, Gudskul Jakarta for Documenta 15 exhibition platform and project, GUDSKUL.

2021: Reviewer- *Panya Routes: Independent Art Spaces in Africa* by Kim Gurney. Published by Motto Books (January 1, 2022).

2021-2025: Reviewer, Journal of Science and Technology (JUST), KNUST.

2021-2025: Co-Facilitator with Renzo Martens, Ibrahim Mahama and Le Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (CATPC): CATPC/SCCA/blaxTARLINES Research Exchange Project.

2021-2025: Consultant: UNDER GROUND Contemporary Art Collective, Kampala, Uganda.

2020-2022: Guest Facilitator: CritLab (Annual Professional Development Programme for Artists, Curators, Writers and Critics). Kumasi and Tamale. Organisers: Exit Frame Collective.

2020: Keynote Speaker, International Mathematics Day, Allotey Auditorium, College of Science, KNUST Theme: *Mathematics is Everywhere*.

2020-2025. Member: International Council of Museums (ICOM)

2020: Juror: 2020 Kuenyehia Prize for Contemporary Art, Accra.

2019: Reviewer: Prince Claus Awards. (Courtesy Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development, Amsterdam).

2019 – 2025: Board Member, Savannah Center for Contemporary Art, (SCCA-Tamale).

2018: (Keynote Speaker): African Modernism; Architecture of Independence [Travelling Exhibition]. Museum of Science and Technology, Accra. Topic: *In the Art of Darkness - Kumasi's Forgotten Futures yet to come*. Goethe Institut Ghana and blaxTARLINES.

2019: (Sessional Keynote Speaker): Rencontres de Bamako: Biennale Africaine de la Photographie. [12th Bamako Photography Biennale], 2019. Topic: *The blaxTARLINES Community: African Unity by other Means*.

2018: Consultant: PROSPA Publishing and Research Workshop 2018; Rhodes University.

2017 – Present: Reviewer - *Africa Today* (Indiana University Press Journal).

2015-Present: Member, Advisory Team and Artistic Director: "Red Clay Studio Complex"-200 Acre Artist Residency, Museum, Theater Complex and Experimental Hub, Tamale.

Since 2014. Co-Founder and Consultant: KNUST/Stadelschule Frankfurt Research Exchange Programme.

2013: (Member, Advisory Team): Tate Modern/KNUST *Across the Board* Institutional Building Programme, Kumasi. (Partners: NUBUKE Foundation and Art in Social Structures).

2010-2012: (Member, International Advisory Team): Project 1975, Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam.

2009-2010: (Advisory Board Member): American Council of Learned Societies, (ACLS), African Humanities Programme.

2009-2010: (Senior Scholar and Reviewer of Grant Applicants' Proposals): American Council of Learned Societies African Humanities Programme.

2010: Special College Award for National Recognition for Best PhD Thesis: College of Art and Social Sciences, KNUST.

2008: Silver Award: Best PhD Thesis Prize in Humanities. Awarded by the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences.

EXHIBITIONS (CURATOR/AUTHOR/EDITOR) – ABRIDGED

2025: Curatorial Advisor – *"Illegally Erected"* [The blaxTARLINES Urban Intervention Projects and Exhibition Site, Bomso Traffic Light, Kumasi].

2024: Authorial Collaborator with Ibrahim Mahama, *"Songs About Roses"*, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh.

2023. Authorial Collaborator with Ibrahim Mahama, *"Parliament of Ghosts"* Exhibition Project. 18th International Architecture Exhibition, Venice Biennale Architettura.

2022. Curatorial Advisor: *Earthy Structures and Contingent Breakthroughs*. Gyamadudu Museum, Ashanti. Frederick Ebenezer Okai (Artist), Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh (Curator).

2021: Curatorial Advisor: *Akutia: Blindfolding the Sun and the Poetics of Peace*. (A Retrospective on Agyeman Ossei - Dota). Venue: SCCA and Red Clay, Tamale. Co- Curators: Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh, Adwoa Amoah and Tracy Thompson.

2019 – Present [Permanent Exhibition]. Co-Curator: *Dignity in Labour. From Forest to Faculty*. Opoku Ware II Museum, KNUST. [Exhibition Type: Biographical, Ethnographic and Modern Art Exhibition in 3 registers]:

- i. Reign of Gold (Asante History and the reign of Otumfuo Osei Tutu II)
- ii. Tales of Gold (The Peggy Appiah Collection of Asante “gold weights” donated to KNUST).
- iii. Hands of Gold (KNUST History told through the ceramic art of Kingsley Kofi (KK) Broni and “Forest to Faculty”, an accompanying documentary film by Charles Owusu, a contemporary of K. K. Broni).

Co-curators: Edwin Bodjawah, kɔrɪ'kɔchɛ seid'ou, George Ampratwum and Bernard Akoi-Jackson.

2019: Authorial Collaborator: “Library of kɔrɪ'kɔchɛ seid'ou” in *Ibrahim Mahama. Re: Working Labour*. Sullivan Galleries: School of Art Institute of Chicago. Ibrahim Mahama (Artist), Ellen Rothenberg and Daniel Eisenberg (Curators). <https://sites.saic.edu/reworkinglabor/projects/ibrahim-mahama/>

2017: [Artistic Director and Head Curator] *Orderly Disorderly*. [109 Artists]. Museum of Science and Technology, Accra.

2016: [Artistic Director and Head Curator] *Cornfields in Accra* [80 Artists]. Museum of Science and Technology, Accra.

2015: [Artistic Director and Head Curator]. *Silence between the lines: Anagrams of Emancipated Futures*, PML Motors Showroom, Kumasi-Ahenema Kokoben, February 19th -23rd.

2015: [Artistic Director and Head Curator] *The Gown must go to Town*. [54 Artists] Museum of Science and Technology, Accra.

REFEREES:

1. Prof. El Anatsui, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
2. Dr. Agyeman Ossei (Dota), Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ghana, Legon.
3. Prof. F. T. Oduro, Department of Mathematics, KNUST.

Transforming Art from Commodity to Gift

kqrî'kachä seid'ou's Silent Revolution in the Kumasi College of Art

Edwin Bodjawah, Kwaku Boafo Kissiedu (Castro), George Ampratwum (Buma), Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh, Dorothy Amenuke, Michael Adashie, Ibrahim Mahama, Adjo Kisser, Billie McTernan, Bernard Akoi-Jackson, Kezia Owusu-Ankomah, Selom Kujie, Robin Riskin, Tracy Naa Koshie Thompson

The revolutionary, according to Fanon, inserts himself among his people, without noise. This formulation is pivotal, but because it is so casually understated, its myriad implications escape casual readers. Cabral adds that in the revolutionary process, the desire for visibility is a teething disease, and that massive crowds, gathered together to make insurrectionary yearnings before the oppressor, make no sense. Quiet, selective, effective, efficient initiatives do make sense. Cabral is on ancestral ground here: the meliorative secret society is nothing new in Africa (Armah 1984: 63–64; cf. Armah 2010; Outa 1988: 4).

It was in Kumasi that most of Ghana's significant artists and curators of the millennial generation and their cotravellers had their epiphany. Bernard Akoi-Jackson, Adwoa Amoah, Ibrahim Mahama, Rita Fatric Bewong, Kelvin Haizel, Selasi Awusi Sosu, Robin Riskin, Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh (IUB), Gideon Appah, Larry Amponsah, Jeremiah Quarshie, Adjo Kisser, Patrick Tagoe-Turkson, Patrick Quarm, Yaw Owusu, Bright Ackwerh, Tracy Naa Koshie Thompson, Benjamin Okantey, Issah Alhassan, Emmanuel Opoku Manu, Priscilla Kennedy, the Asafo Black Collective, and Vabene Elikem Fiatsi (crazinisT artisT) are a few examples. The list is still growing, the range of interests, formats, media, and attitudes is ever expanding; their influence is being felt in Ghana's capital cities and international circuits of contemporary art. More women and cultural and ethnic minorities are beginning to take their place in the unfolding ethos.¹ New paradigms of the artist-subject are emerging. These include variations of a social form Jean-Luc Nancy designates as the "inoperative community" (1991), especially mobilized coalitions and loose collectives solidarizing around a common struggle.² The liberal-humanist figure of the autonomous artist-genius, master, and sole author—more likely than not, an adult middle-class cis male—has ceased being the hegemonic, default, or dominant artist-subject. Yet, it is still an indelible factor, possibly a figure lingering in the new picture

and probably receding towards its horizon as a vanishing point or as the punctum that disrupts its narrative consistency.

The new crop of Kumasi students and alumni continue to collaborate with, inspire, and be inspired by their peers across a wide range of schools, traditions, and nontraditions of art training; the good old snobbery of Ghana's principal art academy, premised on a self-assured craft ableism and aesthetic bigotry that made the institution almost impervious to progressive developments outside its borders, is nearly a thing of the past.³ How did Kumasi, for many years the blank spot on the official map of international contemporary art, become a must-go place for the motivated artist or curator? How did it become a hub of emergent art in Africa?

Accounts of contemporary witnesses and textual evidence converge on the figure of *kqrî'kachä seid'ou* (b. 1968) (Figs. 1–2), an elusive and reclusive artist-provocateur, as a principal architect, guide, and vanishing mediator of this "silent revolution" (see introduction to Bouwhuis et al. 2012; see also Woets 2011, 2012; Kwami 2013: 316–33; Johannenssen 2016; Silva 2017; Dieckvoss 2017: 126; Nagy and Jordan 2018; Munshi 2018; Mahama 2019; Diallo et al. 2018). With a salute to the Black Radical tradition, Rancière, and the Slovenian Lacanian school, he has named this curriculum transformation the Emancipatory Art Teaching Project, a durational and pedagogic project contemporaneous with Tania Bruguera's *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* (2002–2009), *Groupe Amos*, and *Huit Facette* in its conception.⁴

A Cornel West of sorts, *seid'ou* is an artist-intellectual⁵ who took art from the streets to the academy and back to the streets and elsewhere. His intellectual and artistic trajectory is a complex one, including a street art workshop and commercial sign painting practice as a teen on the streets of Accra in the mid-1980s (Figs. 3–4),⁶ an update of his art training in an epicolonial art school in the early to mid-1990s, an engagement with the corpus of the most sophisticated modern and contemporary philosophers, art historians, curators of contemporary art, mathematicians,⁷ and high technologists (Fig. 5), a dedicated study of liberation and

(clockwise from center left)

1 Artist Bright Tetteh Ackwerh's digital portrait of his teacher *kaŕi'kachä seid'ou*, which became Ackwerh's "most loved Facebook photo of 2012." Photo: courtesy Bright Ackwerh

2 *kaŕi'kachä seid'ou* became a cult figure, appearing in students' cartoons and paintings. Here, Rex Akinruntan draws him as an angel appearing in time to save an MFA student from fainting. 2013. Photo: courtesy blaxTARLINES.

3 *kaŕi'kachä seid'ou* worked at Hodep Art Studio, a street sign painting workshop in Madina, Accra, in the 1980s before he enrolled in the Art College in Kumasi. Photo: courtesy *kaŕi'kachä seid'ou*

4 Exhibition poster design for *Cornfields in Accra* (2016) inspired by *kaŕi'kachä seid'ou*'s experience as sign painter in 1980s Accra. Co-designers: *kaŕi'kachä seid'ou*, Alvin Ashiatey and Bernard Akoi-Jackson for blaxTARLINES, Kwabee Arts (Afranchö) and Kofi Royal Arts (Ahinsan), sign painters from Kumasi.

The enhanced bone font was popular on the arched boards of Bedford mammy trucks in the 1970s–80s. "*seid'ou* learned to stand over the bonnet and work on the arch" (Kwami 2013: 325). Photo: courtesy blaxTARLINES

social movements and alternative art schools and art spaces, and a parallel practice of postimagist poetry.⁸

This text by *kaŕi'kachä seid'ou*'s collaborators, students, witnesses, and subjects of the silent revolution provides a synopsis of key ideas that inspired it and threw it into relief. As witnesses from a variety of standpoints, we feel obliged to write a tribute while the protagonist is still with us and can give feedback to our ruminations. While not oblivious to the postmodern historicist caveat that no single event can explain the complexity of historical phenomena, we also acknowledge the importance of Graham Harman's Gavrilo's Corollary,⁹ an argument that casts doubt on the possibility of "total context." As Harman argues, "Of the various contextual factors that surround me right now, not all are having an effect on me" (2009: 210).

Among the several contextual factors that may have played roles in the transformation of the old order, *seid'ou*'s arrival on the scene, to borrow Žižek's phrasing (2013: 1), "not only designates a clear break with the past, but also casts its long shadow" on



the generations of artists, curators, and thinkers who follow him or resurrects failed revolutions that were before him in the history of the Kumasi art academy and Ghana's art field. Thus, this collaborative text weaves a narrative between a triggering event and some existential conditions that have coevolved with it. It is presented in four parts. The first section sets the tone with the significance and reach of *seid'ou*'s practice and curriculum intervention. The second part takes the reader through the conditions in Ghana's art field and institutions that necessitated *seid'ou*'s silent revolution. As the curator Jelle Bouhwuis and sundry others have indicated, "*kaŕi'kachä seid'ou* is himself perhaps the most radical embodiment of his teachings" (Bouhwuis et al. 2012: n.p.). The third part presents a synoptic account of *seid'ou*'s teaching project and a series of responses from students who experienced it firsthand, especially Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh's autobiographical account (p. 29) and supporting text-box contributions of Bernard Akoi-Jackson (Box 1), Billie McTernan (Box 2), Robin Riskin (Box 3), Ibrahim Mahama (Box 4) and Tracy Thompson (Box 5). The conclusion is an elaboration of some key axioms undergirding the curriculum transformation.





5 Ibrahim Mahama's dedication to his teacher: *Library of kɔrɪ'kɔchɔ seid'ou* in the exhibition *Re:Working Labor* at School of Art Institute of Chicago, 2019. The dedication explores kɔrɪ'kɔchɔ seid'ou's complex intellectual trajectory. "It houses a library of reading materials, from communist manifesto to quantum theory."

A SILENT REVOLUTION

The change instigated by kɔrɪ'kɔchɔ seid'ou and his team of art teachers, students, and alumni was not a reform, revision, or expansion of the extant curriculum; it was a rupture announcing a beginning from the beginning again. The event created a void through which the radically new could emerge. Being a subject of the radically new can be quite unsettling; one has to learn to come to terms with the premises of the new terrain. And the old is not wished away; one needs to take a different standpoint in order to reengage it; otherwise, it becomes a formless inkblot on a picture's surface. seid'ou, a champion of radical immanence, has captured this succinctly:

What we hope to advance in Kumasi is a field of "general intellect" which encourages student artists and other young artists to work in the spirit of finding alternatives to the bigger picture which excluded their voices, but paradoxically by becoming an anamorphic stain in the bigger picture itself. This way, the stain instigates a new vision, which requires a necessary shift in the spectator's perspective. And this shift in perspective leaves the older picture as a stain in the new picture (seid'ou and Bouhwuis 2014: 115, 116).

While still in art school in the early 1990s, seid'ou, who was tipped to represent his generation in the pantheon of Ghanaian modernist painting greats,¹⁰ questioned the presuppositions of the painting curriculum and launched a radical dematerialization and deskilling of his art practice. On this path, his romantic-realist life drawing and painting exercises in the undergraduate years became a subtle means of coding dissident praxis into a conventional genre. One example from his undergraduate work (Fig. 6) deploys excessive torsion in the structuring of mass and the treatment of surface, while the repeated cropping at respective edges amplifies the anonymity of the female sitter. Another, by Photoshopping avant la lettre, fictionalizes and narrativizes a strictly eyeballed life painting and on-the-spot studio exercise—the Sahelian costume, Larabanga-esque mosque and Hollywood

night scene are all spontaneous adaptations. For his Imaginative Composition course, which is a social realist genre in British-derived curricula, seid'ou introduces historical metafiction and dramatic lighting (Fig. 7). He also painted, performed, and collaged the *Afro-Pop* series as an extension of his critique of the social realist hegemony of Ghanaian modernist painting. In this series, his forays into parody and tactical humor were inspired by his prior engagement with urban sign painting and caricature. Themes are purposefully iconoclastic and there is collision and dialogue between text and image on the one hand (Fig. 8), and tokens of a performance-without-the-body and collage on the other hand (Fig. 9). Succeeding the

Afro-Pop Series is the *Royal Palm* painting project, which broke the "fourth wall" of Ghana's modern painting by taking the painting act out of the studio and making it a performance exposed to public scrutiny and dialogue in real time (Figs. 10–11). This was a durational project and institutional critique in which he "defaced" all sixty-eight royal palm trees lining the street that leads to the University's central administration block. seid'ou's reflections on human and nonhuman coactivity and the coevolution of the real and the symbolic in the *Royal Palm* painting project also found a place in the project's site extensions to radio, seminars, meetings, and text. For instance, in his MFA thesis, seid'ou reflected,

About a week later, it was found that nature had continued the painting to infinity. The Artist noted that very white webs, in forms of concentric designs, continued to climb the tree like a laddery [*sic*] of life or death; something inevitable. It is a fusion of the Artist's proposal, nature's additions and subtraction, and what the Artist has stored in the subconscious (Amankwah 1996: 7).

As a form of independent practice and critical inquiry, seid'ou's series of guerrilla performances—such as the culture-jamming of the 28th Annual Congregation Ceremony of KNUST (February 1994) (Fig. 12)—institutional critique, social practice, and tactical media staged in the early to mid-1990s was unprecedented in Ghana's canon of modern art. Through silent hacking and recoding of the academic establishment and officialdom, seid'ou introduced the ensuing generations of Ghanaian artists to strategies of social practice, political engagement, and participatory projects. While the possible cues for the performative act abound in codified Ghanaian traditions, especially in festivals and ceremonies, seid'ou's unannounced and inoperative performances are the ones that created the conditions for the use of the body in the contemporary art curriculum of the College of Art. Among artists trained in the new KNUST curriculum who persistently stage their body or other bodies in their projects are Bernard Akoi-Jackson, Rita



(clockwise from top left)

6 *kārī'kächä seid'ou*
Undergraduate life drawing and painting, College of Art,
KNUST (1993)
Pastel; approx. 84 cm x 118 cm
Photo: courtesy *kārī'kächä seid'ou*

7 *kārī'kächä seid'ou*
Anokye and O'tutu: A torn page of Asante history (1993)
Oils; approx. 203 cm x 304 cm
Artist's collection
Photo: courtesy *kārī'kächä seid'ou*

Historical metafiction based on the mythologies on the Ashanti Golden Stool, Kumasi (Suame) "Magazine" vehicle repair and metal engineering culture and in Afro-futuristic setting; the original, painted in oils in 1992, is lost.

8 *kārī'kächä seid'ou*
SLOW DOWN. HERD-hero CROSSING (1993)
Oils; approx. 165 cm x 175cm
Photo: courtesy *kārī'kächä seid'ou*

Afro-Pop series punning on Ghana's road signs

Fatric Bewong, Lois Arde-Acquah, and crazinisT artist, the gender nonconforming artist with an impressive string of radical culture-jamming projects (Fig. 13).

seid'ou's pursuit of silence and self-effacement reminds one of Bartleby the Scrivener's politics of refusal. His transition from an accomplished painter to a painter on strike set him working within the interstices of art, ephemera, and social formatting. In most cases, seid'ou's projects, in his mature years, were coauthored situations and lived experiences involving the interplay of text, performance, image, tactical humor and, a la Moten and Harney, fugitive planning. The most memorable are durational performances and institutional culture jamming, silent reenactments of fictional and historical figures of emancipation and radical sacrifice,¹¹ generative curating projects, and nonproprietary social practices which defied the demands of the three Ms of institutional contemporary art: (Art) Museum, Market, and Media. The use of durational, ephemeral, and undocumented performative form and his critical humor and silent posture as art world refusenik set seid'ou's work alongside the work of Tching Hsieh, Tino Sehgal, and Claire Fontaine¹² respectively, with the difference that the contemporary art world does not know yet what to make of him.¹³ As a nonobservant artist committed to



the manufacture of paradigms, tools, and apparatuses disseminated as gifts to other artists, he may best be known as an artist's artist rather than simply an artist per se. He instituted a sharing economy of intellectual commons and consequently led a hushed movement which opened access to a varied, alternative history of thought. The silent institution and expansion of these informal reading groups wrestled the discourse of art from the existing hegemony of "Stone Age to Cubism art history bibles."¹⁴

Before the turn of the twenty-first century, the default painting practice of the Kumasi School had been the cultural production of portable and sensuous objects legislated by European classical and early modernist pictorial media. Each medium was specific to format and genre; genres were exclusively within-frame single narratives—preferably variants of social realism and ethnographic verism. They were hierarchical according to cultural, market, and institutional privilege, and expatriate connoisseurship. Product was privileged over process, conception, or public affect; auteur over coauthoring. Texts on Ghana's art were typically written by salvage anthropologists and ethnographers identifying iconographic clichés and matching or authenticating them with the existing cultural life of Ghana. By the turn of the century, it was not yet possible to admit photography, film, video, sound,



9 *kqri'kachä seid'ou*
Who says a chimney is a non-living thing? (1994)
 Collage of clothing pieces; dimensions variable
 Photo: courtesy *kqri'kachä seid'ou*

This collage is a pin-up of the artist's studio-wear of the early 1990s during his "Afro Pop" phase. The studio-wear bore his drawings and meditations on the African American hip-hop group Naughty by Nature. The collage was conceived as a "performance-without-the-body."

and installations as artistic activity in the Kumasi fine art curriculum, let alone unobtrusive and deskilled projects such as social and relational practices, meditative walks, public discussion, and performances. These formats and others outside the traditional *beaux-arts* canon were at best shamed or stigmatized as degenerate art; at worst, their practice was consigned to self-reflexive loops of artistic "safe spaces." The art of professionals plying their

trade in the mainstream galleries also pandered to the taste of tourists, with portable décor paintings on walls of offices and hotel lobbies being the queen of the arts. This ethos had marked the typical work coming from the art academy and Ghana's art communities as tame, deserving just a footnote in the international art canon.¹⁵ One can only imagine the intensity of the rupture that overthrew the humanist framework that had legislated decorative painting and sculpture and their traditional cognates as the only options. Bernard Akoi-Jackson, one of *seid'ou's* early students and collaborators, describes *seid'ou's* idiosyncratic art practice and critical interventions of the 1990s and early 2000s as a revolution staged by the "part-that-is-no-part," an Event¹⁶ that picked "at stale roots and nurtured ever green leaves" (Box 1). Extended into the Kumasi curriculum, this event, coevolved with the Emancipatory Art Teaching Project, offered in its place a void, a democratic space out of which a multiplicity of forms and nonforms could emerge. In this expanding field of art practice, the concept of studio also expanded beyond the artisanal to include high-tech, ecological, social interventionist, and nonhuman workspaces in and out of the outlying city. Each student in the evolving curriculum had to invent their own exhibition formats and to curate their own shows. Strangeness ensued. Above all, students at all levels were encouraged to cultivate political sensitivity to materials, technologies, and sites of their practice.

Box 1

kqri'kachä seid'ou as Event: An Anamorphic Stain, Picking at Stale Roots and Nurturing Ever Green Leaves

Bernard Akoi-Jackson

In October 2004, at the very onset of the twenty-first century, *kqri'kachä seid'ou* (formerly known as Edward Kevin Amankwah, a.k.a. Kofi Osei), performs a subtle, yet distinguishable and most "disturbing" act. He posts onto notice boards around the College of Art, KNUST, a letter informing his colleague lecturers and by extension, the entire university community, of his name change. Accompanying the letter is a photocopy of an Affidavit, the legal documentation, (headed with the Ghana Coat of Arms and authenticated with the red seal of state authority) (see Fig. 21). Also included in this set of exhibited objects, is a copy of the Gazette entry. In this performance, *kqri'kachä seid'ou* becomes an event. This momentous gesture functions both as a critical metaphor of the burgeoning revolution in contemporary art practice, and one of the sites from where *seid'ou* launches his notion of "exception," "the part that's not a part." His is an insurrection; a disruption not only in the legal order, but more saliently, in the theoretical bases of the KNUST Painting Curriculum. This significant move is a "real" exception through which we can fervently reimagine the general habit of artistic practice in the context of KNUST (thus Ghana), with implication into the larger contemporary art world. *seid'ou's* revolutionary gesture, as well as his ensuing artistic practice, becomes an anamorphic stain, materially embedded within the system, picking at the very stale roots, initiating transformation of habit and nurturing ever flourishing artistic careers.

That *seid'ou's* deed received entry into the national Gazette makes it a very momentous artistic mediation and notable critique of extreme bureaucratic process. The gesture is an exception also in terms of its ability to defy standard codification, yet concurrently uncovering a "specifically juridical formal element: the decision in absolute purity." In this sense, "a part that was not a part" but became a part by legal decree. *seid'ou's* gesture, though not his very first yet, features amongst harbingers of inventive artistic practices emergent within the contemporary Ghanaian and world context. In 1994, *seid'ou*, then still called Edward Kevin Amankwah, a.k.a. Kofi Osei, would don pseudo-Arabian garb at his graduation, garnering both huge applause and disapproval in equal measure from all gathered.

Though these gestures are characteristic of *seid'ou's* critical positions against the norm but through the norm, they constituted some of his more externalized earlier performances. His later work(s) became decidedly unobtrusive and the most impactful. *seid'ou* would eventually, as he says, "stop making art" (in the known sense), so as to embark on his most important project yet: "making artists." He describes his strategy as "Silent Insistence," and the resulting "work" becomes what he has referred to as "Silent Parodies."

I deem as crucial, that moment of disruption when *kqri'kachä seid'ou* decided, with passion, to make a name change, as it has radical potential. Read metaphorically this moment of the name change begins the slow, deliberate march towards material transformation within the KNUST Fine Art curriculum. A change that has urged more and more graduating students from the Department of Painting and Sculpture to boldly pursue sustainable careers in the art field. Hitherto, the recurring lament had been that students complete the art program, only to divert into such totally unrelated fields as banking, finance and marketing, to cite a few. Now, these "unrelated fields" and others are means to make art; and *kqri'kachä seid'ou* has demonstrated it in his praxis.



EMANCIPATORY ART TEACHING PROJECT: THE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE

The Emancipatory Art Teaching Project coevolved with seid'ou's stereotypical reenactments of historical and fictional characters within institutional settings. One of the key referents in these enactments was Jean Jocotot, the "ignorant schoolmaster," who on the side of the preemptive equality of intelligence, demonstrated "that an ignoramus could teach another what he himself did not know" (Rancière 2007, 2011). The other was Harriet Tubman, the African American former slave who returned to the plantations on several dangerous trips to liberate other slaves.

seid'ou's reenactments resurrected the promise of intellectual emancipation hidden in a failing curriculum. His classes, critiques, and informal conversations were moments of epiphany for most of us—staff, students, and alumni—collaborating on this text. His experience in the street art communities in Accra also placed him favorably to give students insights into technical and social improvisation. His genre-defying art practice dovetailed into his teaching methods.

In the earliest phases of his teaching project in the College of Art, seid'ou encouraged students to "excavate" the city as Foucaultian archaeologists, make visual and poetic notes, and develop cues for exhibition projects (Figs. 14–15). Thus, he converted his drawing classes into curatorial projects of guerrilla exhibitions on campus and in the city (Figs. 14–19). "Campus and city came alive with over sixty site-specific and off-site exhibitions, their critiques, and overviews each year" (seid'ou 2010: n.p.). Exhibitions and critiques were held in drinking bars, railway tracks, footbridges and locomotive sheds, automobile workshops, on public buses, in science laboratories, graveyards, forests, virtual spaces, and so forth (Fig. 16). This series of exhibition projects, which bypassed Ghana's *beaux-arts* gallery, museum, and institutional systems, became the basis for the MFA Curatorial Practice Programme, introduced in 2014. As part of the curatorial training, he headed the curatorial teams that curated *Silence Between the Lines* (2015) in Kumasi and a trilogy of exhibitions in Accra: *the Gown must*



10 *kaŕi'kachä seid'ou* (néé Kevin Amankwah)
KNUST Royal Palm Avenue Painting Project
Painting Performance on sixty-eight trees, social practice and institutional critique.
Photo: courtesy Atta Kwami

This project broke the "fourth wall" of Ghana's modern painting by taking the painting act out of the studio and making it a performance exposed to public scrutiny and dialogue in real time. Off-site components of the project include radio programs, seminars, and meetings on ecology.

11 *kaŕi'kachä seid'ou*
Royal Palm Painting Project 1995, KNUST [detail]
Photo: courtesy *kaŕi'kachä seid'ou*

This transspecies and speculative thinking about the human-nonhuman creative zone would play a vital part in *kaŕi'kachä seid'ou's* later teaching and practice in KNUST and in the outlook of some of his students.

go to Town ... (2015), *Cornfields in Accra* (2016) (see Fig. 4), and *Orderly Disorderly* (2017), that followed from it. Through these exhibitions, he shared his insights on the collective mobilization of labor and resources for large-scale exhibition and infrastructure projects and encouraged curating students to, in his words, "work from bolts and nuts to high theory and back."

With painting as the queen of the European-derived *beaux-arts* tradition in Ghana, film, video, and photography had been consigned to the commercial, journalistic, and advertising subcultures. *kaŕi'kachä seid'ou's* lessons in Philosophy of Painting introduced a module that took students through lens-based and lensless filmic practice from improvised pinholes through DSLRs to medical and astronomical imaging, and the materiality of light, still, and moving image. Since then, many lens-based practitioners have come out of the Kumasi School, some of whom are award-winning artist-photographers. Mavis Tetteh-Ocloo, who authored the curatorial text for Selasi Awusi Sosu's three-channel video installation *Glass Factory II* for the debut Ghana Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale (Tetteh-Ocloo 2019), was an exponent of seid'ou's photography module before her curatorial training in Kumasi (Fig. 17). In his lectures, seid'ou knows no disciplinary bounds; he does not hesitate to use logical paradoxes in mathematics and physics such as Godel's proof and quantum



12 *kqri'kachä seid'ou* in a guerrilla performance at the 28th Annual Congregation Ceremony of KNUST, February 1994. His unsolicited coperformers include Mr. Louis Caseley Hayford, the then chairman of University Council, and Otumfuo Opoku Ware II, the then king of Asante. These unannounced performances also created conditions for the use of the body in the College of Art curriculum, extending to other generations of contemporary art practitioners based in Ghana.

Photo: courtesy *kqri'kachä seid'ou*

Box 2
On Casting Forms
Billie McTernan

It is September. We are in a classroom where moths fly liberally around a whirring fan and a dimming fluorescent light. In front of us is a whiteboard, about 8ft high, with scribbles barely legible. We face the board, frantically trying to keep up with the thoughts and interpretations coming towards us, floating around us.

There are a few significant moments, in life, when you know that something has changed. Have you ever felt that? That the tectonic plates you house inside of you have shifted?

*The critical and contextual studies class in the Department of Painting and Sculpture with *kqri'kachä seid'ou* began in 2004. Over the years the teaching has changed, the form is not static. Philosophical and conceptual texts from across the globe; from France, the United States, Germany, Ghana, and Nigeria, and more, come and go.*

"Consider everything," we have been advised. "You never know where you might find liberation."

entanglement, abstract objects such as the Klein bottle, Möbius strip, or phase portraits, or tropes of gene activity such as epigenetics to explain issues about contemporary art and curating.

Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh, an alumnus of the BFA 2007 class, shared his experience of *seid'ou*'s undergraduate teaching in 2019:

My experience with *kqri'kachä seid'ou*'s Emancipatory Art Teaching Project when I entered the KNUST undergraduate Fine Art Programme in 2005 subtly affirmed a yearning I always had but could neither articulate nor assert before that time. His universalist approach to teaching dissented from the official KNUST art curriculum, which relied imperiously on established styles and formats of the Euro-American modernist canon ending with Abstract Expressionism. Over the years, as we struggled with the rigor of his critiques in the drawing and painting classes, I was enthralled by the depth and range of historical, philosophical, and practical (everyday) references being used and suggested by *seid'ou* to each student regarding their work. This was a class of over sixty students. It aroused my interest in metatheoretical questions and propelled a search for more than what the canvas alone could offer. And this is where I cultivated my interest in writing as artistic medium.

seid'ou was the only lecturer in the College of Art then who utilized such an indifferent approach to teaching. He dedicates himself to challenging each student from the point of their own interest and not, as was the norm, to enforce a priori standards of what a student ought to do for a lecturer. In the final year, when *seid'ou* taught us more courses, the emphasis on independent work became more

13 crazinisT artisT (nee Va-bene Elikem Fiatsi). “reThinking-‘naZa”. A still from nonbinary artist’s culture-jamming performance at the 2014 Asogli State Yam Festival. crazinisT artisT’s gender-bending and institutional critical performances were nurtured in the Emancipatory Art Teaching curriculum in Kumasi.
Photo: courtesy crazinisT artisT



ingrained. He opened us up to coming to terms with the responsibilities associated with the choice of practicing art. This is when I can say I had begun to enjoy the Painting Programme I had majored in. My attraction to painting was more with it as a concept—as a set of ideas about form, color, and aesthetics—and less as idiom. My proclivities were nurtured, stimulated, and extended all at the same time when seid’ou became my undergraduate thesis supervisor. By this time, although I was unprepared for it then, the transformation had begun and I began to feel more alive in school.

My final year work was an interrogation into the notion of painting itself masked as a collaborative and site-specific installation project (Fig. 18). I worked with Nana Essah (who was an architecture student at the time) and Eric Chigbey (a colleague in the Sculpture Programme) for a project titled *Untitled ... I Can’t Draw* (2009). The work doubled as a mute response to one of my teachers who almost failed me in his course because he interpreted my ambivalent attitude to painting in his class as a rejection of all that was good and sacred in art. The project was my opportunity to create an ambiguous structure that could interrelate painting, sculpture, installation, architecture, and social relations in its form and had been inspired

by Charles Sauvat’s formalist metal sculptures. (Sauvat was a French artist-collaborator of mine at the time). Sited in the courtyard of the Queen Elizabeth Hall on campus, the work took about five days to construct. During this time, passersby would offer to participate in the construction process. It was my first attempt at a site-oriented and relational art project.

For her exhibition project in seid’ou’s Drawing Class, Heartwill Kankam and her team of young women staged a feminist intrusion into Ghana’s all-male public transport (“Trotro”) system. The women, driver, and “mate,” wearing high heels, took charge of a commercial vehicle and plied the major commercial routes of Kumasi from morning to late afternoon (Fig. 19). Kankam’s exhibition statement draws the reader’s attention to gender norms in the Ghanaian cultural mainstream that needed to be challenged through forms of interrogative acts such as hers:

I have always questioned some norms of the society and now it has started manifesting in my works consciously and unconsciously. These questions revolve around the constructions of the society I live in and especially, of gender and what is appropriate to a particular gender.

By 2010, when this project was staged, galleries and cultural institutions in Ghana were not ready for such work and most of them are still yet to confront this challenge. Without this support system, many promising artists such as Heartwill Kankam have dropped out of practice. Noticing this lacuna, seid’ou and his colleagues introduced students to the importance of building such support systems as a necessary supplement to the art they practice.

Today, the ensuing collective and incubator blaxTARLINES KUMASI can boast of a sophisticated art labor movement that lends pro bono services and support for exhibition projects and start-up art spaces in Ghana and elsewhere. It is needless to say that seid’ou’s formal and informal classes, juries, and critiques are legendary. Being a polymath with remarkable breadth of experience from the streets to the academy and back, he formulated and shared freely a teaching system that could translate high-level concepts to material solutions and vice versa.

Box 3

“the guy who took me to a new forest ...”

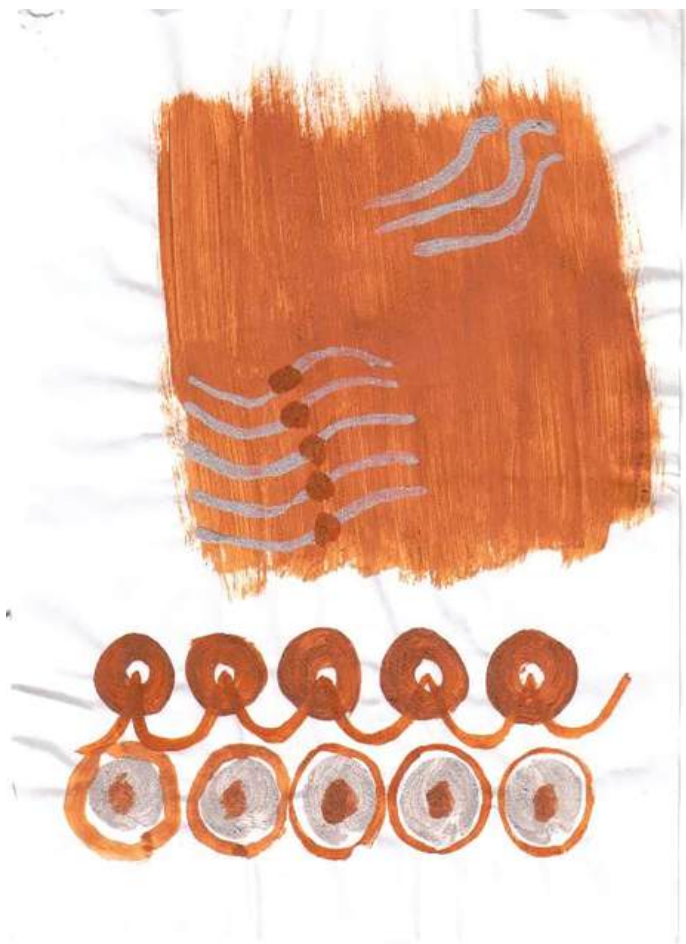
Robin Riskin

“A healer sees differently. He hears differently,” said Damfo in Ayi Kwei Armah’s The Healers. Others may look and walk through the forest but a healer sees and hears more.

kqri’ kachā seid’ou set us loose in the forest of things and asked us to find our way through. The seeds were planted all around us. We just had to look for them.

kqri, integrating current ideas from object-oriented ontology, “thing theory,” and posthumanism, asks us to consider not only the perspective of the human being toward the objects, but of the objects toward the humans, and toward each other. One of his favorite lines is by the artist Pierre Huyghe, who said he tries not to “exhibit something to someone” but “to exhibit someone to something.” Such conceptual revolutions—which appear futuristic but are at the same time very ancient—have formed the basis of my search into “ecological thinking.” How might we take inspiration from the behavior of plants, fungus, insects, bacteria, etc., in imagining models for art- and exhibition-making toward a more collective world?

kqri asks us not to take anything for granted, to examine all our terms, to consider the context, political climate, and all the other forms or ideas that led up to it or were birthed out of it. kqri and the teachers of the blaxTARLINES KUMASI collective didn’t tell us what to think or know or make, but asked us to find our own imagination, and to practice it, with discernment.



(left)

14 Janet Djamoe

Visual notes of the Kumasi cityscape during
kqri'kqachä seid'ou's drawing classes (2004)

Earth and ash on A4 paper

Photo: courtesy kqri'kqachä seid'ou

The Emancipatory Art Teaching Project was
launched as a drawing class in 2003.

(below)

15a–b The drawing class took students to
the city to find cues leading to their self-curated
guerrilla exhibition projects. These scenes from
2004 capture a moment of the drawing class at
the Adum Central Railway footbridge, the site
where Ibrahim Mahama would undertake a jute
sack installation project in 2012.

EMANCIPATORY ART TEACHING PROJECT: THE AXIOMS

Playing host in the slum, no more guest in the hub

kqri'kqachä seid'ou has chosen to live, study, and practice only
from the African continent and, in a reflection tinged with humor,
considers himself exiled from the North Atlantic. However, this

enactment of “exile from Euro-America” is also a means to over-
identify with the derelict domestic conditions that regulated
modern and contemporary art in Ghana at the turn of the millen-
nium. seid'ou referred to this phenomenon as the “cultural slum”
(seid'ou and Bouwhuis 2014)¹⁷ of Ghana's art institutions—a state
of exception from the global contemporary art world—as a site
from which to work out a silent revolution through its crisis con-
ditions and failures. In order to critically challenge the hegemony
of Euro-American institutions as cultural gatekeepers of contem-
porary art, he encourages his students to work as hosts in their
cultural slums more than as guests in the already well-established
lofty institutions that proliferate the North Atlantic or elsewhere
(Enwezor and Williamson 2016). In alliance with his team of
collaborators, he inverted the “nomadic guest” model favored by
Afropolitan exponents of “advocacy curating” (Kouoh and Wise
2016) when he instituted Interactive Series, a dynamic “seminar
program in Kumasi to host [international] contemporary artists,
curators, and art professionals for talks, workshops, exhibitions,
overviews, and critique sessions with his students” (seid'ou and
Bouwhuis 2014: 16)¹⁸ (Fig. 20). He is mindful of the contradictions
that go together with his desire to be transnational in outlook
without moving a step.



(right)

16 Critique sessions were held at project sites most of which were located in the heart of Kumasi city. Here, *kaŋi'kačä* seid'ou and George "Buma" Ampratwum engage Ibrahim Mahama in a critique session at site of the Adum Central Railway Footbridge, 2012.

Photo: courtesy Ibrahim Mahama

(below)

17a–b Mavis Tetteh-Ocloo

Stills from two-channel silent video installation, *Coming of the morning*.

Photo: courtesy Mavis Tetteh-Ocloo



Boundaries nowhere, centers everywhere—

A basis for the gift-form of art

Adapting Alain de Lille's trope of a great sphere with boundaries nowhere but centers everywhere, *kaŋi'kačä* seid'ou envisioned iterable, propagative, and translatable formats of art practice which auto-distribute infinitely as gift without the author's presence, instruction, further instigation, or control. A typical example is the Name Change Project (1994/2004–present)¹⁹ through which he got his strange name with anomalous orthography notarized in the *Ghana Gazette*, self-distributed over all official

documents of state apparatuses, translatable into sound and other sign systems (Fig. 21). Here, the artist makes a gesture towards complete dematerialization and deskilling of the art object. He proposes it as a paradoxical property form that challenges the smooth operations of existing property relations and conditions for art's commodification.

Concerned with the tendency for art to constitute a site of struggle for the expropriation of intellectual commons, his practice took a pedagogic and processual form in this phase when he took teaching appointment in the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in 2003. Acting as an artist-in-residence in the university, he launched the Emancipatory Art Teaching Project, which can be described as the central nervous system animating content of the new Kumasi curriculum and activities of the emergent artist collective and dynamic network, the blaxTARLINES.

Universality, crisis, and a gift economy

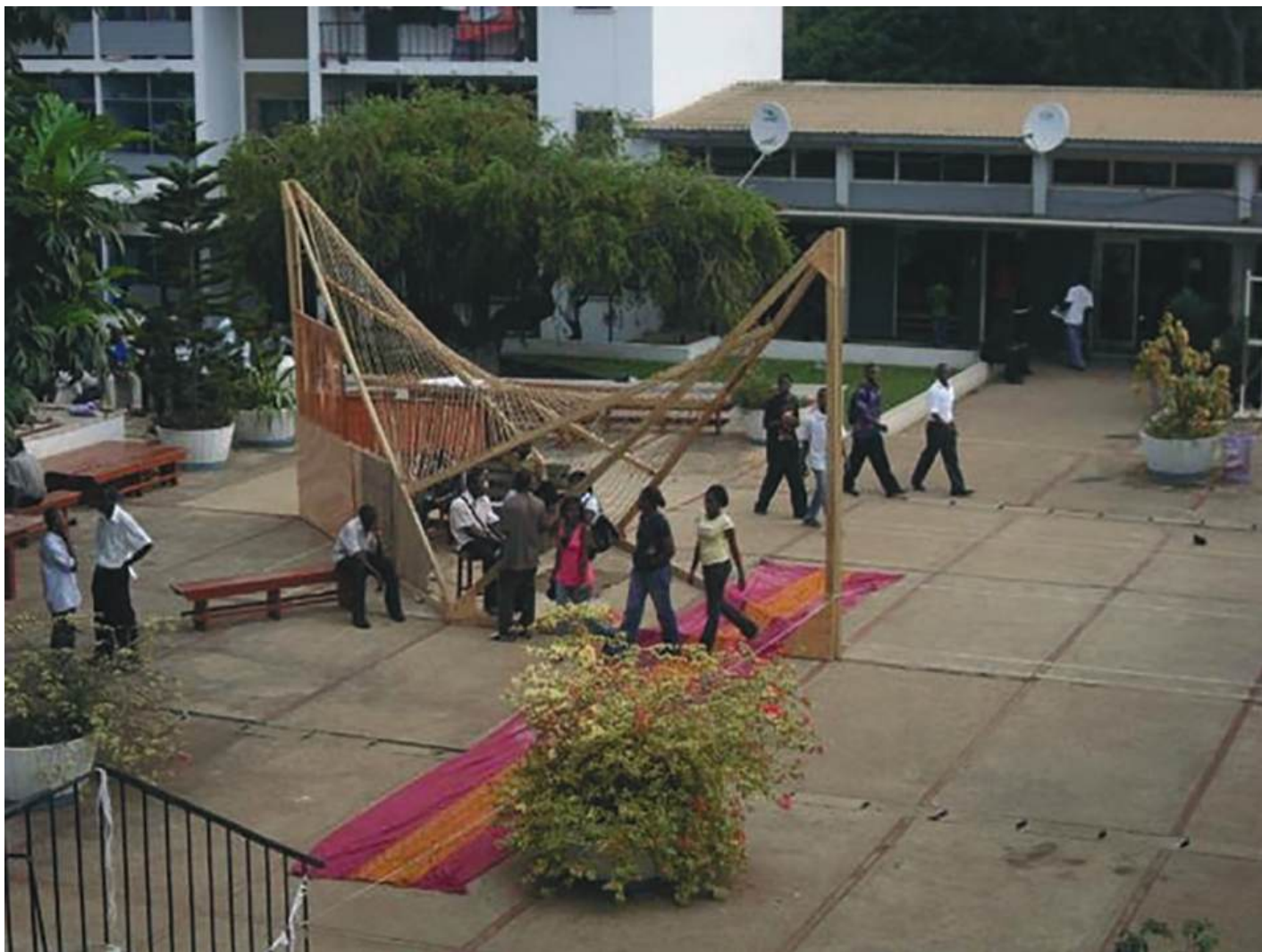
The substructure of seid'ou's Emancipatory Art Teaching Project can be summed up, in his words, as a hope to "transform art from the status of commodity to gift" (seid'ou and Bouwhuis 2015/2019: 193). And this can be summarily interpreted as a gesture toward affirming the emancipatory potential of concrete universality—potentially speaking, the exception that is emblematic of "the all." To say that it is a hopeful endeavor is to come to terms with the hopelessness lurking in the pertaining conditions he has had to endure. As Žižek describes it, the true courage is to admit that "the light at the end of the tunnel is probably the headlight of another train approaching" (2017: 3). Creating conditions of possibility within the fabric of such impossibilities is the miracle of revolutions. Referring to notes she took from seid'ou's classes, Adjo Kisser recalls one of his popular maxims regarding seid'ou's affirmative stance towards crisis.²⁰

"What do you do when there are no options?"

"You invent!"

In the case of seid'ou's Emancipatory Art Teaching Project, it means enacting constructive and affirmative politics in the face





of imminent crisis, within the Ghanaian “cultural slum” of contemporary art (seid’ou and Bouwhuis 2014: 112).²¹ seid’ou’s focus was on the curriculum of the KNUST Art College, a principal nurturing point of Ghana’s art community, where the institutional framework for contemporary art had been in malaise. Ibrahim Mahama has drawn out valuable insights in seid’ou’s teaching project that inform his persistent engagement with the

promises embedded in failure and crisis conditions (Box 4).

In a conversation with a student on the gift form, seid’ou says of his envisioned gift form;

18 Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh created a discursive space of conviviality in the courtyard of Queens Hall, KNUST. Undergraduate exhibition project for *kari’kacha* seid’ou’s drawing class, 2007. Photo: courtesy Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh

19 Heartwill Kankam. Performative exhibition project, social practice and filmic documentation, *kari’kacha* seid’ou’s undergraduate drawing class, 2010, Kumasi. Photo: courtesy Heartwill Kankam



20 “Interactive Series”: Bisi Silva and the 2013 Asiko school joined an MFA critique session in Kumasi. The student presenter sitting on the blue plastic paint bucket is Ibrahim Mahama, who was soon to become the youngest artist to be called to participate in the Venice Biennale in 2015.

Photo: courtesy blaxTARLINES.

21 *kari'kachā seid'ou*.

Name Change Project (1994/2004)

Anomalous name notarized in the Ghana High Court. 2004.

Photo: courtesy *kari'kachā seid'ou*.



Even potlatch fails as a gift form. Derrida has already deconstructed the gift on these terms. To him, the gift or gifting is impossible because there is always the reciprocal supplement attached to it. The taker is bound to return the gesture in some other way or form. A gift, in the sense Derrida knew it, is impossible. This is where I come in. I begin from where Derrida left it. If the gift is impossible then that is where a miracle is lurking. A miracle is a miracle only because it is the impossible that happens. So, what is this gift that is an impossible that happens? What constitutes this gift miracle? It is the one that can escape the logic of a priori reciprocity. This means we must look at what kind of form the gift takes and what social forms it can enable, etc. One of the plausible forms is what Marx calls the “general intellect” ... maybe the “cognitive form” if you will. If art, for instance, takes intellectual, cognitive or knowledge form, no matter how you share it, you still have it. The taker is not compelled to return the gesture because both parties have it. This is where the pedagogical project, the Emancipatory Art Teaching Project finds its support as a gifting economy. That is not to say that no aspect of it is commoditizable. Indeed, it is, as demonstrated by the futile attempts to gentrify it as “intellectual property.”²²

Notably, once a thing is commodified, it enters the circulatory vortex of exchanges, conforming to the logic of profit and capital accumulation. Therefore, art, when strictly thought of as commodity, necessarily encloses that which must, in principle, be accessible and usable to all of humanity, consecrating it for only the few who have arbitrarily acquired the privilege of exclusive ownership. And this has been the oracle of inequality for at least three centuries now. The “gift” regime is about sharing; about artists making the property form of art inoperative. In this egalitarian paradigm, everybody possesses the means to offer and/or receive a gift.

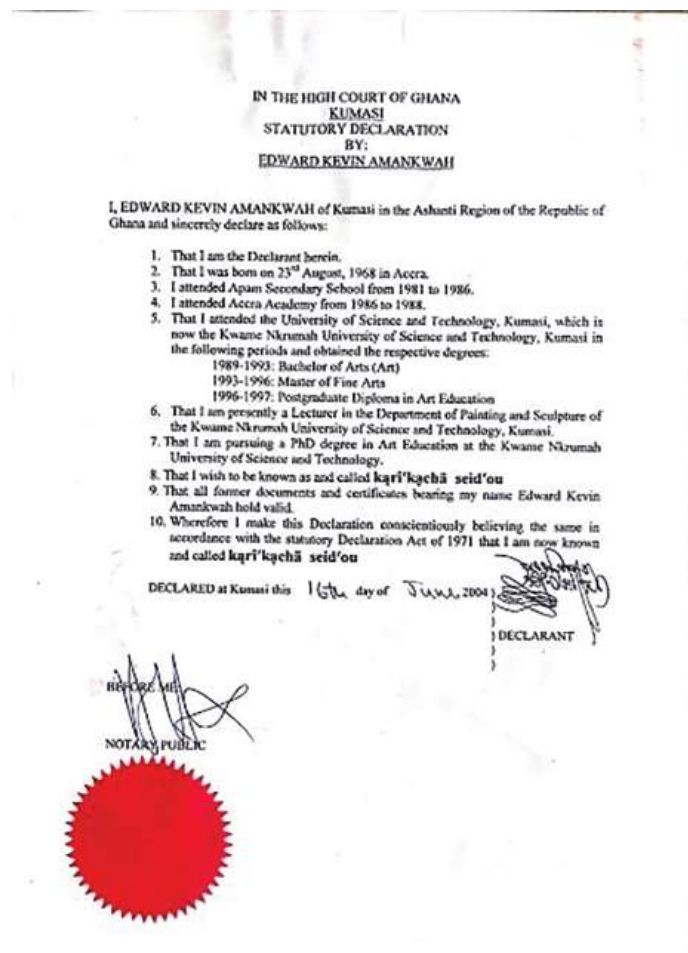
Nurturing a community of communities:

Gown goes to Town—Town flows through Gown

The pursuit of the ambitious curriculum transformation in Kumasi led *seid'ou* to form collectives with other faculty, alumni, and kindred spirits whose networks and dedicated spirit would eventually be formalized as blaxTARLINES KUMASI in 2015, more than a decade after the launch of the pedagogical project in Kumasi.

The workings of the blaxTARLINES community mark the

postbiopolitical and posthuman phase of struggle and solidarity in spheres where the symbolic or “representational” gets coded into life and material. Thus, the community’s preferred site of political struggle is the coded material.²³ The mode of struggle is, first and foremost, economic and therefore premised on the logic of exploitation. This model challenges the default biopolitical regime of power struggle premised exclusively on the logic of domination and targeted at zones of cultural power where aspects of the body (life or material) get coded into symbol. To *seid'ou*,



Box 4

"... and the ghosts that I knew come back to haunt me now ..."

Notes from the lectures of *kqri'kachā seid'ou*
Ibrahim Mahama

Sometimes something is recognized as revolutionary only after the actual revolution has long taken place. So perhaps retrospectively, a history may be chronicled. Perhaps this will be unearthed in the revisions, the rereadings, the reconstitution of narratives that ensue in posterity. In my case, I notice that I keep returning to notes I have made as I sit in *kqri'kachā seid'ou's* lectures for instance, or nuggets of wisdom I have picked up whilst in conversation with other members of the faculty or artist colleagues. These notes become like ghosts I have known, and they come back to haunt me ...

From the lectures of *kqri'kachā seid'ou* in my postgraduate studies, I have come to realize that the understanding of the notion of "crisis" and how it can be a protagonist in modern production systems makes "crisis" the very crux of my enquiry, and I approach these ideas through artistic production and interventionist gestures across sites ...

seid'ou's arrival (or rearrival) on the scene became a moment of rupture, which has since changed the direction of art production, consumption, and discussion in our generation. *seid'ou's* project has been to present multiple perspectives within art historical production systems across multiple geographical locations, while focusing on the infinite possibilities forms of art can take and their aesthetic implications for revolutionary practice.

(Extract from "Labour of Many: Ibrahim Mahama," Cape Town: Norval Foundation, February 13–August 11, 2019)

this paradigm, Foucaultian in its ancestry, hardly tackles the roots of inequalities adequately; rather, it smacks of a reproduction of the postmodern culturalization of politics and the default ideology of neoliberal and late capitalism.²⁴

blaxTARLINES is a transgenerational, transdisciplinary, and open-access entity dedicated to rebuilding the art infrastructure of Ghana and other regions of exception. In its program of material and intellectual emancipation, it lends support to young artists and

Notes

This article forms part of a collection of papers planned at the Arts of Africa and Global Souths PROSPA publishing workshop held at Rhodes University, South Africa, in November 2018. The workshop was funded by the Andrew W. Mellon foundation and the NRF/DSI SARCHI chair program in Geopolitics and the Arts of Africa. We are grateful to *kqri'kachā seid'ou* for offering us detailed information on his work and that of others, reading the text at every stage, giving us feedback and clarifications and helping us draw important historical connections. These exchanges have been very useful in composing the text.

1 Unlike the former curriculum, which was restricted to *beaux-arts* painting and sculpture media and cut-and-dry skill sets which alienated artists who wanted to explore their unique experiences in the world, the new curriculum offers an open field that permits women, other cultural minorities, and any artist-subject with special inclinations and abilities to explore their specific interests and unique experiences as art. The possible ideas, materials, and tools are endless. This has encouraged diversity in the artist population nurtured by KNUST and blaxTARLINES KUMASI. There are more women artist-practitioners and cultural workers from KNUST than anytime in Ghana's history. The greater number is from the millennial generation, who are beginning to mentor younger generations of women artists. Also, enrollment of women has increased significantly in the department. At high school level, the number of female candidates who sat for the WASSCE Examinations has been higher than the male population since 2019. This year, the figures stand at 188,163 female candidates to 187,574 male candidates (<https://www.waegh.org/wasce>). This increase in female candidates at high school level reflects in the increasing female population at the university.

2 Nancy (1991) refers to inoperativity as a number of individuals bound together by their shared mortality or common struggle but having no shared or collective identity. See also Ford (2015) and Agamben (2005).

3 Most of the existing and burgeoning art spaces, groups, and institutions in Ghana's capital are run by former students of Kumasi and their collaborators who had their art training from Ghanatta and Ankle schools of art, the former polytechnics, or the streets of Ghana's cities. Examples are Foundation for Contemporary Art, Exit Frame, the Studio, Ehalakasa, and the founding team of Chale Wote Art Festival. The collaborations between Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh and Sir Black's Ehalakasa, and Serge Clotey and Francis Kokroko, respectively, produced remarkable results.

4 The Emancipatory Art Teaching Project was conceived in the mid-1990s and launched in 1998 as a response to Agyemang "Dota" Ossei's pedagogical project in a high school in Bawku, North Eastern Ghana. It was updated and relaunched in the College of Art, Kumasi in 2003 and was contemporaneous with the early bottle-cap installations in Nigeria of Ghanaian-born artist El Anatsui. In this new work, Anatsui had transformed from a sole producer of autonomous sculptures to the collective production of magnificent installations.

5 *kqri'kachā seid'ou's* PhD thesis (*seid'ou* 2006) won the 2008 Silver Award of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences. The Silver Award is given to the best unpublished PhD thesis manuscript presented to a Ghanaian University. Nagy and Jordan (2018: 1) observe that *seid'ou's* dissertation, *Theoretical Foundations of the KNUST Painting Programme: A Philosophical Inquiry and Its Contextual Relevance in Ghanaian Culture*, "is closely read by faculty and students at KNUST to this day."

6 At the sign painting workshop, *seid'ou* painted sign boards and embellished video advertisement posters, a painting method which anticipated Photoshop editing. He painted giant concert cartoon boards and undertook billboard hoarding. He also decorated motor vehicles, "especially tro-tros with 'addresses', vignettes, floral patterns and lettering, from rubber mud guards to the arched boards above the windscreens" (Kwami 2013: 325).

7 *kqri'kachā seid'ou* holds a degree in mathematics. The "black hole" mascot he suggested for blaxTARLINES

Box 5

Out of nothingness, particles are born: The phenomenon of black holes that informs blaxTARLINES thought
Tracy Thompson

The blaxTARLINES community is premised on egalitarian principles of equality and respect of the general intellect of all persons, which demands operating from a void that implodes a thing under its own weight by "gravitational pull" and perhaps emit radiations (even temporarily). Such implosion has meant to even unlearn what we know as art and (re-)discover what such a void offers. Such void propels the individual towards the unknown where experimentation creates infinite possibilities

curators establishing start-up art spaces.²⁵ A new attitude to teaching and art programming has been cultivated: one that jettisons a pedantic and conformist logic—where the learner must absorb what the pedagogue already knows whether they are interested in it or not—for a more experimentally driven peer-to-peer dynamic system. There is a "coworker" ethic and spirit of filial kinship (Badiou 2006: 19) that enables the teacher to participate in a "community of equals"—where there is freedom for one to pursue an independent destiny—as lecturers and students form collectives to share and execute projects. The sense of shared responsibility and mutual respect is inevitable to this society although it would not be one based on absolute harmony because it is at the same time one that eschews conformity and organicism. blaxTARLINES is nourished by this spirit of collectivism. The intellectual emancipation and political sensitivity to artistic practice it offers has revolutionized artistic and curatorial practices at the Kumasi School and has laid the foundation for criticality there and beyond. And this is a consequence of *kqri'kachā seid'ou* nonproprietary art practice and its gift form. As he continues to remind us: Silence is not absence!

KUMASI is a consequence of his mathematical interests.

8 A sample of *kqri'kachā seid'ou's* post-imagist poems, namely *Appendix Appendicitis*, *Shadows are Telegrams Awaiting Reply 30x30x30 ...*, *Boundaries*, *Sores and Scars* and *Untitled 1*, have been published in Ndikung et al. (2019: 129–30, 219–22, 233–34). His 1998 poem, "Hieroglyphs on Kangyaga Plains" was a tribute to Ama Ata Aidoo's 1964/1965 poem "Cornfields in Accra" which inspired the eponymous blaxTARLINES exhibition held in 2016.

9 The corollary is named after Gavril Princip, who assassinated the Archduke Frans Ferdinand of the Austro-Hungarian empire. This triggered a chain of events that led to the outbreak of World War I. Graham Harman cautions the contemporary thinker against contextualist dogma: "We must restore dignity to individual causes and resist the seductive dogma of total context" (2009: 210).

10 In a foreword to an exhibition text, the renowned Ghanaian painter Ato Delaquis (1994) writes of *seid'ou*, who was then called Kevin Amankwah, "There are some naturals who seem to be born with a brush in one hand and a palette in another. Kevin is such an artist. Pablo Picasso was another. They seem to draw or paint anything, whether objective or subjective, with extraordinary facility."

11 Among these figures of radical sacrifice are Harriet Tubman, an escaped enslaved person who risked her freedom in order to free others who were enslaved; Euripides's Medea and Toni Morrison's Sethe, who sacrificed their children out of their fidelity to them; and Joseph Jacotot, the Ignorant Schoolmaster. Like these figures of the "ethical act," *kqri'kachā seid'ou* sacrifices "art" out of fidelity to "art." Žižek proposes that "the only way to liberate oneself from the grip of existing social reality is to renounce the fantasmatic supplement that attaches us to it" (2000: 149).

12 Tching Hsieh's series of one-year performances (1978–1986) and Thirteen Year Plan (1986–1999) have much in common with *seid'ou's* long durational projects such as the Name Change Project (1994/2004–present)

and the Emancipatory Teaching Project (since 2003). seïd'ou and Tino Sehgal share a practice of undocumented performative form and "constructed situations." However, there are important differences: while seïd'ou's projects, the antecedent, could be propagated by anybody, Tino Sehgal's works are performed at museums and galleries and executed by trained individuals he refers to as "interpreters." seïd'ou's artist on strike subject is contemporaneous with Claire Fontaine's readymade artist. They are also cotravellers in the use of tactical humor, text-based pieces, and critique of the hierarchy between visual and verbal expression.

13 seïd'ou once humorously referred to himself as Hestia, the goddess of domesticity (*oikos*) and community (*polis*), i.e., goddess of the political economy—the firstborn of the first-generation Olympian gods, who nurtures all, but who lost her place in the canon to Dionysus.

14 In his PhD dissertation, seïd'ou critiques the Art History Programme of the KNUST College of Art thus: "[the Art History Programme] had not monitored contemporary practices and revised critical theories seriously. In our assessment, the Section is not satisfactorily equipped with the resource to give critical direction to the twenty-first century Ghanaian painter. On the surface, this seems to place a burden on the painting lecturer who has to double as an art historian, art critic, and philosopher. However, the monitoring of current practices and critical discourse has become an inextricable part of the responsibilities of studio art teaching also, especially, in Africa where institutional practices and apparatuses for curating, art criticism and presentation are still in their infancy" (seïd'ou 2006: 308).

15 Marshall Ward Mount, in his canonical *African Art since 1920*, had marked the Kumasi Art College for special criticism for its rather tame output and its epicolonial and prescriptive program: "The [institution's] instruction has followed essentially the theories of the typical English academic art school. Still lifes, portraits, and nudes have often been done in a lifeless, realistic style with little originality ... It is unfortunate that more artists of note have not been trained in the long history of the department" (Mount 1989: 129, 139). seïd'ou himself was trained under this curriculum and tried to change its direction with his colleagues when they were students. This instigation for change was memorable but failed until seïd'ou became a teacher there in 2003.

16 An Event is a phenomenon that intervenes "to upset the established rhythm of daily life and even questions the eternal order of Ideas" (Žižek 2013: 1). It is also "the effect that seems to exceed its causes", a miracle inseparably bound to "the space of the event" (2014: 4).

17 In a conversation with curator Jelle Bouwhuis, seïd'ou says, "In terms of institutions of contemporary art, I tend to have the view that Ghana is a kind of 'cultural slum,' or in Agamben's terms, 'homo sacer,' the governed but ungovernable" (seïd'ou and Bouwhuis 2014: 112).

18 Participants in this series have included Bisi Silva, Godfried Donkor, Elvira Dyangani Ose, Nana Oforiatta Ayim, Adwoa Amoah, Rochelle Feinstein (Yale), Sam Durant, Rikki Wemega-Kwawu, Papa Owusu-Ankomah, and El Anatsui. Kwaku Bofo Kissiedu (Castro), George Ampratwum (Buma), Ibrahim Mahama, and Bernard Akoi-Jackson have been very instrumental in institutionalizing the Interactive Series. More recently, Kwasi Ohene-Ayeh, in collaboration with The Studio, Accra, and Foundation for Contemporary Art, Accra (FCA) has expanded the locus of Interactive Series beyond Kumasi.

19 The name change project started in 1994 but was ratified in 2004.

20 Adjo Kisser summarizes seïd'ou's affirmative politics thus: "The urgency of inventing new possibilities in response to a milieu of hopelessness within the emaciated art scene of Ghana and its institutions is what undergirds every one of kari'kachā seïd'ou's projects" (George Ampratwum and Adjo Kisser in conversation; March 13, 2019, KNUST, Kumasi).

21 seïd'ou suggests, "My over identification with the 'cultural slum' is an optimistic rather than a cynical one, a constructive rather than resistance politics. It is to affirm and thereby help invent an alternative to the global mainstream than to assimilate" (seïd'ou and Bouwhuis 2014: 112).

22 kari'kachā seïd'ou, in conversation with Robin Riskin, July 9, 2020.

23 seïd'ou proposed the black hole, the mascot of blaxTARLINES, as a materialist update to the symbolic

"Lodestar of African Freedom" incorporated into Ghana's flag and coat of arms in 1957 by Theodosia Okoh and Amon Kotei respectively. Ultimately, the blaxTARLINES economic and intellectual emancipation project is a resurrection of Kwame Nkrumah's adaptation of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which culminated in the abortive Black Star Line shipping line project (1919–1922).

24 seïd'ou's critique of postmodern multiculturalism and contemporary art's complicity in neoliberal capitalist exploitation must be disambiguated from the critiques of postmodernism by the Intellectual Dark Web.

25 Examples of start-up art spaces to which blaxTARLINES lends support are Ibrahim Mahama's Savannah Center for Contemporary Art (SCCA-Tamale), the Studio, Accra; crazinisT Art Studio and Perfocraze International Artists' Residency (PIAR), Kumasi, directed by Vabene Elikem Fiatsi (crazinisT artistT).

References cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. 2015. *The Use of Bodies: Homo Sacer IV*, p. 2. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Armah, Ayi Kwei. 1984. "Masks and Marx: The Marxist Ethos vis-a-vis African Revolutionary Theory and Praxis." *Présence Africaine* 3 (131): 35–65.
- Armah, Ayi Kwei. 2010. *Remembering the Dismembered Continent*. Popenguine: Per Ankh.
- Badiou, Alain. 2006. *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bouwhuis, Jelle, Kerstin Winking, Kofi Setordji, and Odile Tveie. 2013. "Introduction." *SMBA Newsletter*, No. 129. Amsterdam: SMBA.
- Delaquis, Ato. 1994. *Lasting Impressions* [Exhibition text]. Smithsonian African History Library. http://collections.si.edu/search/results.htm?q=record_ID:SL-LAF_219
- Diallo, A., kari'kachā seïd'ou, K.B. Kissiedu, G. Ampratwum, et al. 2017. "Department of Now: The Teaching Methods at Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Has Cultivated a New Generation of Innovative Artists." *Contemporary &*, 7. <http://www.contemporaryand.com/de/magazines/past-present-and-future-about-art-in-kumasi/>
- Dieckvoss, Stephanie. 2017. "College of Art and Built Environment of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana: Handwerkllichkeit als Existenzstrategie." *Kunstforum International* 245: 118–31.
- Enwezor, Okwui, and Sue Williamson. 2016. "Sue Williamson's Diary: An Interview with Okwui." *Artthrob*. <https://artthrob.co.za/2016/12/15/sue-williamsons-diary-an-interview-with-okwui/>
- Ford, Russell. 2015. "Inoperativity (Desreuvrement)." In Peter Gratton and Marie-Eve Morin (eds.), *The Nancy Dictionary*, pp. 121–23. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Harman, Graham. 2009. *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*. Melbourne: re.press.
- Johannessen, Toril. June 19, 2016. "Art with Consequences [Exhibition review]." *Contemporary &*. <https://www.contemporaryand.com/magazines/art-with-consequences/>
- Kouoh, Koyo, and Lloyd Wise. 2016. "Koyo Kouoh." *Artforum*, September. <https://www.artforum.com/print/201607/koyo-kouoh-62999>
- Kwami, Atta. 2013. "kari'kachā seïd'ou." In *Kumasi Realism 1951–2007. An African Modernism*, pp. 316–33. London: Hurst.
- Mahama, Ibrahim. 2019. *Labour of Many: Ibrahim Mahama*. Cape Town: Norval Foundation.
- Mount, Marshal Ward. 1989. *African Art: The Years since 1920*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Originally published 1973.

- Munshi, Neil. 2018. "Ghana Art Scene Rises from Streets to International Galleries." *Financial Times*, Oct. 8. <https://www.ft.com/content/aa3fb2ac-clab-11e8-84cd-9e601db069b8>.
- Nagy, Rebecca, and Alissa Jordan. 2018. "Cutting Edge of the Contemporary: KNUST, Accra, and the Ghanaian Contemporary Art Movement." *African Arts* 51 (3): 1–8.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. 1991. *The Inoperative Community*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ndikung, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng, Aziza Harmel, Astrid Sokona Lepoulter, and Ohene-Ayeh Kwasi (Eds.). 2019. *Streams of Consciousness: A Concatenation of Individuals. Bamako Encounters*, 12th ed. Berlin: Archive Books and Bamako: Editions Balani's.
- Outa, George Odera. 1988. *Art and the Revolutionary Content of Ayi Kwei Armah's Novels (with Special Reference to Two Thousand Seasons)*. Unpublished MA thesis, University of Nairobi.
- Rancière, Jacques. 2007. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Rancière, Jacques. 2011. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London: Verso.
- seïd'ou, kari'kachā. 2006. *Theoretical Foundations of the KNUST Painting Programme: A Philosophical Inquiry and Its Contextual Relevance in Ghanaian Culture*. Unpublished PhD thesis. Kumasi: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.
- seïd'ou, kari'kachā. 2010. "Foreword." In Kelvin Hailzel (ed.), *Kages*, n.p. Kumasi: Department of Painting and Sculpture, KNUST.
- seïd'ou, kari'kachā, and Bouwhuis Jelle. 2014. "Silent Parodies: kari'kachā seïd'ou in conversation with Jelle Bouwhuis." In Jelle Bouwhuis and Kerstin Winking (eds.), *Project 1975: Contemporary Art and the Post-colonial Unconscious*, pp. 109–18. Amsterdam: SMBA and London: Black Dog.
- seïd'ou, kari'kachā, George Ampratwum, Kwaku Bofo Kissiedu, and Robin Riskin. 2015. "Silent Ruptures: Emergent Art of the Kumasi College of Art." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 5 (10): 131–37.
- Silva, Bisi. 2017. "Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom." In *Asiko: On the Future of Artistic and Curatorial Pedagogies in Africa*, pp. 42, 43. Lagos: Center for Contemporary Art (CCA).
- Tetteh-Ocloo, Mavis. 2019. "'Selasi Awusi' Sosu." In *Ghana Freedom: Ghana Pavillion at the 58th International Art Exhibition La Biennale Di Venezia*, pp. 90–99. London: Koenig Books.
- Woets, Rhoda. 2011. "'In Art, Any Shit Can Be A Hit': Blazing Conceptual Trails on the Artscape in the 21st Century." In *What Is This? Framing Ghanaian Art from the Colonial Encounter to the Present*, pp. 319–63. Amsterdam: VU University.
- Woets, Rhoda. 2012. "'In Art, any Shit can be a hit': The work and teaching of kari'kachā seïd'ou." *Time Trade and Travel* [Exhibition booklet]. Amsterdam: SMBA No. 129.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2000. *The Fragile Absolute*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2013. "The Three Events of Philosophy." *International Journal of Žižek Studies* 7 (1): 1–25.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2014. *Event: A Philosophical Journey Through a Concept*. London: Penguin Books.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2017. *The Courage of Hopelessness: Chronicles of a Year of Acting Dangerously*. London: Allen Lane.