

Uncommon Threads

The Fabrics of Africa

Barkcloth (Uganda)

Barkcloth making is an ancient craft of the Baganda people who live in the Buganda kingdom in southern Uganda. Traditionally, craftsmen of the Ngonge clan, headed by a kaboggoza, the hereditary chief craftsman have been manufacturing bark cloth for the Baganda royal family and the rest of the community. Its preparation involves one of humankind's oldest savoir-faire, a prehistoric technique that predates the invention of weaving.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJethDZg6RQ>

The inner bark of the Mutuba tree (*Ficus natalensis*) is harvested during the wet season and then, in a long and strenuous process, beaten with different types of wooden mallets to give it a soft and fine texture and an even terracotta colour. Craftsmen work in an open shed to protect the bark from drying out too quickly. Barkcloth is worn like a toga by both sexes, but women place a sash around the waist. While common barkcloth is terracotta in colour, barkcloth of kings and chiefs is dyed white or black and worn in a different style to underline their status. The cloth is mainly worn at coronation and healing ceremonies, funerals and cultural gatherings but is also used for curtains, mosquito screens, bedding and storage.

The production of barkcloth, which was widely spread with workshops in almost every village in the Buganda kingdom. With the introduction of cotton cloth by Arab caravan traders in the nineteenth century, production slowed and eventually faded out, limiting the use of barkcloth to cultural and spiritual functions. Nevertheless, barkcloth is still recognized among the Baganda community as a marker of specific social and cultural traditions. In recent years, the production of barkcloth has been greatly encouraged and promoted in the Buganda kingdom.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIpa817U-qI> (short)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhznFtHhkBo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDQOlxrtp4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SKhGaOKYVE>







Gala Limon
Designer



Santa Anzo
Designer



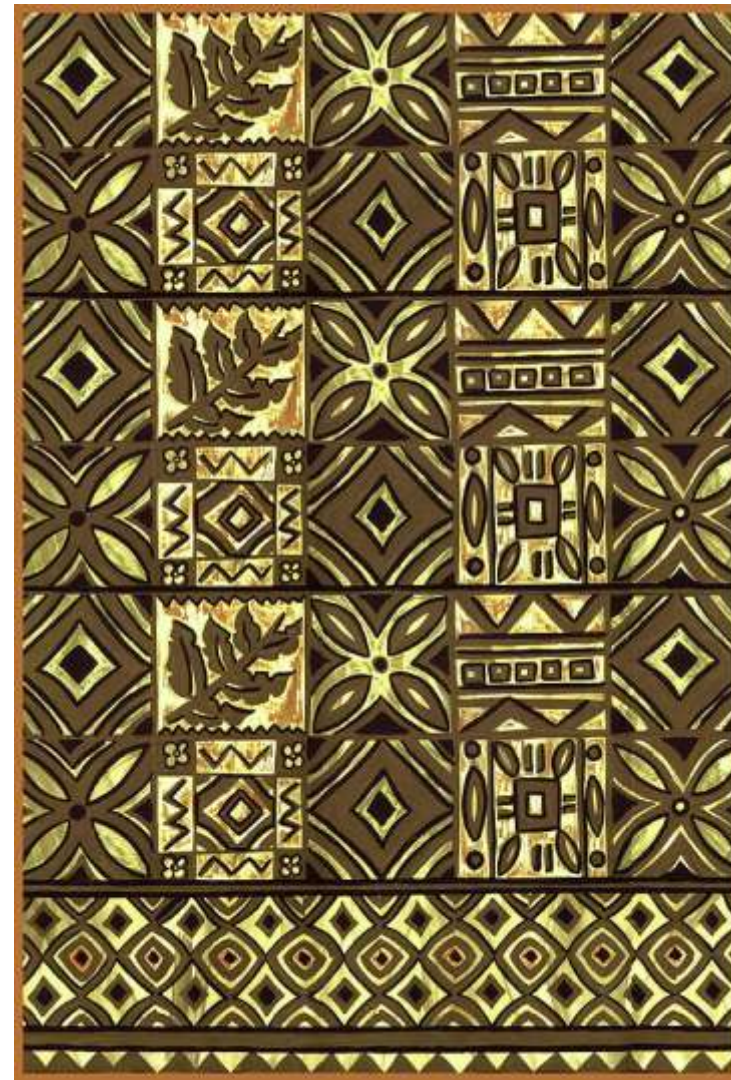
Jose Hendo
Designer



Bobby Kolade
Designer







Kuba Cloth--Bakuba People (Congo)

The Kuba Kingdom, also known as the Kingdom of the Bakuba or Bushongo, is a traditional kingdom in Central Africa. The Kuba Kingdom flourished between the 17th and 19th centuries in the region bordered by the Sankuru, Lulua, and Kasai rivers in the heart of the modern-day Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Kuba weave cloths from palm fibers. They were traditionally used for costumes and mats for royalty. The patterns in the cloth inspired early 20th century artists such as Matisse and Picasso.

Kuba ceremony

<https://vimeo.com/273094366>

Kuba cloth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oStCNLZBjUM>

- [Kuba Art in Washington, D.C. – YouTube](#) (4 minutes)

Nick Cave Kuba textiles

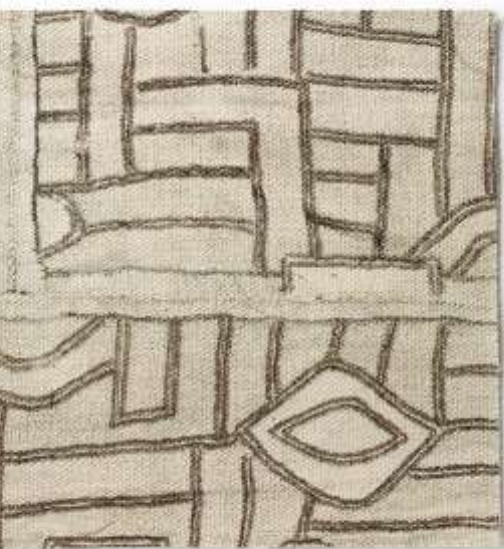
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0s2FZUrcgg>





KUBA CLOTH









Kente Cloth (Ghana)

Kente is the most famous of all African textiles, and one of the world's most complicated weavings. This cloth is woven by men on a combination of narrow hand-and-foot looms. It is traditionally woven for Ashanti royalty who wear it for ceremonial occasions e.g. 'stooling' or kingship.

<https://www.cnn.com/videos/tv/2017/11/07/kente-cloth-from-ghana.cnn> (short)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vUvBoYzRghQ> (6.5 mins)











Batik Cloth (Ghana)

Ghanain batik

[Made in Africa: Making a case for Ghana's batik fabrics - YouTube](#)











El Anatsui

El Anatsui (b. 1944 Ghana; lives and works in Nigeria) transforms simple materials into complex assemblages that create a distinctive visual impact. His typical material palette includes discarded resources such as liquor bottle caps, printing plates and cassava graters to create sculptures that defy categorization. Anatsui's choice of these materials reflects his interest in reuse, transformation and an intrinsic desire to connect to his native continent of Africa while transcending the limitations of place. His style combines the world history of abstract art with his local aesthetic traditions. Much of his work interrogates the legacy of colonialism, drawing connections between consumption, waste and the environment, but at the core is his unique formal language that distinguishes his practice.

Anatsui is particularly well-known for his large-scale sculptures composed of thousands of folded and crumpled pieces of metal sourced from local recycling stations and bound together with copper wire. His intricate works are both luminous and weighty, meticulously fabricated yet malleable. One of the conceptual underpinnings of much of the work is that the sculptures takes different forms each time they are installed. In morphing to activate various spaces, they challenge long-held views of sculpture as something rigid and insistent, which opens up his work to exist on its own terms.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3RIE195JI> (art 21)

<https://www.artbasel.com/news/meet-the-artists-el-anatsui>













Bogolan (mudcloth)—Dogon People Mali/Burkina Faso

The Dogon are an ethnic group indigenous to the central plateau region of Mali, in West Africa, south of the Niger bend, near the city of Bandiagara, and in Burkina Faso. The population numbers between 400,000 and 800,000.

Dogon Dance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeQ8uBzVvI8> (3.5 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6998rlxyhg>

Bogolon

[The Bogolan Project – YouTube](#) (8 minutes)

Burkina Faso mudcloth (French)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcl8bWHcypw>

Brenda Winstead on mudcloth

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YT8C4sxBxEc>

Bogolon

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcl8bWHcypw&t=264s>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXBoU68VJhc>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dycA5kBqYs> (in French)







Abdoulaye Konaté (Mali, born 1953)

Abdoulaye Konaté is a Malian artist. He was born in Diré and lives and works in Bamako. *Konaté* studied painting in the Institut National des Arts de Bamako and then at the Instituto Superior de Arte, Havana, Cuba.

- **Medium:** Textiles
- **Materials:** Woven and dyed clothes from his native Mali

On the space between figuration and abstraction: “[The visual difference for me is relatively low](#). Up to a certain level, the imagining of the figurative finds himself in abstraction. Just think of looking at a cloudy sky, in which inevitably also repeatedly shapes, silhouettes seem reminiscent of people. For me, reconstructed in any case even in the most abstract forms the idea of something representational. The border is not as clean as one likes to believe.”

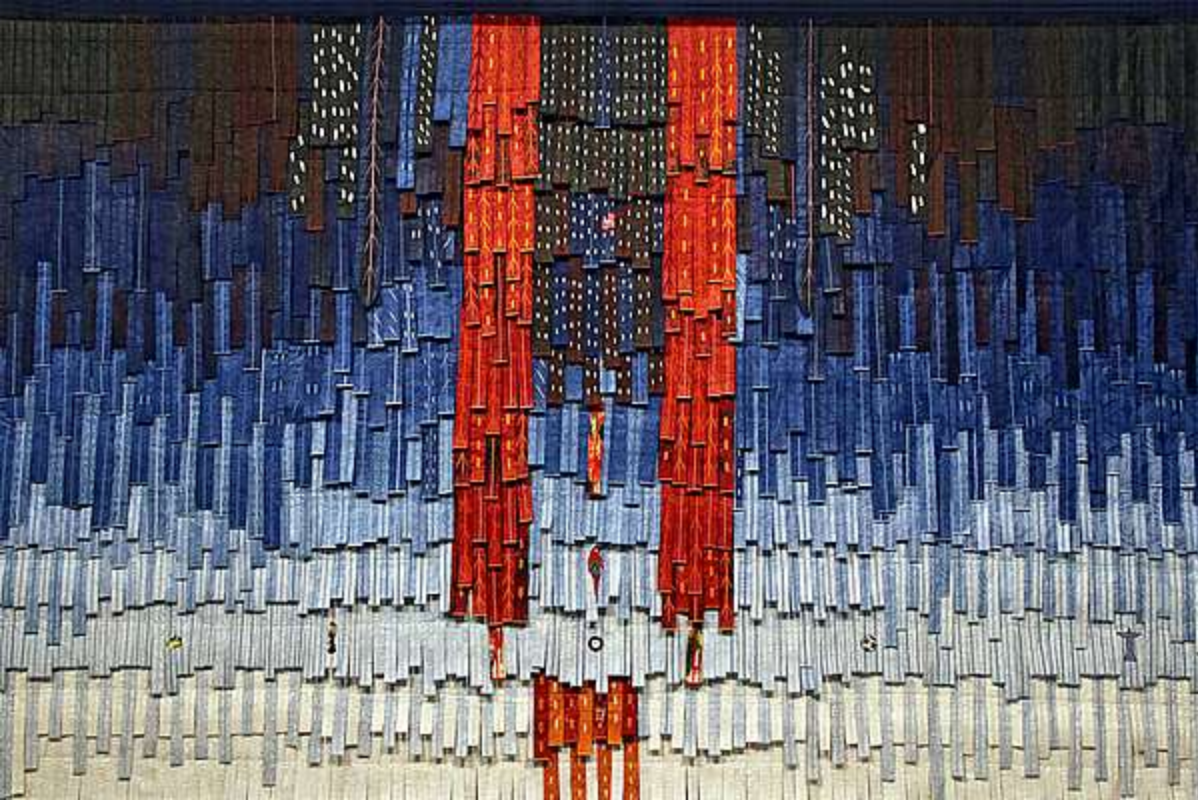
On his use of textiles: “[Textiles are in principle very strongly tied to the people](#), on whose body they act for him often as a house. And the meaning varies according to the ethnic groups, epochs, traditions. There are certain substances that are intended for the wedding, soirées or religious ceremonies. To that extent have textiles for human social and periodic content, sometimes there is also a mystic attribution. With us, the musicians and hunters carry certain substances, because they believe that some force inherent in these and they are protected.”

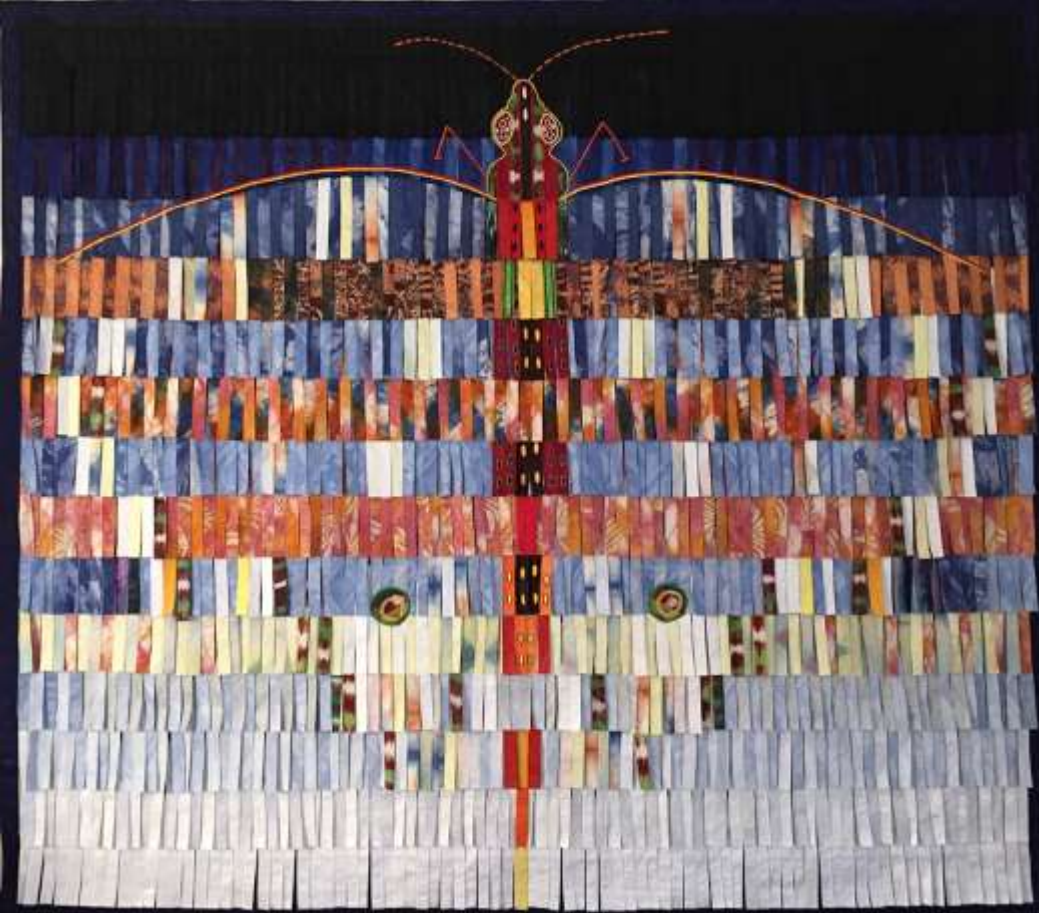
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cCjhljdl1HU>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0_7gKof8JM





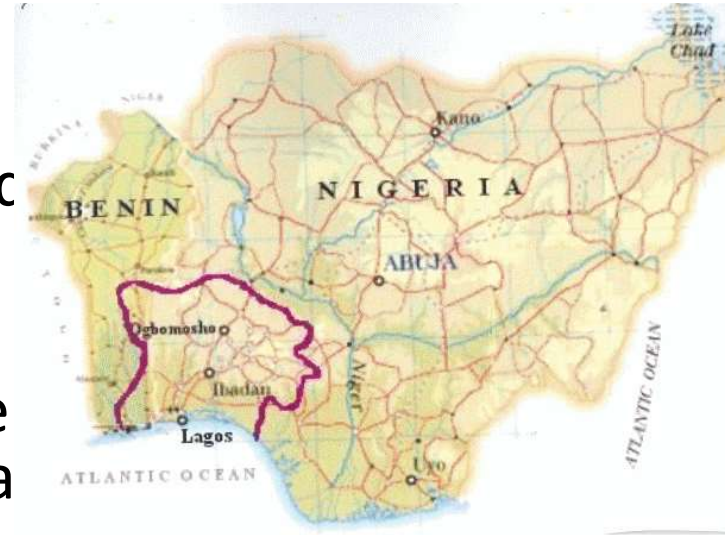




Adire (Tie Dye)--Yoruba People Nigeria

The Yoruba people are an ethnic group that inhabits western Africa, mainly the countries of Nigeria, Benin, and Togo. The Yoruba constitute around 30 million people in Africa.

Adire literally means "tie and dye" in the Yoruba language. The indigo dyed cloth is one of the famous cloths in Africa worn exclusively by women. Adire cloth is a patterned, starch resist cotton cloth akin to batik. Artist Niki Seven is in the forefront of reviving the age old art of Adire.

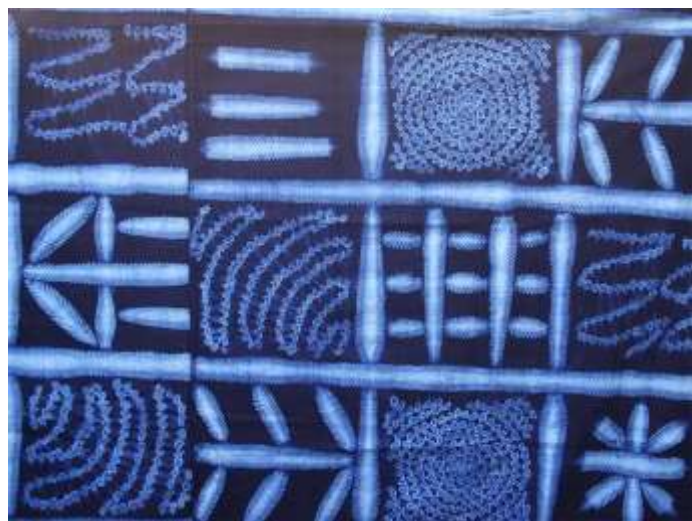
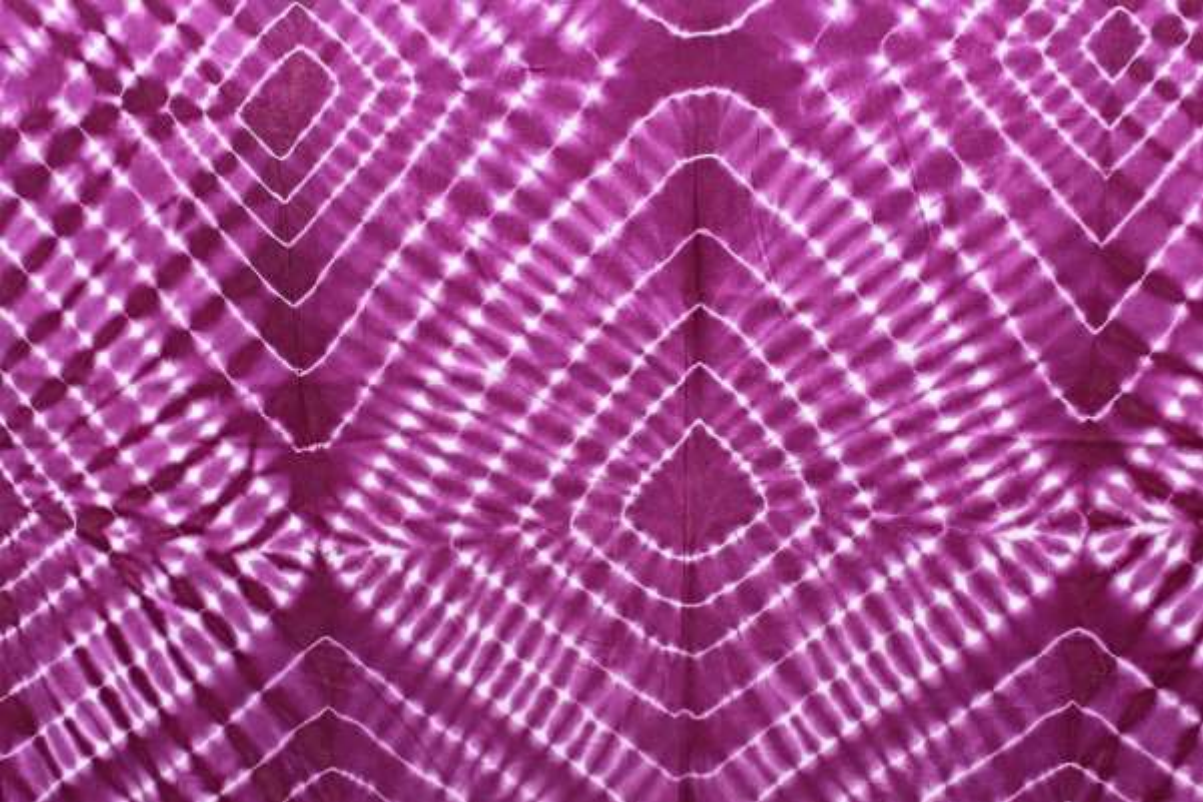


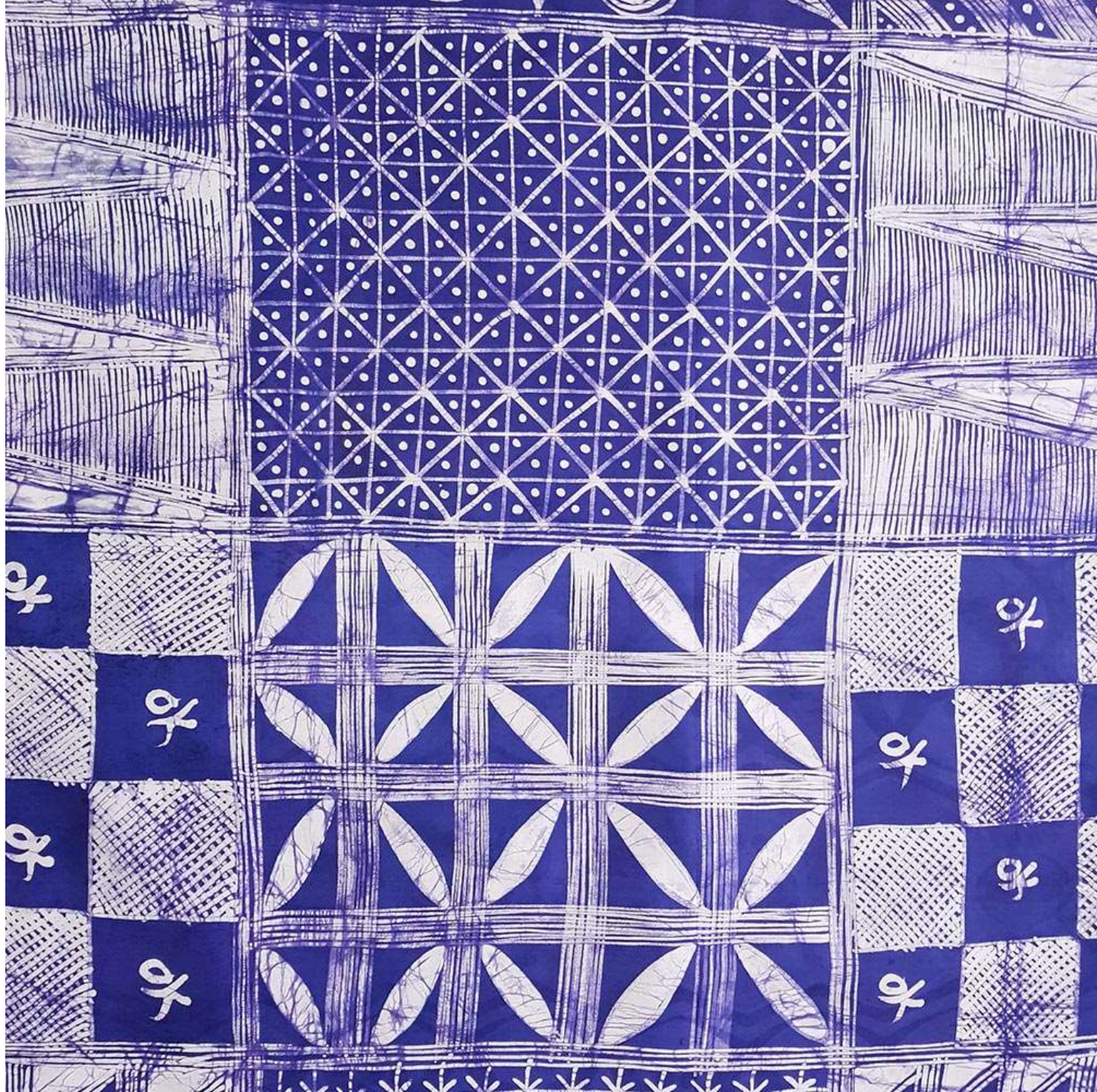
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gY3QlhTtKq8> (2 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nELccoG-PcA> (silent)

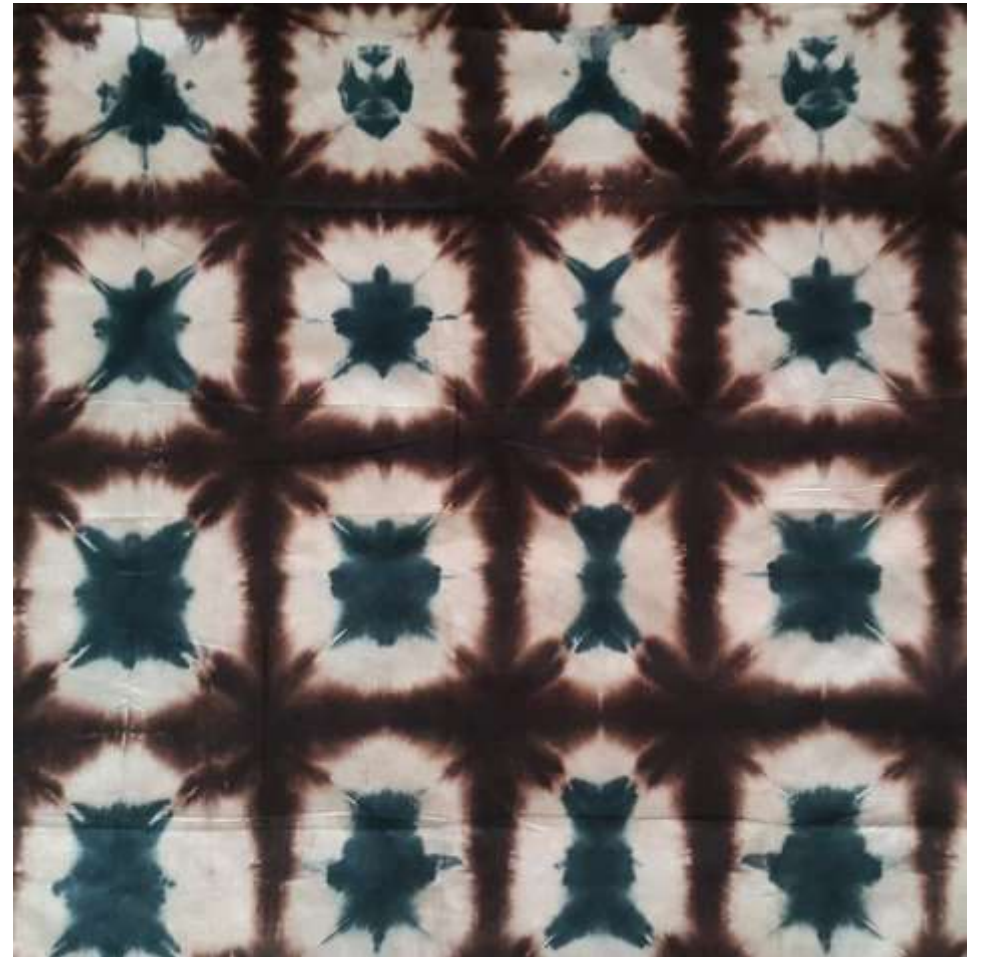












Okene Cloth—Nigeria

Woven cloth from the town of Okene in Nigeria. Okene is a “prestige” fabric woven by Ebira women, who weave on wide stationery looms inside the house, as opposed to Ebira men who weave on narrow hand looms outside. Many modern weaves incorporate metallic gold or silver threads giving the cloth a glorious sheen. These cloths give prestige to the weaver and dyer as well as the women who wear them, often as head-ties or wraps.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_hJwWEgarI&t=42s (9 minutes)

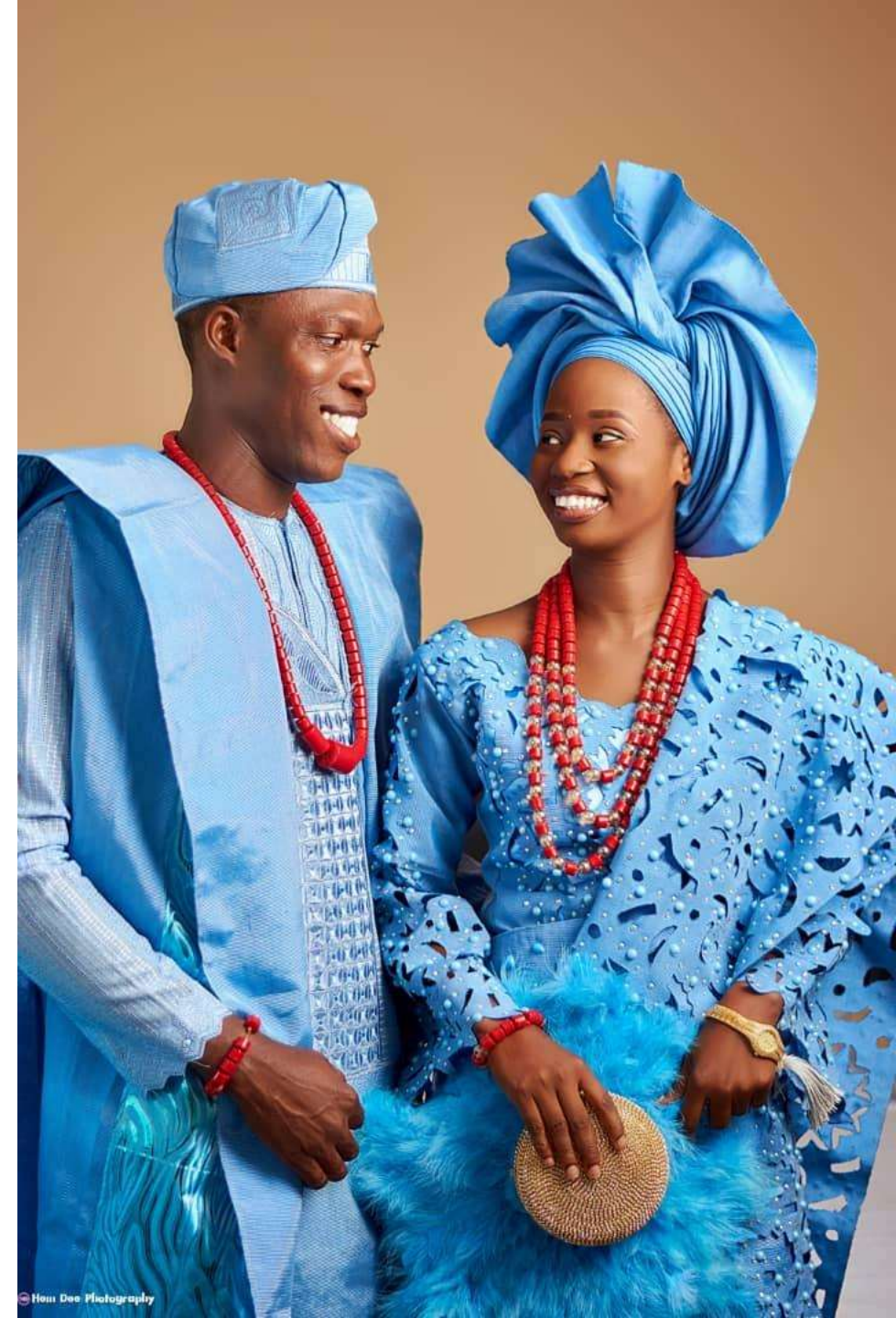




Ase Oke—Yoruba Nigeria

Ase Oke is a cloth named after a Yoruba salutation meaning "greetings on the spending of money". It is woven exclusively by men on narrow strip looms from cotton or silk. It is important to Yoruba men and women since they lend visual splendor as well as social prestige to both the wearer and the weaver. It is one of the glorious 'prestige' fabrics woven on narrow strip looms by Yoruba men in Nigeria. Ase Oke often feature complicated lace-like patterns which were incorporated into weaves when imported lace was not available from England during World War II. Other designs feature gold and silver metallic threads. Ase Oke is worn by both men and women.





Nnenna Okore (Nigeria, born 1975)

Nnenna Okore is an artist who works both in [Nigeria](#) and the [United States](#). Her largely [abstract sculptures](#) are inspired by textures, colors and forms within her immediate milieu. Okore's work frequently uses [flotsam](#) or discarded objects to create intricate sculpture and installations through repetitive and labor-intensive techniques. She learned some of her methods, including [weaving](#), [sewing](#), rolling, twisting and [dyeing](#), by watching local Nigerians perform daily tasks. Most of Okore's work explores detailed surfaces and [biomorphic](#) formations.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lhvMaQ8Osg>

<https://art.daimler.com/en/artwork/nnenna-okore-cycles-and-cyclones-2017/>













Peju Alatise (Nigeria, born 1975)

Peju was born into a traditional Muslim family in Lagos, Nigeria, and is one of seven children. Her father raised strong objections to her desire to pursue art as a career, insisting that she do something that would give her a steady income. Her mother, however, was her biggest supporter. She knew that Peju was born for art, and would grow up to do big things. Peju recalls her always joking, “Ah, she’s going to be rich!”. ([Artist Transcending Barriers](#)). So, in spite of the traditional way in which she was raised, Peju took a non-conformist stance and, through her art, encourages thousands to do the same. “I can’t do what everyone else is doing,” she stated simply ([Artist Transcending Barriers](#)). Peju seeks to stand out for her work. Not for the fame, but for the important topics that drive her to create.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU4Mlx2zdn8>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IDEWWhjnPmo&t=64s>
- <https://www.sulger-buel-gallery.com/video/16-peju-alatise-speaks-with-diamond-woman/>









Sokari Douglas Camp

Nigerian-born, London-based Sokari Douglas Camp belongs to the first generation of African women artists that captured the international market. Douglas Camp, who is from a large Kalabari town in the Niger Delta, is largely inspired by Kalabari culture and traditions, and she employs modern sculptural techniques with the predominant use of steel, to create large, semi-abstract figurative works. She has had numerous solo and group shows all over the world, and her works live in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC and the British Museum in London.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otcWOO2PSBw>

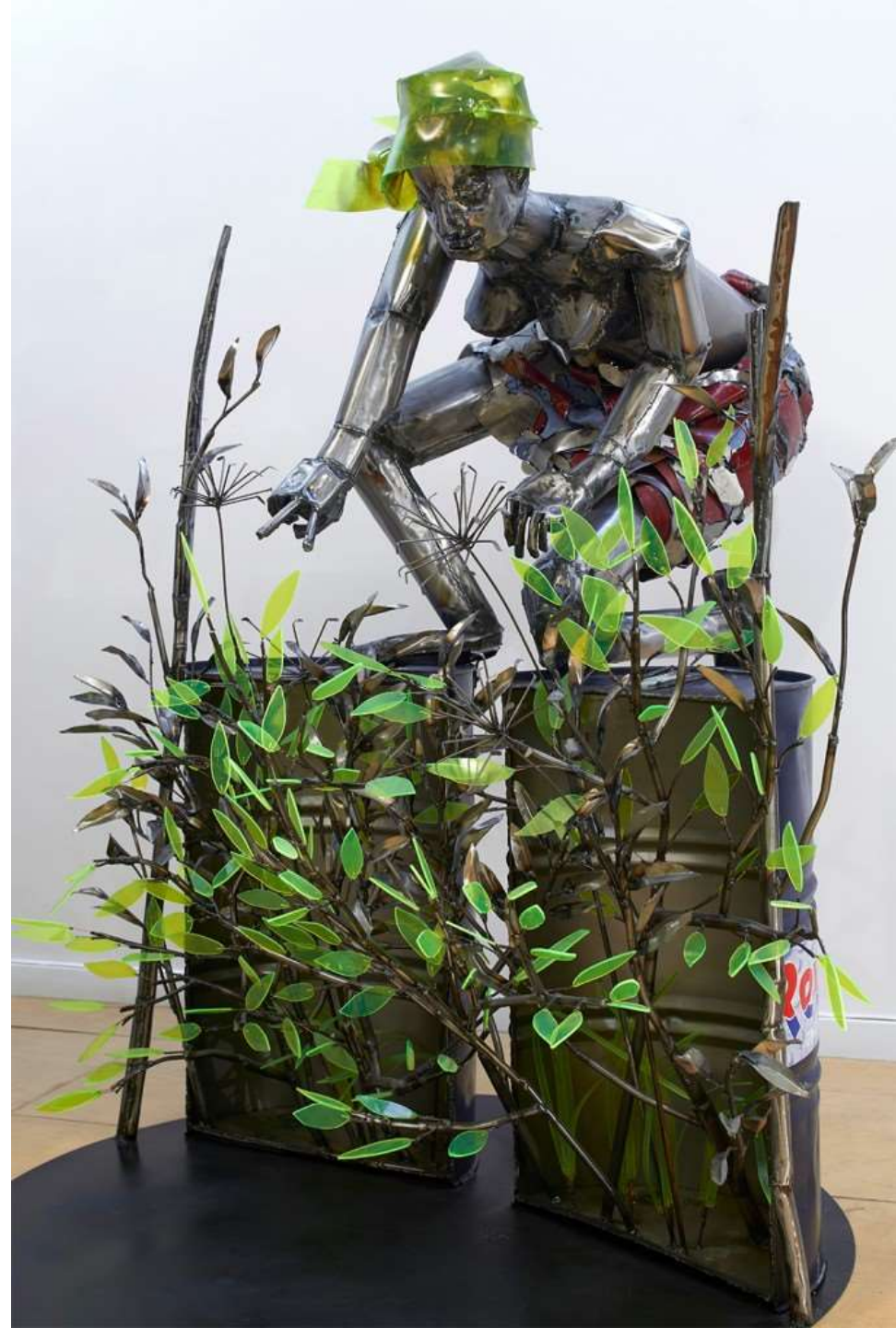
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= yr1fztwrnU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yr1fztwrnU)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bP670ylRh zg&t=13s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZX7s0kH zjc>









Jamilla Okubo

A student of Parsons The New School of Design, [Jamilla Okubo](#)'s work is inspired by the silhouettes of traditional African wear — specifically the Maasai and the Ndebele people of South Africa. When it comes to textiles she derives motivation from the layering, color, and making of African fabrics such as Kanga, Kente, and Wax Fabric.

- <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=648115262653812> (8 mins)









Assignment Suggestions...

- Use tree bark or fiber in an artwork
- Use resist in an artwork
- Incorporate fabric swatches that have meaning to you in an artwork (for example, a piece of a favorite shirt or one of a loved one)
- Use applique in an artwork
- Create an artwork inspired by fabric patterns and texture