

Kente Cloth: Analysis

The piece of kente cloth shown in your *Art Reproductions Booklet* is held by the Newark Museum in New Jersey. Made of rayon, it measures approximately 112½ inches by 72½ inches. The cloth presents typical kente elements, including its general coloration and design. Repeated vertical and horizontal patterns in square and rectangular shapes are arrayed in eleven long, relatively evenly scaled strips. Colors include gold, orange, red, greens, blues, and black. The portion visible at the bottom of our illustration of the fabric is somewhat distinct, with slightly different patterns and a preponderance of flat orange squares of fabric. This adds a horizontal emphasis in this area that sets it off somewhat from the rest of the piece. Additionally, a thinner vertical strip at the left edge of the cloth, which is predominantly red in tone, adds another area of distinction. Overall, the fabric presents an evenly decorated surface with a tremendous amount of visual rhythm. As we will see at the end of Section V, with El Anatsui's *Between Earth and Heaven*, kente continues to inspire contemporary artists, who add modern conceptual meanings to this highly recognizable African form.

Section IV Summary

WESTERN AFRICA

- ✧ Western Africa encompasses the area including present-day Senegal, Guinea, Côte D'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, much of Nigeria, and Cameroon.
- ✧ The peoples of Western Africa, unlike the other areas we have studied, are not predominantly Bantu-speaking.
- ✧ Slavery was present in Western Africa prior to contact with the West, but it expanded greatly after that period, with several groups becoming actively engaged in providing slaves for the Atlantic slave trade.
- ✧ During the colonial era, it was France, and to a lesser degree England, that dominated Western Africa.
- ✧ Several Western African groups fought val-

iantly to maintain their independence in the face of European incursions.

SELECTED ARTWORK: NOK SCULPTURE, NOK CULTURE, NIGERIA, FIRST CENTURY BCE–FIRST CENTURY CE

- ✧ Much of our understanding of Nok culture is necessarily speculative, as the Nok left no written or oral histories.
- ✧ The initial discovery of significant Nok sites occurred in the 1880s, as major tin mining began in the lowlands south of the Jos plateau.
- ✧ Bernard Fagg, a cadet administrator of mining operations who came to the region in the 1940s, became the leading expert on Nok art.
- ✧ It is with Nok culture that the tradition of sub-Saharan figurative sculpture in Africa begins.
- ✧ The function of the Nok sculpture on which we have focused is unknown. It may have been intended to be mounted in some way and used in ritual practices connected to fertility.

SELECTED ARTWORK: BOWL, IGBO UKWU, NIGERIA, NINTH–TENTH CENTURIES

- ✧ Igbo Ukwu was a major center for Igbo culture and appears to have been the residence of high-status individuals, possibly the priest class or the king.
- ✧ The first Igbo Ukwu bronze items were discovered in 1938 by a local man, Isaiah Anozie, who was digging a hole in order to install a water tank on his property.
- ✧ Lost-wax casting can be accomplished through both direct and indirect processes, both of which produce hollow sculptural forms.
- ✧ The crescent-shaped bowl is in the shape of a half-calabash covered with geometric patterning.
- ✧ The bowl is comparable to other, similarly shaped examples discovered at Igbo Ukwu, which also have single handles and ornate surface decoration.