

Basic Detail Report



Woman's Skirt (tafé)

Primary Maker

Djotene Diarra

Medium

Cotton, mud, n'galaman and changora leaf dyes

Description

Bamana people call this fabric bokolanfini or "mudcloth."

Although some mudcloth is produced on a large scale for sale in local or international markets, traditionally, the fabric is made-to-order. This allows the buyer not only to suggest familiar patterns, but also to commission work from artists known for the quality of their work. The materials needed to make bokolanfini (cotton, leaf dyes, and mud) are all available locally. After women prepare the raw cotton and men weave it into strips, the pieces are sewn together. Women dip the resulting creamy white fabric into a dye bath made from n'galaman and changora leaves and branches. The fabric emerges a bright yellow color which is later washed away. (It is not known precisely why the makers undertake this step; it has been suggested that this initial dyeing makes the mud-staining less likely to bleed.) Women prepare a solution made from mud collected from pond floors and left to stand for a year. The dark mud is painted onto the fabric, leaving white-line designs. These designs, in turn, are covered with another solution and left to dry in the sun. After repeated paintings and washings, the fabric will remain colorfast. Made in a Kolokani style which typically features sharply delineated lines and high contrast between the dark and light portions, this bokolanfini skirt features the most traditional and, in many ways, most valued mudcloth design. Women lay out the designs freehand and maintain consistent widths for the white lines. These white lines are not painted on; rather, the dark portions are painted, leaving areas of exposed fabric. Today, artists in Mali produce many styles of bokolanfini, such as genre scenes, images of animals, and patterns drawing upon a wider range of earth tones. Although bokolanfini continues to be produced in Mali, most women no longer wear bokolan skirts or wraps. Women prefer imported printed cloth for its comfort and ease in cleaning. Designs: This bokolanfini skirt pattern, the Cheli Djou, is associated with married women. Its crisscross pattern of diamond-shaped lines is named after a locally made string bag called a cheli djou, which a newly married woman would use to transport her trousseau of cooking pots to her husband's village. A stretched bag creates the string diamond design used on the skirt. The design that recalls an iron cross, the Baarafeere So, refers to the white flowers of the Baara gourd plant. The very large gourds produced by the Baara plant are used as containers for the newlywed woman to store and carry her trousseau of cotton skirts. The artist used diamond-shaped lines called Nkerekan or "cricket's neck" to create the Cheli Djou pattern. The diamond shape visually imitates the form of the cricket's neck. Its significance lies with the appearance of crickets at the end of the rainy season - the sound of many crickets is a good omen and suggests abundant crops. An unequal square with "legs" represents glistening light on the wings of a sajume bird. Its arrival marks the beginning of the rainy season. The string of

squares encasing simple crosses is called the Fali Fereke and references a thick cord used to inhibit a donkey's wandering. It suggests that upon having children, a woman's actions should be restricted. Prior to childbearing, but after marriage, a woman is free to pursue her own interests - even lovers. A heavy rectangle crossed with equally heavy bars is the Ntabani design. Named after a tree that produces a stimulating fruit, this design is never seen, but is concealed under the overlapping skirt.

Dimensions

39 × 70 inches (99 × 177.8 cm)