



Adire eleko, woman's wrapper ("Ijapa /tortoise" design)

Date

ca. 1960s

Primary Maker

Artist not recorded

Medium

Cotton, indigo dye

Description

According to Yoruba taxonomy, there are two primary types of "classic" adire: eleko and oniko. Eleko is a starch-

resist technique, typically using cassava or corn starch applied by hand-painting, stamping, or stenciling. Oniko involves tied, twisted, folded, or hand-stitched resist patterns, created with raffia or thread. If machine-sewn, this variation is referred to as adire alabare. The 1960s, during Nigeria's post-Independence era, marked a period of increased popularity and market expansion for adire. This era fostered innovations in design, techniques, and the use of diverse dyestuffs and base fabrics. However, by the 1990s, experimentation had largely supplanted the production of "classic" forms, which were deemed old-fashioned. Today, high-quality "classic" adire is rare. According to our regular collaborator, Gasali Adeyemo, adire of this caliber is no longer produced in Nigeria and is considered incredibly valuable. Adire patterns often take their names from dominant motifs, but artists have significant freedom to interpret or combine these motifs with others, creating a vast array of designs numbering in the hundreds. This example is an adire eleko cloth featuring a hand-drawn "ijapa" (tortoise) design, made using the starch-resist technique. The starch—usually cassava or corn—is applied through hand-painting, stamping, or stenciling. The wrapper consists of two lengths of cloth, with a pattern composed of 56 blocks arranged in three basic motifs. One motif features rows of triangular shapes with circular forms inside and outside the triangles. Another consists of variously sized dots. The third depicts a stylized tortoise centered in the block, accompanied by a circular form near its tail. On either side of the tortoise are undulating shapes, possibly representing a snake. The remaining areas are filled with small dots. On one hem of the solid-colored reverse side, the repeated inscription "Ko" (potentially a signature) can be seen.

Dimensions

75 × 66 1/8 × 1/8 in. (190.5 × 168 × 0.3 cm)