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## **Ebifananyi : a study of photographs in Uganda in and through an artistic practice**

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The title *Ebifananyi* refers to the fact that photographs in Uganda are conceptualised in language as likenesses. Accepting the idea of linguistic relativism according to which language shapes the way the world is perceived,<sup>14</sup> it is assumed that the way photographs in Uganda and in The Netherlands produce meaning is different. I became aware of this difference while already working as a Dutch artist with photographs in Uganda. The initial idea that the unknown encountered in Uganda could be explored through photography as I knew it therefore turned out to be a misconception signalled by the conceptualisation of the photograph in language as *ekifananyi*. This was for me, as a trained photographer and artist, a sobering insight, which became the premise for this dissertation.

## Research questions

The research question is twofold. The first question is topical and asks about the difference between photographs and *ebifananyi* and how this difference may be relevant when communicating with and about photographs in Uganda and in the Netherlands. The second question concerns the method of research and asks how my artistic practice contributes to research into photography.

*Ebifananyi* / photographs have ambiguous roles in this research project. They are the objects of study in relation to the first question. They are also used as material in, and as part of the outcomes of, my artistic practice. This introduction positions the multiple roles of photographs in my artistic practice as research method. It argues why the notions of encounter and correspondence as brought forward by Azoulay and Ingold are of crucial importance. It also briefly discusses the interdisciplinary field that addresses ‘photography in Africa’ and the relevance of Uganda as a case study for this research project, closing with the framework of the project and the form in which it is presented.

## Images, Pictures, Photographs

The ubiquitous presence of photographs and their appearance as, what French philosopher Roland Barthes called, ‘a message without a code,’<sup>15</sup> creates the impression that they can be instantly interpreted.

<sup>14</sup> Whorf (1956), Brons (2015), p. 79, Staszak (2008), p. 43

<sup>15</sup> Barthes (1977), p. 17

Photographs, however, result from and relate to culturally specific “generally distributed ways of doing and making”<sup>16</sup> that are present in their production, in their application in mass media, in the way they are used for remembrance, to narrate history and in the conventions that shape their institutional utilisation.

This research project studies photographs in Uganda through an artistic practice. They are the objects that are studied as well as agents that guided me through Uganda. My artistic practice intervened in the state in which historical collections of photographs were encountered. I engaged with modes of production of photographs and other pictures in present day Uganda, which resulted in a series of books and exhibitions with the same title as the dissertation: *Ebifananyi*.

The word *ebifananyi* signifies a category of pictures that looks like something else. This category of pictures can only be differentiated further, for instance in their mode of production, through the context in which the word is used. Sometimes this is done by adding other words. A photograph is then *ekifananyi kya mu camera*, translated as a likeness ‘made in’ a camera. *Ekifananyi ekisiige* is a likeness that is drawn. However, in most cases this kind of explication is not made and the mode of production and materiality of *ekifananyi* is not specified. The difference between *ekifananyi* and photograph then is signalled by the absence of a particular word for photograph in Luganda and the conceptualisation of the image / picture / photograph as a likeness.

The meaning of pictures obviously depends on context as well. In the words of art historian Hans Belting, “They migrate across the boundaries that separate one culture from another, taking up residence in the media of one historical place and time and then moving to the next, like desert wanderers setting up temporary camps.”<sup>17</sup>

In the *Ebifananyi* books and exhibitions I purposefully made use of this versatility of pictures. The attempts to do this in a way that is critical, transparent and reflexive are made explicit in this dissertation.

*Ebifananyi* wants to contribute to the field of study of ‘photography in Africa’ through responses to collections of photographs in Uganda, and through an analysis of the processes around these responses. I follow the line of thinking of British anthropologist and art historian Christopher Pinney. He calls for a ‘world system photography’ that decentralises the theorising of photography, which, as he and others have argued, still tends to universalise a Euro-American perspective.<sup>18</sup> In addition, this dissertation takes a reflexive approach as it hopes to contribute to debates about ‘artistic research’ by considering the possibilities and consequences of a particular artistic practice. This particular practice is based on the idea of the photograph as an encounter, and on research as a correspondence based process.

My artistic practice as research method

Thinking of artistic practices in terms of responding to ‘what is already there’ rather than creating something new makes it possible to identify myself as an artist. Addressing questions which relate to current academic

<sup>16</sup> Rancière (2004), p. 13  
<sup>17</sup> Belting uses the word images in his comparison. Taking the definitions used in this context into account pictures is more appropriate here. Belting (2011), p. 21  
<sup>18</sup> Pinney (2010), (2012). Also see Oguibe (2004), pp. 78-89 and Peffer (2012), p. 12

discourses renders my artistic practice relevant as a research method. I respond to the notion of photography as understood through my upbringing and education in the Netherlands. As explored in Chapter 2 I build upon encounters with collections of photographs in Uganda. Each person who engages in both the making of and subsequent experience with a photograph becomes part of an encounter between, in Azoulay’s words, “several protagonists, mainly photographer and photographed, camera and spectator.”<sup>19</sup> She continues to say that,

“Understanding the photograph as a product of an encounter extricated me from dead-end discussions of the photograph in terms of the ‘inside and outside’ organized and embodied by the camera – those standing in front of the camera and behind it at the moment the photograph is taken, and inside and outside the frame at the moment the photograph is viewed.”<sup>20</sup>

The inside and outside positions which Azoulay mentions have been cultivated from the moment photographs were used as part of empirical ambitions and documentary efforts.<sup>21</sup> They have been used to emphasise differences and thus create others.<sup>22</sup>

In the second half of the 20th century photographers, artists and anthropologists have increasingly become aware of this problem, reflected on it, and developed photography projects that presented alternatives to the prevalence of photographs from elsewhere that generated spectacle and distance. Particularly influential have been photographers Lary Sultan (USA, 1946-2009), Susan Meiselas, (USA, 1948), Santu Mofokeng (SA, 1956) and Julian Germain (UK, 1962), and artists Akram Zaatari (LB, 1966) and Roy Villevoye (NL, 1960). The practices of these photographers and artists overlap in their use of historical material and an emphasis on narratives that address contemporary issues related to identity formation and relations between self and others. They have been influential to my practice in different ways. Sultan and Germain both positioned in their books historical photographs from personal (Sultan and Germain) and institutional (Germain) collections alongside photographs they produced themselves to inform each other.<sup>23</sup> Meiselas and Mofokeng did not only work with historical photographs but produced collections that shed light on how photographs were produced and used in the past and how available histories are the result of highly selective processes. Mofokeng experimented with different temporal and special forms of presenting the collection of photographs which he put together in a slideshow, exhibition and later a book.<sup>24</sup> Meiselas made use of the possibilities of web 1.0 to crowd-source photographs and information attached to photographs.<sup>25</sup> Next to the, already mentioned, Arab Image foundation, of which Zaatari is a founding member, this was an example for HIPUganda, the platform I set up to collect and share photographs that is discussed in chapter 1. Zaatari and Villevoye both explore photographs beyond the photographic in ways that opened doors within my practice.<sup>26</sup> Meiselas and Villevoye explicitly foster collaborations with the people whose stories they engage with as well as with anthropologists and other academic partners.<sup>27</sup>

In my artistic practice I initiate encounters that lead to correspondences as a result of which photographs move from one context to several other ones in processes that unfold over periods of time. It is assumed that a limited understanding of the conditions in which these processes unfold can cause misunderstandings in the encounter. The notion of the encounter signifies both the excitement and wonder as well as the unease and friction that

<sup>19</sup> Azoulay (2008), p. 25, (2010), p. 11  
<sup>20</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>21</sup> Landau (2002), Riis (1890)  
<sup>22</sup> Brons (2015), Hall (1997), pp. 223-279  
<sup>23</sup> Sultan (1992), Germain (1990)  
<sup>24</sup> Mofokeng (2013)  
<sup>25</sup> Meiselas (2008b), <http://www.akakurdistan.com/> Last accessed 25-09-2018. Also Meiselas (2008a, 2008c)  
<sup>26</sup> Raad & Zaatari (2005), Zaatari (2014), Villevoye (2004), [www.royvillevoye.com](http://www.royvillevoye.com) Last accessed 22-09-2018  
<sup>27</sup> Meiselas (2003, 2008c)



appear when I see a collection of photographs in Uganda for the first time. The excitement and wonder spring from the promise of new vistas and connections,<sup>28</sup> while the friction and unease relate to the privilege I have, just like other artists and researchers who work in cultures other than their own. Excitement and wonder, and the consequences of privilege are topics that return throughout this dissertation. Thinking of photographs as encounters helps to practice a form of ‘narrative humility’, a term coined by American physician Sayantani DasGupta who is interested in ‘narrative medicine’.<sup>29</sup> Narrative medicine is a discipline in health care that places emphasis on the stories of illness taking the different positions of patients and medical professionals into account.<sup>30</sup> In the context of this dissertation this means that I am aware that my pre-conceived ideas about photography do not fully apply in Uganda, and that the consequences of the versatility of meanings attached to photographs can only be grasped by listening to and observing how people in Uganda deal with them.

Rancière’s definition of artistic practices, as mentioned in the glossary above, is part of an argument on how what we sense is distributed. He defines this “distribution of the sensible” as,

“[...] the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common [a community] and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time some thing common that is shared and exclusive in parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution.”<sup>31</sup>

When different people see the same picture this generates an at least partially shared experience, for instance when people have read a certain book or visited an exhibition. In either case the experiences create a community of insiders and outsiders to that experience. The notion of the encounter that allowed Azoulay to be extricated from discussions on photography in terms of “the ‘inside and outside’” also generates inside and outside positions. I take Rancière’s “parts and positions” to result from the particular conditions that generate meaning and attach value to what is seen. These “parts and positions” are formed by circumstances that differ slightly from one person to the next and can inform the potential of a book that is read or an exhibition that is seen.

The production of the *Ebifananyi* books and exhibitions makes it possible to study these circumstances in and through what Ingold calls correspondences: “In correspondence points are set in motion to describe lines that wrap around each other like melodies in counterpoint [...] To correspond with the world, is not to describe it, or to represent it, but to answer to it.”<sup>32</sup> In this research project “the world” consists of collections of photographs as well as people who have a stake or interest in these collections. Both people and photographs have agency and, sometimes intentionally and sometimes accidentally, they become part of these correspondences. In this sense correspondences answer to the world while acknowledging that one is changing it, and allowing oneself to be changed while formulating this answer.

<sup>28</sup> Behrend (1998-1)  
<sup>29</sup> DasGupta (2008), p. 981  
<sup>30</sup> DasGupta (2004)  
<sup>31</sup> Rancière (2004), p. 12. Between brackets an insertion by the translator of the text.  
<sup>32</sup> Ingold (2013), p. 108

The books and exhibitions produced in and through the artistic practice are answers to the encounters with collections of photographs and generate partially shared experiences among audiences who read the books or visit exhibitions. Analysing the correspondences - that lead to the books and exhibitions and result from them - makes the artistic practice that produced the books and exhibitions a research method. The “ways of doing and making” of the artist are the method of the researcher.

Photography in Africa

The broad and encompassing word photography is often used to refer to particular photographs or the practices that produce them. Taking the observed differences between *ebifananyi* and photographs that are explored in this dissertation into account, the use of the word photography potentially adds misunderstandings. When the word ‘photography’ is used in this dissertation it refers to conventional uses of the term within certain discourses, examples including ‘photography in Africa’ and ‘history of photography’. Historians, anthropologists and art historians meet each other in a loosely defined and interdisciplinary field of inquiry that finds its origin in the conference *Photographs as sources for African History* that was organised in London in 1988.<sup>33</sup> German anthropologist Heike Behrend notes that colonial photographs were critically studied from the 1970s, but that it “is scandalous that anthropologists and art historians realised so late [in the early 1990s] that Africans, too, had worked as photographers and created their own visual traditions”.<sup>34</sup> Studies in the field of photography in Africa contribute, for instance, to the narration of the history of photography on the continent,<sup>35</sup> and to the understanding of photographs as part of visual culture,<sup>36</sup> as well as opening a space to reconsider the relevance of photographic archives.<sup>37</sup>

American art historian John Pfeffer points out some of the challenges the study of photography in Africa faces. He notes that its history has largely left us “to assume inaccurately that the historical experience of photography – the phenomenological basis for considering photographic meaning – is a cultural universal on European terms.”<sup>38</sup> He goes on to note that it is problematic that,

“exhibition catalogues of contemporary photography from Africa, while recognizing the need for alternative historical approaches, still often tend to offer mostly universal humanist interpretations [...] while photographs] contain time- and place bound worlds of gestural and sartorial (and phenomenological) meaning that constitute a language, one that will be missed or misconstrued if not recognized by later viewers.”<sup>39</sup>

Pinney agrees, as do I, with Pfeffer, and connects the problematic history and theory of photography and its Euro-centrism explicitly to the notion of culture, noting that,

“Perhaps it is useful to imagine a spectrum with ‘photography’ at one end and ‘culture’ at the other. What might be called ‘core’ photographic history (by which I mean that which describes Euro-American practices) erases ‘culture’ as a problematic whereas ‘peripheral’ or ‘regional’ histories by virtue of their very regionality tend to foreground ‘cultural’ dimensions of practice.”<sup>40</sup>

I think of culture as a shared normality in which people live their lives in an environment that balances a sense

<sup>33</sup> Vokes (2012), p.1, Schneider in Sheehan (2015) p. 176  
<sup>34</sup> Behrend (2014), p. 11  
<sup>35</sup> Schneider in Sheehan, (2015), p. 172, Vokes (2012), p. 1  
<sup>36</sup> Pfeffer (2012), p. 5  
<sup>37</sup> Vokes (2012), p. 3, Garb (2014)  
<sup>38</sup> Pfeffer (2012), p. 3  
<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-4. Also see Haney in Vokes (2012), pp. 127-128  
<sup>40</sup> Pinney (2010)

of connection and individual expression. This particular use of the term builds on American anthropologist Clifford Geertz's thinking. Geertz considers the study of culture to be an experimental science in search of meaning.<sup>41</sup> This search is continued here through the production of meaning that builds on correspondences. It also builds on the articles in the publication *Writing Culture, the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, which reflects on ethnographic practices and the 'writing' it results in. The book's editor James Clifford (USA) argues that "culture is always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historical, *between* subjects [...]." <sup>42</sup>

The modes of production and habitual use of photographs in Uganda has certain parallels to, and differences from the Netherlands. By using the cultures in the Netherlands and Uganda as points of reference while studying photographs in Uganda, this research project attempts to avoid the pitfalls of cultural universals and peripheral histories.

## Photographs in Uganda

When I embarked on this research project only few studies on photographs in Uganda were available. In publications that contribute primarily to an art-historical discourse, Uganda was only mentioned in relation to photographs produced by non-Ugandans or members of the Ugandan diaspora.<sup>43</sup> Several articles by scholars with backgrounds in anthropology and history do address photographs in Uganda, but these studies are incidental.<sup>44</sup> Internationally distributed artworks that have photographs in Uganda as their subject were part of practices of artists who are members of the Ugandan diaspora rather than living in the country.<sup>45</sup>

An infrastructure for critical engagement with photographs in particular, and visual arts in general was virtually absent in Uganda's capital city Kampala at the time I embarked on this research project. However, this situation has dramatically changed partly owing to the establishment of arts centre 32° Degrees East, the ambitions of artist and gallery owner Daudi Karungi and his Afriart Gallery,<sup>46</sup> and the presence of German curator Katrin Peeters-Klaphake at Makerere University Art Gallery.<sup>47</sup> For photography in particular the activities around the Uganda Press Photography Award (UPPA) have been an important factor in connecting local photographers to international developments.<sup>48</sup> UPPA was established in 2012 and organises an annual award, exhibition and discussions on photography with local and international speakers. The interplay between these organisations and individuals created a situation in which it was necessary to be critical towards self and others on a local level while international connections unfolded. Artistic outcomes of this research project were presented in collaborations with, but not limited to each of these organisations and individuals.

## Ekifananyi / The photograph

There are significant differences between the words used for 'pictures captured on light sensitive surfaces with the use of a camera' in Luganda and in English. *Ekifananyi* is the Luganda word that is used to signify a

photograph, but it does not mean a photograph. The noun *ekifananyi* is derived from the verb *kufanana* - to be similar to.<sup>49</sup> The literal translation of *ekifananyi* is then a likeness. The English word photograph is constructed from the Greek *photos* and *graphé*, referring to a drawing made with light. The word photograph places emphasis on the production process (drawing) of the picture and the material used (light). This excludes paintings or drawings from the category of pictures that is signified and makes the camera and a light sensitive surface central to it. The Luganda word *ekifananyi* makes it possible to erase the camera from the encounter with the picture and produces a more inclusive category that can refer to a photograph, but also to a painting or a drawing.

I encountered the word *ekifananyi* for the first time in a document related to the collection of photographs that is presented in *Ebifananyi* #4. When this document appeared I had been searching for collections of photographs in Uganda for four years. During this search people repeatedly brought paintings and drawings to the table while (I thought that) the conversation was about photographs. Once I was aware of this inclusive category of pictures generated by the word *ekifananyi* I asked other Europeans who worked in Uganda whether they had heard of it. None of them had. These Europeans included professionals working in arts institutions, photographers and lecturers at a film school. I also brought up the topic in conversation with Ugandan artists. They told me it was an interesting observation they had not thought about.

The absence of a particular word for photographs in Luganda was not something English speakers in Uganda were aware of while it was so much part of the normality of Ugandans that they had never given it any consideration.<sup>50</sup> Studies on photographs in East-Africa take note of this. British anthropologist Richard Vokes mentions *ebishushani*, the Runyakitara equivalent of *ebifananyi*, in an article about vernacular photography in Western Uganda. He relates *ebishushani* particularly to the twin portraits and double prints of photographs he encountered, instead of to the photograph as a picture among pictures.<sup>51</sup> Behrend notes, in relation to the Kiswahili word *picha* that "some popular photographers conceptualized photography and painting not so much as distinctive media and genres, but as different phases in the production of "pichas."<sup>52</sup> From my observations and these references it follows that thinking of photographs as 'pictures captured on light sensitive surfaces with the use of a camera' is not sufficient if we want to understand the uses of and the practices around *ebifananyi* / photographs. This observation and position has led to a range of questions on the cultural and historical contexts of *ebifananyi* / photographs that are addressed in the artistic products of this research project and analysed in the following sections of the dissertation.

## Framing *Ebifananyi* as a research project

A photograph is inscribed with information and given value in each encounter with it. British historian of photography Elizabeth Edwards has argued the importance of the social biography of historical photographs when trying to understand their present day positions.<sup>53</sup> Photographs are not static but subject to change. Their materiality continually shifts as they move through different hands and in this way 'live' in morphing social contexts.<sup>54</sup> My artistic practice engages with particular social contexts and enters into the social bio-

<sup>41</sup> Geertz (1973), p. 5

<sup>42</sup> Clifford (1986), p. 15

<sup>43</sup> Njami (ed.) (2001), Enwezor (2008), Njami (1998), (2010), (2014), Haney (2010), Peffer (2012), Garb (2014), Nwagbogu (2015)

<sup>44</sup> Morton (2015) pp. 19-38, Vokes (2010-2), (2012), pp. 207-228, Behrend (2001)

<sup>45</sup> E.g. Zahrina Bhimji, Caroline Kamya, Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa, Sunil Shah

<sup>46</sup> See <http://ugandanartstrust.org/> and <http://afriartgallery.org/> Last accessed 25-09-2018

<sup>47</sup> Peeters Klaphake worked as a curator at the gallery from 2010 till 2017. She currently lives in Germany where she works on a research on the art collections from the university.

<sup>48</sup> See <http://www.ugandapressphoto.org> Last accessed 25-09-2018

<sup>49</sup> Luganda English dictionaries do not make this etymological connection; Kaddu Wasswa, an elder from Buganda who I have been working with since 2008, gave it to me.

<sup>50</sup> Mulder(2004), pp. 34-42, Foucault (1972), pp. 124-131

<sup>51</sup> Vokes (2012), p. 222, p. 224

<sup>52</sup> Behrend (2013), p. 89

ographies of photographs in Uganda. This is where the approach of my practice differs from both Edwards’ work as well as from most studies on photography in Africa. The collections of photographs are objects of study and, in order to study them, they are used as material in my artistic practice. The *Ebifananyi* books are central to this practice. They are the response to the collections and they aim to present them in an appropriate way. Through these books photographs reach new audiences, stories are added to them and an awareness of the potential values of collections usually grows as illustrated in *Ebifananyi* #4.<sup>55</sup>

The book *Mapping Sitting: on Portraiture and Photography*, presents a wide variety of photographic portraiture practices from the Middle East that was brought together by the Arab Image Foundation.<sup>56</sup> The introduction to the book states that isolating an individual photograph from the book would not do justice to that photograph or to the wider collection of portraits they are part of. The same can be said about the photographs in the *Ebifananyi* books. During the first year of the research project I was introduced to Musa Katuramu’s photographs (*Ebifananyi* #2, chapter 3). It soon became obvious that it was impossible to understand the pictures made by professional photographers Deo Kyakulagira and Elly Rwakoma (*Ebifananyi* #1 and #3, chapter 3), without taking Musa Katuramu’s older amateur oeuvre into account. Meanwhile other collections were digitised and other connections were established. The connection between wealth, privilege and the possession of portraits became obvious in the extensive collection of photographs owned by the Ham Mukasa family (*Ebifananyi* #4, chapter 4).<sup>57</sup> Ham Mukasa appears in Musa Katuramu’s portraits, which demonstrates the link between Buganda and Ankole elites. These and other connections led to the final eight collections that feature in the *Ebifananyi* series. The end comes to the beginning in *Ebifananyi* #8 that departs from what appears to be the first portrait that was made in present day Uganda (chapter 4).

Each of the chapters discusses aspects of the artistic practice as “ways of doing and making” that responded to the social biography of the photographs presented in the *Ebifananyi* books and exhibitions. My artistic practice as a research method is elaborated on in Chapter 1. Chapters 2 through 6 discuss the *Ebifananyi* books and exhibitions as both outcomes and sources of correspondences. Chapter 2 discusses the use of the epistolary form in this dissertation and includes a ‘circular letter’ to the individual addressees of the letters in chapter 3-5.<sup>58</sup> Each addressee plays an important role in one of the books. The pictures in the books are ‘theirs’ in different ways: they made them, own them or appear in them. In this ‘circular letter’ I introduce my background and my interest in photographs in Uganda, and motivate the general choices that were made towards the production of the books.

The letters in chapter 3, 4 and 5 are preceded by brief texts. These texts were produced for the first exhibition that presented all the collections in the *Ebifananyi* project together. The texts were originally meant to give the, mainly Western European, audiences of the exhibition that took place in Belgium access to the collections. Here they give the reader of the dissertation information about the collections and are meant to contribute to the tangibility of the presence and relevance of the different voices that give context to pictures as discussed

<sup>53</sup> Edwards(2001), (2002), Edwards & Heart (ed.) (2004)  
<sup>54</sup> Edwards (2002), p. 68  
<sup>55</sup> See the opening and closing section of *Ebifananyi* #4.  
<sup>56</sup> Raad and Zaatari (ed.), 2005. The book is edited and authored collectively by artists Walid Raad and Akram Zaatari, designer Karl Bassil and cultural studies scholar Zeina Masri.  
<sup>57</sup> Vokes in Vokes (2012), p. 216. See *Ebifananyi* #4 for the collection of the Ham Mukasa family and chapter 5 for a letter to Ham Mukasa.  
<sup>58</sup> Schofield (1928)

in chapter 6.

Chapter 3, 4 and 5 follow the sets in the book series. The books with yellow covers (*Ebifananyi* #1, #2 and #3, chapter 3) present correspondences with photographs produced by particular photographers. The books provide insights in the conditions in which 20th century Ugandan photographers produced and distributed their pictures, which are taken to be “ordinary and regional artifacts”<sup>59</sup> that are produced by a “vernacular mode”.<sup>60</sup> The presentation of the photographs in the *Ebifananyi* project is compared to other appropriations of photographs made in this vernacular mode. The books with blue covers (*Ebifananyi* #4 and #8, chapter 4) present correspondences that respond to the historical context in which photographs were introduced in Uganda. A variety of makers of pictures contributed to these correspondences and led to an unanticipated addition to the research method described in chapter 1. Chapter 5 discusses unsolicited correspondences to *Ebifananyi* #5, #6 and #7, which resulted from the production of the *Ebifananyi* books. It thus makes an argument for an open mode of investigation, acknowledging that certain aspects of a context can never be fully understood by an outsider. Chapter 6 asks how the collections of photographs can and should be understood as a whole through the two *Ebifananyi* exhibitions that presented all eight collections together. The first exhibition, which took place in the FotoMuseum (FoMu) in Antwerp, is analysed leading up to the proposal for the second show that is scheduled for August 2018 at The Uganda Museum in Kampala.

A written dissertation as artistic practice

One of the bigger challenges of this research project has been to bridge the perceived gap between my artistic practice, and the academic reflection and analysis that was expected in the context of a doctoral trajectory. An important question in this respect was how to build on a vital connection between the realities I worked in Uganda, which include the lives and social environments of the people who made or amassed the photographs in the *Ebifananyi* books, as well as the often bureaucratic institutions that own collections of photographs and emerging art initiatives in Uganda. Ignoring this question would have perpetuated a structure of exclusion, reminiscent of colonial strategies that I consider to be problematic and therefore necessary to avoid. The way out of the rather paralysing status quo caused by this question was found in acknowledging that the writing of this dissertation is also part of my artistic practice. Writing a doctoral thesis is in itself a “generally distributed way of doing and making” and thus something an artistic practice can respond to and correspond with.

Correspondences as positioned above have taken on many forms in this research project. These forms range from hands-on work with photographs while digitising and categorising them, to informal interviews with their owners, to Collective Making in which producers of pictures respond to my request to existing documents that raised questions on photographs and pictures in Uganda. In the following chapters I will make use of letter writing as a form of correspondence as reflected in Ingold’s interpretation of the term as a way of doing

<sup>59</sup> Batchen (2001), p. 57  
<sup>60</sup> Vokes (2012), pp. 214-219



research with instead of about people and aspects of their lives and environment. The choice for this form is further elaborated on in chapter 2.

The, often assumed and misleading, self-evidentiary mode of transmitting information through photographs is, as stated above, part of the issue this dissertation addresses. In the context of academic research, both in publications and in conferences I attended, photographs are mostly used as side-notes to illustrate or ground arguments that are made in words, even when they are the objects that are studied.<sup>61</sup> American art historian James Elkins categorises the use of pictures in the article ‘An Introduction to the Visual as Argument’. He does this in the context of visual studies, a field that despite its focus on the visual “is mainly engaged with kinds of argument that do not need to make continual, close, concerted, dialogic contact with image”<sup>62</sup> and is “not yet a visual enterprise”.<sup>63</sup> Pictures, he says, are used with texts to remind the reader of the object of discussion, as examples that “provide evidence or veracity to an argument” developed in the text, or as an illustration that is “an ornament, a conventional accompaniment” of the text.<sup>64</sup> In addition these three functions of pictures are often positioned using ekphrasis, “a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art”.<sup>65</sup> Whereby ekphrasis becomes a rhetorical devise, which relies on an assumed authority on the side of the person making the description. The relative ability this person has to recognise and read what is depicted can lead to its own kind of misunderstanding.<sup>66</sup>

I read Elkins’s description of how pictures could function as “visual arguments” as a plea to make room for encounters between text, pictures and the reader. These encounters will become correspondences once the reader takes up the invitation to engage with the pictures. I take correspondence to be a prerequisite of a visual argument and therefore the reader of this dissertation is invited to engage with the sequences of pictures that are part of this dissertation in two ways. Firstly, sequenced photographs accompany the texts in the following chapters. Different from the photographs in the *Ebifananyi* books, these pictures have captions that mention their context and, where relevant, sources are added to these captions. Secondly, links to photographs that were shared on Facebook, and documentation of the *Ebifananyi* books and exhibitions that have been made available online, are provided in these captions and in the footnotes of the text. These links regularly cut across collections of photographs and the different forms and events in which they have been presented, which makes the network of photographs that was generated by this research project tangible.<sup>67</sup>

In the electronic version of this dissertation the hyperlinks are active and instantly accessible. They extend the invitation offered by the pictures to the continuously changing online presence produced in the outcomes of this dissertation and the realities they relate to. Finally, the bold and italic texts that precede the letters in chapter 3, 4 and 5 were produced to serve as texts with the *Ebifananyi* overview exhibition at FoMu in Antwerp. Here they serve both as introductions to the letters as well as to stress the importance of acknowledging different voices and their potential deficits. This argument is made in chapter 6, after the reader of the dissertation has encountered these texts.

<sup>61</sup> e.g. Haney (2010), Morton (ed.) (2015), Peffer (ed.) (2012), Vokes (2012)

<sup>62</sup> Elkins (2013), p. 25

<sup>63</sup> Elkins (2012)

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-27

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ekphrasis> Last accessed 25-09-2019

<sup>66</sup> Zeitlyn in Morton (ed.) (2015), pp. 72-74

<sup>67</sup> [www.facebook.com/HIPUganda](http://www.facebook.com/HIPUganda), [www.andreastultiens.nl](http://www.andreastultiens.nl) and [www.HIPUGanda.org](http://www.HIPUGanda.org) are the most ubiquitous home pages of specific hyperlinks that are used. In the case of the last two websites I am in control of the content as administrator of the pages, therefore these hyperlinks are not accompanied by a ‘last accessed’ date.