African women are often portrayed in the media as victims—victims of war, victims of starvation, victims of African men, and victims of traditional African culture. This all inspires images of backward, defenseless women in need of our sympathy and help. Yet in Africa, women have had, and still have, more power within their own societies than do most women in the Western world.

Women were not oppressed as women in most African societies prior to colonialism. Seniority, not gender, determined status, which meant that older women had social status and control over younger women and younger men. Women were leaders and had important status, especially as mothers.

This exhibit should challenge your view of African women.

Displays
Bold Mamas.............................. pg 2-3
Audacious Entrepreneurs......... pg 4-5
Khangas..................................... pg 6
African art................................ pg 7
Rotating displays..................... pg 8
Motherhood was the most important social institution in Africa prior to colonialism. All of these paintings show the importance of motherhood. In our society, we have an emotional feeling about our mother, but rarely in the West is motherhood socially, politically, economically, or spiritually important. In Africa, women prior to motherhood are not adults, and this is the same case with men. The social aspects of motherhood in this environment transcend biological motherhood.

Often, older women with children play a key role in determining who is the new chief. Among the Chewa, only older women who are grandmothers can decide who the new Chewa chief is. In most matrifocal societies (like most of the societies represented here), to marry, a young man must work for his mother-in-law for several years. In this way, the mother-in-law controls labor from both the young male and young female (her daughter, who must also work for her). In societies where the life expectancy was 40 years, this meant that grandmothers controlled a large portion of the labor in the society.

**Woman Jumping Rope**  

The woman is much bigger and the only active figure in the etching. This again symbolizes the key role of the mother. She has a child and a husband, but she is the dominant figure in the piece. In traditional western culture, women are supposed to be passive, smaller, and weaker. This is not how most African societies view women, and especially mothers. We would laugh at a man who was skinny and little with a much larger wife, but in Africa, especially in the past, this was common. Men’s status is not based on reducing the status of a woman, as it is in the West.
Women Gathering Mushrooms

*Moses Kalifu Chipoya*

This painting by Moses Kalifu Chipoya is very symbolic of his culture. He was a Bemba, and traditionally in Bemba society, all significant knowledge comes from dreams. Also, Bemba society was very matrifocal — this means that older women (grandmothers and mothers, or the sororal group) had the most power within the society. Identity and inheritance came from the mother. All of Chipoya’s paintings show women in traditional activities and are dream-like.

Women Pounding

*Moses Kalifu Chipoya*

This painting by Chipoya shows women pounding grain. The traditional staple food in most of Bantu-speaking Africa is a grain dish — like grits, but usually finer. In Bemba society it is called ubwali, and the grain, usually sorghum or maize, must be pounded every day before making ubwali. This painting is a dream-like version of this scene found in most African villages. Women well into their 80’s have great, toned arms because of over 70 years of pounding grain.

Time to Go Home

*Moses Kalifu Chipoya*

This Chipoya painting shows women leaving their market stalls and returning home. Everything is carried on their heads.

Pieces (cont.):

Women Gathering Mushrooms

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Time to Go Home

*Moses Kalifu Chipoya*

This Chipoya painting shows women leaving their market stalls and returning home. Everything is carried on their heads.
African women, prior to the arrival of Europeans, never were just housewives, and even after colonialism this tradition continues. Unlike in European art, you never see a woman reclining, resting, or “just being pretty” in African art. Every one of the images of women, even in African contemporary art, show them working or taking care of babies, or often both.

**Hard Day at the Market**  
*Kata*

This painting by Albert Kata shows women on a slow day at the market. These women are small-scale entrepreneurs who buy from the farmers early in the morning and then gather together to set a fair price. Once a price is agreed upon, it is adhered to by all vendors. From the big food markets of Kumasi in Ghana to here in Zambia, women who are individual entrepreneurs see advantage in working communally.

**Killing Me Quickly**  
*Kata*

Kata painted this scene of a local bar in the township (an impoverished African community) to show the evils of drinking too much local beer. While the men are drinking the beer, notice the woman manufacturing it. Local beer made of fermented grains is the consistency of a thick milkshake — and it’s served at room temperature. The skyline of downtown Lusaka, Zambia’s capital city, is seen in the background.

**Downtown Lusaka**  
*Mulenga*

Henry Mulenga creates a scene from downtown Lusaka. The large businesses are usually owned by men, but look at the sidewalk along the main streets — the women are selling produce, salt, and other necessities.
Gathering Water

Kata

This is a familiar scene in most of urban Africa. The setting here is Zambia, which has more people living in cities than in rural areas. Zambia is about the size of Texas, but has only one-third its population — about 10 million people. Even in urban areas, women often walk miles to collect water and carry it home on their heads. These containers (pots in rural areas and plastic containers in cities) weigh 50 pounds or more when filled, and women can balance them on their heads.

Will Domestic Violence Ever End?

Kapata

Stephen Kapata is the best-known Zambian artist. This small painting contradicts all the newspaper articles that discuss African women as victims of violent African men. While there is domestic violence in the urban areas against women who have no relatives nearby, in the villages historically, the older women gather together and punish any man who harms his wife. This tradition is found among the Zulu of South Africa, Kikuyu of Kenya, Chewa of Malawi, Ibo of Nigeria, the peoples of Cameroon, and in many other parts of Africa — and it also equipped older women to wage fierce battles against colonialism.

Township Market

Mulenga

Mulenga loved detail and painted this active market in a township outside of Lusaka in real detail. Again, see all the women as acting as entrepreneurs; there are various women’s shops and stands. Note that the tailor shop is owned by a man. During colonialism, Europeans believed that only men should work on machines, so today in Africa, hand sewing is done by women, but machine sewing is done by men. Can you find the Batman t-shirt?
Khangas are colorful spans of fabric (similar to sarongs) worn by African women in a variety of ways. They usually have a unique border going around the outside and a special message in the inner design. These messages are usually virtues or morals in African culture.

Africa map - tukiheshimiana diama tutapendana
If we respect each other, we will always love each other.

Green eye - usimdharuau usiyemjua
Do not revile someone whom you don’t even know/without first knowing the person.

Green flowers - apendwaye bana ila.
Someone who has love has no faults.

Brown and green - kuinamako ndiko kuinukako
When you lean on someone, they will lift you up — but this can lead to other problems.

Brown and gold - jua pendo langu mwenyewe ni wewe
Know that my love is you.

Brown and yellow - mama nipe radhi kuishi na watu ni kazi
Mother give me blessings, for living with people is difficult.

Tanzanian khanga - nitunzenipendeze waigizao wasiweze
I should hold onto the one I love, and cherish him/her so that others don't have the chance to do so.

Orange and blue - kila palipo na pendo ni visijo na nderemo
The place where there is love is a place of drums and singing voices

Red - heri yako ni yetu
Your wealth and blessing is our blessing and wealth.

Burgandy - radhi ya mama ni bora kuliko mali
The blessings of the mother are better than wealth.

Pink - mwenye kuumwa na nyoka akiona jani hustuka
The person bitten by a snake will look carefully at the grass so as not to be taken by surprise in the future.

Purple fireworks - usinipende kwa raha kwenyen shida usinitupe..
Don't befriend me and love me when times are good and throw me out when times are bad.
In the West, individualism and individual creativity are celebrated. In Africa, prior to colonialism and to a certain extent even today, art was not an individual endeavor, even though each piece was carved or painted by an individual with different skills. All art was created within the boundaries of the aesthetics of the community. A statue of a woman with a child is more than art — it is often a religious item, or a political item (for example, the Luba staff of chiefship had to have a carving of a Luba woman with her hands on her breasts or the navel), and even can be a useful tool.

The line between art and other social institutions was blurred or non-existent in most African communities. In Africa, there was never “art for art’s sake” or art for shock value, as is the case in much of contemporary Western art. Look at the paintings of Chipoya — the oils are a modern Western introduction to Africa, but all his images are of women working, done in the Bemba ideal of a dream sequence.

Display Case:

- Luba pipe
- Kamba mother and child
- Luba woman squatting
- Kamba women
- Luba woman tall
- Kenyan soapstone
- Gender unspecific - Tabwa
- Woman in cave
- Tabwa woman
- Woman grinding grain
- Kuba mother and child
- Women holding harvested grain
- Ethiopian paintings on cattle skins
- Zimbabwe cup
- Women pounding grain
- Zimbabwe bowl

Zimbabwe Women’s Art:

*Four pieces painted on board* - portray story of women’s lives

*Small hanging quilt* - check out the little piece of paper from the artist tucked inside for more information.

*Large hanging quilt* - portrays the daily activities of African women
Rohrbach Library also hosts a number of rotating displays throughout the semester.

Currently on display:

**Ed Terrell** is a local artist and president and art director of A.C.O.R. (African-American Coalition of Reading). He has been all over the world, living off his artwork. Closer to home, Terrell has had pieces on display at GoggleWorks in Reading, PA and in our very own Rohrbach Library. You can find Terrell’s pieces in the Book and Brew Café.

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<td>Africa 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Music</td>
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<td>Storytime</td>
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**Emily Allen** graduated from KU this past spring with a passion for painting the world around her. Allen has also had her work on display at GoggleWorks and in the Miller Gallery in the Sharadin art building. She hopes to continue to develop her work over time and eventually make a career out of her art.

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<td>Mama and Me</td>
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<td>Rhythm</td>
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This brochure has been created by Dale Bond for use at Rohrbach library. The pictures of the paintings in the exhibit and the information included within this brochure were taken, compiled, and organized by Dale Bond. The researched descriptions of the pieces were written by Dr. Christine Saidi. For more information, contact Dale Bond at dbond861@live.kutztown.edu, or Dr. Saidi at saidi@kutztown.edu.