Basic Detail Report

Adire eleko, woman’s wrapper (“Ore merin/Four friends” design)

Date
ca. 1960s

Primary Maker
Artist not recorded

Medium
Cotton, indigo dye

Description
According to Yoruba taxonomy, there are two primary types of “classic” adire: eleko and oniko. Eleko is a starch-resist technique, typically using cassava or corn starch applied by hand-painting, stamping, or stenciling. Oniko involves tied, twisted, folded, or hand-stitched resist patterns, created with raffia or thread. If machine-sewn, this variation is referred to as adire alabare. The 1960s, during Nigeria’s post-Independence era, marked a period of increased popularity and market expansion for adire. This era fostered innovations in design, techniques, and the use of diverse dyestuffs and base fabrics. However, by the 1990s, experimentation had largely supplanted the production of “classic” forms, which were deemed old-fashioned. Today, high-quality “classic” adire is rare. According to our regular collaborator, Gasali Adeyemo, adire of this caliber is no longer produced in Nigeria and is considered incredibly valuable. Adire patterns often take their names from dominant motifs, but artists have significant freedom to interpret or combine these motifs with others, creating a vast array of designs numbering in the hundreds. This example is an adire eleko cloth featuring a hand-drawn ore merin (“four friends”) design. This wrapper is composed of 36 blocks, each showcasing four distinct geometric patterns: One pattern consists of unevenly arranged dots and splotches. Another features small squares divided into two triangles—one solid with a centered circle, the other filled with stripes. The third pattern displays numerous asterisk-like shapes. The fourth pattern includes squares with single asterisk-like motifs positioned in the corners, accompanied by a cross-hatched cross in the center. This dynamic arrangement of geometric designs highlights the artist’s creativity and skill in interpreting the ore merin motif.

Dimensions
73 1/4 × 70 1/16 × 1/8 in. (186 × 178 × 0.3 cm)