

# Art

## Photographers frame female issues



**Nzingah Muhammad's portraits** in the Temple Gallery show capture confident, though sometimes introspective, Muslim women at home.

By Edward J. Sozanski  
INQUIRER ART CRITIC

**T**he exhibition "Ophelia Rising" at Temple Gallery attempts to explore the emotional and psychological minefield of adolescence and young womanhood through the work of eight female photographers.

The photos address three themes: sense of self, primacy of relationships, and alternative attitudes toward the body.

This is a large order for still photography unless the artists can present extended suites of images. That doesn't happen in "Ophelia" because there isn't room.

Viewers encounter three basic strategies: portraiture (Judith Joy Ross, Nzingah Muhammad, Jo Ann Walters, Judith Jockel); narrative situations, some of them montaged (Abigail R. Cohen, Deborah Mesa-Pelly); and symbolism (Martha Madigan, Judith Taylor).

Within this group, portraiture is most effective in revealing attitudes and relationships that aren't readily quantifiable.

Muhammad's large color prints, including a regal self-portrait, are easily the most imposing and suggestive of character. Her women, Muslims photographed in the home, present themselves as confident personalities who haven't a trace of Shakespeare's Ophelia in them.

Walters' images of a young girl dressing for a prom and of another brushing her mother's hair touch poignantly on issues of transition to adulthood and mother-daughter relationships.

Taylor produces the show's strongest, most direct symbolism — gold-toned prints of bleached-out braids and a ponytail set against black backgrounds. Loss of hair equals loss of childhood innocence.

"Ophelia Rising" is a thought-provoking exhibition even when the photographs don't entirely achieve their purpose. The show's overall spirit and the way it frames the issues are the qualities that recommend it.

Temple Gallery, 45 N. Second St.  
11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesdays  
through Saturdays, to 9 p.m. on First  
Friday. Through March 9.  
215-925-7379.