

# Basic Detail Report

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## Wrap-Around Garment

### Date

mid 20th Century

### Primary Maker

Bamana

### Medium

Wool cotton blend and indigo

### Description

Indigo is considered extremely valuable and plays an important role in textile cultures all over West Africa. This example comes from Mali, whose western regions (near the city of Kayes) serve as a hub for the production of indigo fabric. This practice, which was traditionally only the domain of women, requires complex technical knowledge due to the many resources that must be commanded throughout the process. Masters of indigo dyeing are also revered for their ties to the spiritual world, which is said to guide them in their work. To make indigo cloth, indigo leaves must be crushed and formed into dried balls. Green wood is burnt, and water filtered through the resultant ash is mixed with the indigo leaves. This solution is then fermented until it becomes an odiferous and foamy dye in which the cloth is dunked many times. Chemically speaking, the blue is not water soluble; therefore, the fermentation is necessary, because it reduces the blue to a cognate known as indigo white. Indigo white is soluble as long as the solution is alkaline, which is why the alkali ash is added to the water. Once the dye is exposed to air, it reoxidizes and turns a deep blue. Indigo cloth is considered more desirable the more saturated the color is. Fabric is usually not rinsed before going to market, so the dye will rub off on hands or on other clothing. In some places, truly good indigo textiles are said to crackle when they are put on.

### Dimensions

54 × 93 in. (137.2 × 236.2 cm)