



Adire eleko, woman's wrapper ("Olokun /Sea Goddess" 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 adire eleko cloth is an elaborately patterned wrapper featuring 20 central blocks, each measuring approximately 32 cm by 36 cm. The blocks display a variety of geometric patterns—triangular, circular, dotted, and striped—as well as figured designs. Notably, only five of the patterns repeat, emphasizing the uniqueness of the composition. Surrounding the central blocks are rectangular borders adorned with additional geometric and figured motifs. The stylized figures within the design depict elements of vegetation, sea animals, birds, snakes, lizards, turtles, and crocodiles, showcasing a rich interplay of natural and symbolic imagery. This complex arrangement highlights the artist's creativity and mastery of the adire eleko technique.

Dimensions

76 3/8 × 70 1/16 × 1/16 in. (194 × 178 × 0.1 cm)