

Imagine Africa with the Penn Museum

PENN MUSEUM HAS BEEN CHANGING, gallery by gallery. The old Museum presented glorious objects in an often dry and uninspiring idiom. Ironically, for a museum which 40 years ago pioneered the importance of provenance for antiquities on the market, the Museum's own exhibitions often provided limited context for the wonderful materials on display. Like countless archaeology and anthropology museums around the world, our exhibitions were aimed at visitors already "in the know." But museums, like many aspects of life, are changing with the digital "flat world." Today, it is no longer sufficient to address those who may already know something about the objects and cultures on display. Our goal has to be to create a conversation with all our audiences, permitting them to discover and enjoy and, indeed, challenge our presentations from their own standpoint.

So in a major effort to move beyond the restrictive confines of the glass case, the Penn Museum has installed *Imagine Africa with the Penn Museum* in the Sharpe Hallway near the café. This year-long exhibition (September 18, 2011–September 16, 2012) treats the continent of Africa as a kaleidoscopic experience leavened with contemporary African music. It introduces some of our great collection by a series of themes, while pointedly providing visitors with a compelling invitation to offer their views on the selection and display of objects. The exhibition includes material as diverse as masks, textiles, and the physical remains of slaves who brought sickle cell disease and its resistance to malaria to the New World. Supported by a prestigious Heritage Philadelphia Program planning grant, and the PoGo Foundation, this is an experimental exhibition, designed to pave the way for an equally vivid reinstallation of the Museum's celebrated Africa Gallery. Accompanied by a wide range of public programs from lectures to pottery workshops to arts nights, and accessible through a series of free community nights and afternoons, this exhibition promotes a conversation about the power of material culture in shaping our lives. *Please come along and join in!* 🏠



Visitors to the new *Imagine Africa* exhibition use rubber stamps to create West African Adinkra patterns.

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