

Basic Detail Report



Wrap-Around Garment (Kente)

Date

early to mid 20th Century

Primary Maker

Akan

Medium

Cotton and silk

Description

Kente, which can refer both to the type of cloth and the style of garment in which it is worn, is a distinctive aspect of Ghanaian dress. The first kente were developed with the initiative of Ashanti Chief Oti Akenten approximately 500 years ago. Pre-existing weaving techniques, which had used cotton, were adapted and modified to make more luxurious garments using silk that arrived in West Africa via Saharan trade routes. At first it was impossible to purchase silk thread by itself, so long pieces of silk would be purchased and unraveled to obtain raw material. Typical kente colors include yellow, red, blue, green, and pink. Kente are usually considered ceremonial or formal pieces of clothing, although more recently kente cloth has been made into bookmarks, headbands, and decorations for other articles of clothing. Men will wear kente as one piece, draped like a toga; women will also wear a second piece of kente cloth that serves as a baby carrier. Kente cloths always feature warp designs that are combined throughout a strip of cloth. These are all given names that can reflect proverbs, connotations of the color scheme used, the mood or circumstances of the weaver, or any number of other variables. Some examples include "Snail's bottom," "Somebody wishes my death," "Zigzag," and "Fear man." Previously, designs would be brought to the Ashanti chief, who would name them and keep the copyright for all kente designs. For most of kente's history, women were barred from weaving because their menstrual cycles were thought to contaminate them. However, this rule is not as strictly enforced today, as colonialism in West Africa has led to both increased awareness of gender inequality and a commercialized market for kente whose demand is too great to be met exclusively by male weavers.

Dimensions

66 1/2 × 105 in. (168.9 × 266.7 cm)