Basic Detail Report

Mud Cloth (Bogolanfini)

Date
mid 20th Century

Primary Maker
Bamana

Medium
Wool dyed with mud

Description

Bogolanfini is a traditional textile from Mali. The name comes from the Bamana word "bogolan," which means "made with mud," and "fini," which means "cloth." The process of making bogolanfini is time-consuming and complex. First, men weave cotton on a double-heddle loom into strips of cloth six inches wide. These are then sewn together by their selvedges, and the resulting cloth is preshrunk and dried in the sun. The next step of dyeing and painting is traditionally only carried out by women, with the technique being passed on to the younger generation through long apprenticeships. Two types of leaves (n' gallama, or African birch, and n'tjankara ,or Combretum glutinosum) are boiled and mashed together, and the cloth is soaked in the resultant dye. Next, river mud that has been fermented in large clay pots is applied to the cloth with a stick or iron tool. The mud is painted onto the negative space of the desired pattern; its high levels of iron oxide react with the tannins to dye the cloth black. After the mud is washed off, the lighter areas are bleached to increase the contrast. The processes of dyeing and painting may be repeated many times, and bogolanfini can take several weeks to make. The geometric patterns on bogolanfini serve as a code that turns the textile into a text. They can describe historical events, proverbs, mythological stories, and so on. Bogolan, the commercialized derivative of bogolanfini, is popular in foreign markets but contains "gibberish" patterns. Traditional bogolanfini is usually worn by hunters or people at transitional points in their lives, such as young girls who have recently had their genitals cut or women who have just given birth. Bogolanfini may also serve as clothing for elderly women or as a mother's funeral shroud.

Dimensions
37 3/4 × 39 in. (95.9 × 99.1 cm)