



Art and its histories

Ghana: Introduction to Adinkra

Narrator

Adinkra is a printed fabric - hand-made and worn mainly for funerals, which are very important celebrations in Ghana. According to Kojo Fosu:

Nick Levinson

The Adinkra fabric is carefully printed in graphic symbols of geometric motifs, on a background of white, rust-brown, or black vegetable-dye fabric. Any one of the motifs, or any combination of them, could be arranged in narrative patterns to convey specific messages. These messages may be expressed as a reflection on issues pertaining to beauty, morality or other higher values.

Narrator

The dye for the cloth is produced from kuntun kruni - the roots from the kuntu plant.

Ident: kuntun kruni, roots from the kuntu plant

Ident: Gabriel Kwaku Boatye, Adinkre maker

Gabriel Kwaku Boatye

First, twelve buckets of water for one barrel.

After that, twenty-five strips of the roots are put into the barrel.

And the next two days, you remove the cover it becomes cool, because if it is hot you can't put this in, and remove it from here to this small barrel.

Ident: Moami Abena Tabi, Adinkra dyer

Gabriel Kwaku Boatye

This is white cloth - you want to change it into black. When you put it in first it looks like brown, but by two weeks' time it will change into black. It takes two weeks, it need more Sun. And when it dries you bring it back, and wet it again, and dry it again, six times.

Ident: Badie, bark of a tree

Gabriel Kwaku Boatye

This is called 'Badie', it's the bark of the tree. You find it only in the Savannah area. It's hard, so we broke it in pieces, like this, and soak it with water for twenty-four hours.

Narrator

The softened bark is pounded in a mortar and is used to produce the dye for stamping the symbols.

Ident: Kwadwo Amofa, bark pounder

Narrator

Repeated boiling and filtering produces a concentrated solution.

Gabriel Kwaku Boatye

Out of forty-eight gallons, I'm going to receive only one gallon of the solution. I test it in this way. It's ready for printing.

Ident: Opanin Yaw Boatye, master Adinkra maker

Narrator

The Adinkra stamps are carved from the wood of a gourd or calabash, by a professional designer and carver, such as, Joseph Kofi Nsiah

Ident: Joseph Kofi Nsiah, Adinkra stamp carver