

African Pattern and Identity in Contemporary Textile and Fashion Design:

Exploratory Study of Trending African Sources and Technology in Fashion, Art, and Textiles

Western African Historically • Nigeria & Ghana today • Heavy Asian Influence
 • Now influencing Western Trends!



A printed "functional" textile design or artform than spans 3 centuries and across 3 continents
 It taps into *Colonization* and *Power Structures*

- * Dutch colonized Indonesia and began to copy their unique batik, or wax resist methods
- * English, French, Belgian, and importantly Dutch, colonized West Africa

Batik prints, common in Indonesia, inspired Ankara. However, there are differences between them that usually relate to the way the wax is melted and the types of patterns that are formed. There was a time when Batik was a popular choice for fabric in Africa but it was expensive. During the 1800's, Dutch companies in Africa developed a new technique called *Ankara*

Leslie Nobler, Professor
 William Paterson University
 Wayne, NJ, USA

Shoes, fashion: popular prints
 - worn by Michelle Obama



Artists Featuring Ankara

- Yinka Shonibare, UK/Nigeria
- Njideka Akunyili Crosby, USA/Nigeria
- Kehinde Wiley, USA (
- Grace Ndiritu, UK
- Bisa Butler, USA (NJ)
- Nick Cave, US



CEO, Linda Harrison

Njideka Akunyili Crosby
 Acrylic, transfers, colored pencils, pastel, collage and commemorative fabric on paper

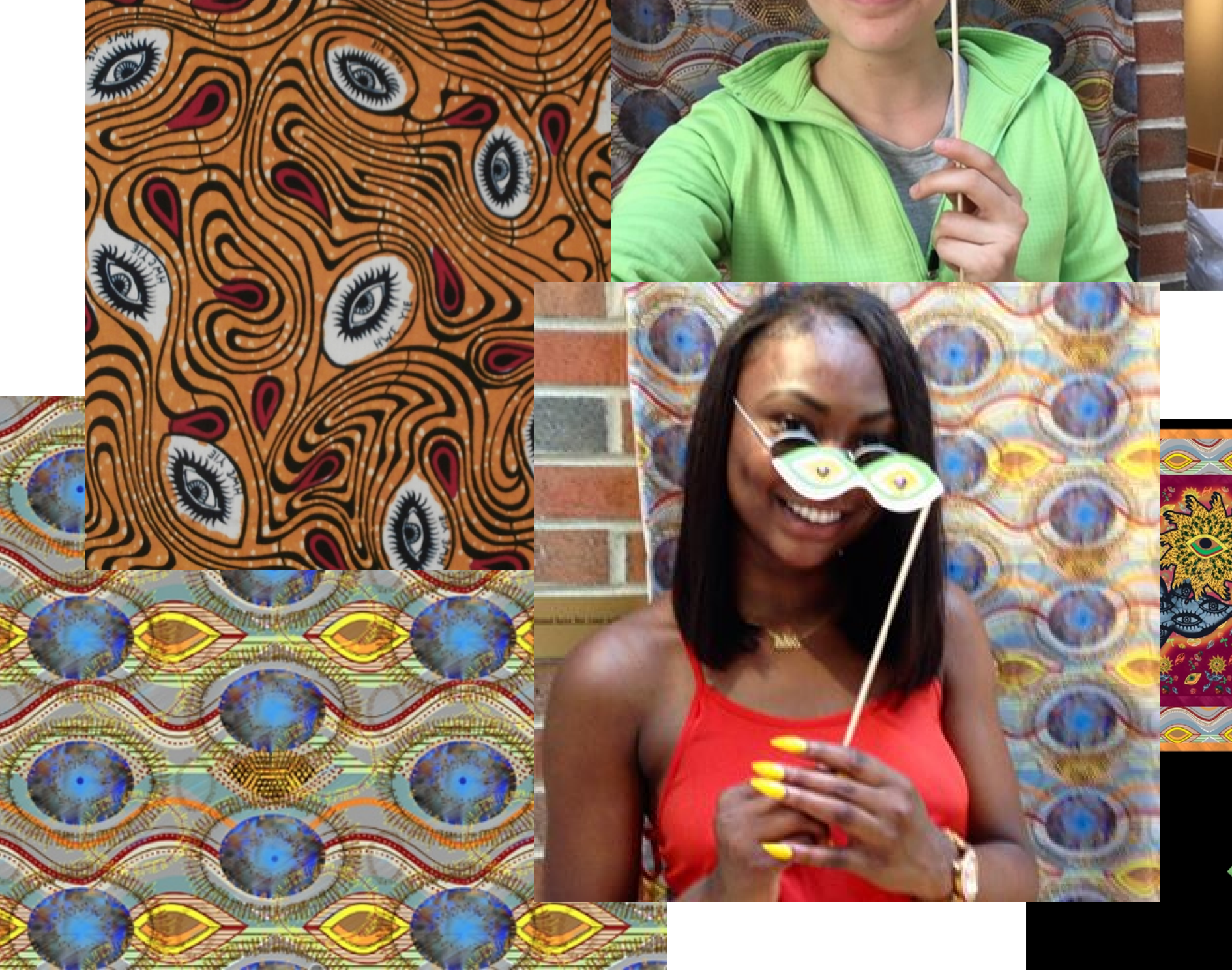
Celebrities Popularizing Ankara



Gwen Stefani

Ronke Raji

Eyes: popular prints
 Art by Leslie Nobler and student models



Art by Yinka Shonibare

Imagery from everyday life, perhaps a precursor to "Pop Art," is key to many African artforms

Bisa Butler
 Art Quilts

2000s Black Fashion Designers... and Stylists & Ghanaian prints



Keira Knightley wears Olowu

Duro Olowu's Art



Michelle Obama wears Oluwu

African fabrics based on the Dutch Wax Print (Ankara) popularized during Africa's colonial era, have had an enormous impact on Western Fashion, especially in the US and UK, in the last decade. The trend has had an effect in the visual arts as well, which circuitously, impacts fashion design. In fashion, and notably for celebrities, this is in part due to identity and pride in one's African roots; in the fine arts, artists such as Yinka Shonibare and Njideka Akunyili Crosby make statements about identity politics, colonialism up through post-colonialism, and racism. The global village ushered in by the internet has driven this proliferation, as have improvements in fabric printing technology, combining wax-resist with roller printing. Patterns can now be designed authentically in western Africa and easily sent electronically to Europe for artisanal quality printing. Examples of Ankara's new reach across the Atlantic abound. We see its greater availability and utilization in the fashion world, from authentic textile shops in African-American neighborhoods, to low-end reproductions in discount chains. More recently these textiles/patterns are integral to important works of fine arts in major museums, from Philadelphia and San Francisco to the Mass MOCA (in the US), all the way to the Israel Museum, and throughout Europe. Lastly, yet significantly, we see this trend throughout social media thanks to Instagram, Pinterest and celebrity photos. What shall sustain this major new design direction is that Ankara adapts to the times. Some is now printed in West Africa, but regardless of the design or production locale, Ankara stays so relevant because the motifs are based on objects and scenes in today's everyday life. When designing, studying and teaching Ankara, this idea is first and foremost, from spiritual eye motifs to drawings of foods to the "politically-loaded" chain patterns. By deconstructing the complex techniques of and exceedingly rich history behind Ankara, up through social issues connected with its new-found trendiness, this paper will examine the whys and hows driving this strong new African wave in design. This first-hand creativity experience becomes part of the research of this paper, along with historic and contemporary sources of inquiry, both through a literature search and anecdotal experience, into what is behind this far reaching trend.

We tasked American students of all ethnicities to create Ankara based on this [deeper understanding](#)*...



* Past Informs Now; Current and Stays Relevant
 Style is On-Trend, Design-Conscious
 Illustrative – Lends Itself to Vector-Drawing
 Hands-on, Tactile Sensibility (resist and crackles)
 Balance between Digital and Folk/Analog Art