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

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Detail of *Ebifananyi* - The Photographers Trilogy, at Photoville, New York, September 2018

Epilogue

alternating views on *Ebifananyi*

The Uganda Museum Kampala
01-08-2018 / 24-08-2018

FoMu Antwerp
26-09-2017 / 18-02-2018

Groningen, 21 September 2018

Four weeks have passed since the model of the Ebifananyi exhibition in Antwerp was burned during another Ekyoto²⁹⁸ in Kampala. The event marked the end of the Ebifananyi exhibition in the Uganda Museum. The preparations for the exhibition ‘on the ground’ in Kampala followed the printing of the model in the Netherlands. Canon, Engineer Wambwa’s daughter Mary and I started to put the model together six weeks before the Ekyoto. The temporary exhibition hall of the museum was not in use and therefore available as a workspace, which was fortunate for us. While working in this space I saw the number of school classes that visited the museum day after day. The number of children passing through the halls was rather overwhelming. We nevertheless went ahead as planned. The photographic documentation of the exhibition in Antwerp was placed on the large table in the central dome of the museum. The model was positioned in the forestry section of the Science and Industry hall, just behind the dome. Pictures were added to the permanent museum display in files placed on small tables. The organisers of the KLAART festival told me they were happy with the exhibition as an addition to their “Off the Record” activities that mostly took place in public spaces.²⁹⁹

After the exhibition opened I spent several days in the museum to experience responses to the presentation. Next to the never-ending stream of children there were also tourists and small groups of people who were interested in KLAART. Possibly the most rewarding response to the *Ebifananyi* exhibition was given by a young man who spent almost an entire day in the museum. It was another busy day with school visits. There was no guide available to tour him through the museum. He took a remarkably long time to look at the displays. Once he reached the model I asked him what the purpose of his visit to the museum was. “I pass by on a daily basis, but have not entered the place since I came here on a school visit,” he replied and looked up while continuing, “like these ones”. I asked what he liked about the museum. He responded “The photographs, and...” while pointing at the carriage and car positioned opposite to the *Ebifananyi* model, “these things”. “The rest”, referring to the displays behind glass, “is not real”. He was not able to clarify there and then what he meant by his remark, so I said that there were many more photographs in the books, in case he still wanted to see more. He sat down among the children that had gathered around the model and started going through the books one by one.

The burning of the model during the ekyoto was intended as an opportunity to have an intimate discussion about the exhibition and the future of HIPUganda. It was also a comment on the presentation related to *Ebifananyi* #6 that was, as mentioned in chapter 6, meant to be on display for five days only, but can to this day still be found in the natural history section of the museum. Due to the decision to keep it up I became aware that the museum could and maybe should be read as a place full of relics of earlier, often temporary, exhibitions. It is a palimpsest of opportunities that came along in the past and challenges the museum faces in the present, relating to lack of funding and government support.³⁰⁰ From the corner behind the model, in a space where I usually sat while spending time in the museum, I looked at a cow’s head. It had been part of an exhibition about milk, organised by The Uganda Museum in collaboration with and funded by the Swiss-African Research Cooperation.³⁰¹ Even though people did plea for the *Ebifananyi* exhibition to remain on display, I wanted it to properly end it this time. The model was carried out and positioned in an open area between the huts in the cultural village behind the museum. As the sun set behind Nakasero hill the fire was lit. The flames that ate the model were big, the photographs made of

²⁹⁸ Bonfire, see footnote 251
²⁹⁹ See <http://klaart.org/> last accessed 25-09-2018

the event were dramatic. For now they seem to be too dramatic even to share.

Over the past four weeks I have been going through photographs and films made of the exhibition. While I started to work on the digital files, I also finally managed to make an edit of the film documentation of the show in Antwerp that ended more than six months ago. In two days I will leave for Greece to install a show that juxtaposes documentation of the presentations in Antwerp and Kampala at the Thessaloniki Photobiennale. In November an exhibition in the gallery of the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague will accompany the public defence of my research. I am certain that these exhibitions will help me to eventually reflect in more depth on the presentations in Kampala and in Antwerp through words. For now the photographs I have made are reminders of the encounters that took place. The exhibition documentation is also a starting point for new correspondences that shift the initial focus of the research project towards conventions around exhibitions and other presentation practices of photographs. While I am figuring out which photograph to use for the invitation of the exhibition in The Hague, my mind wanders to thoughts about how to ensure that my work will continue to actively engage with other artists, as well as to maintain strong dialogical academic conversations. Such conversations, when productive, offer ways to decentralise the dominant Western perspectives on the production, uses and understandings of photographs.

³⁰⁰ This was confirmed several times by museum employees in informal conversations. Senior curator Nelson Abiti added the challenges the museum faces because it was built for a population of 5 million people while it now serves 35 million during his speech at the opening of the exhibition.
³⁰¹ <https://www.sareco.org/profile/drinking-deeply-from-museum-work-milk-in-switzerland-uganda-an-international-coop-between-museums-in-uganda-ethnographic-museum-at-university-of-zurich/> Last accessed 25-09-2018



























