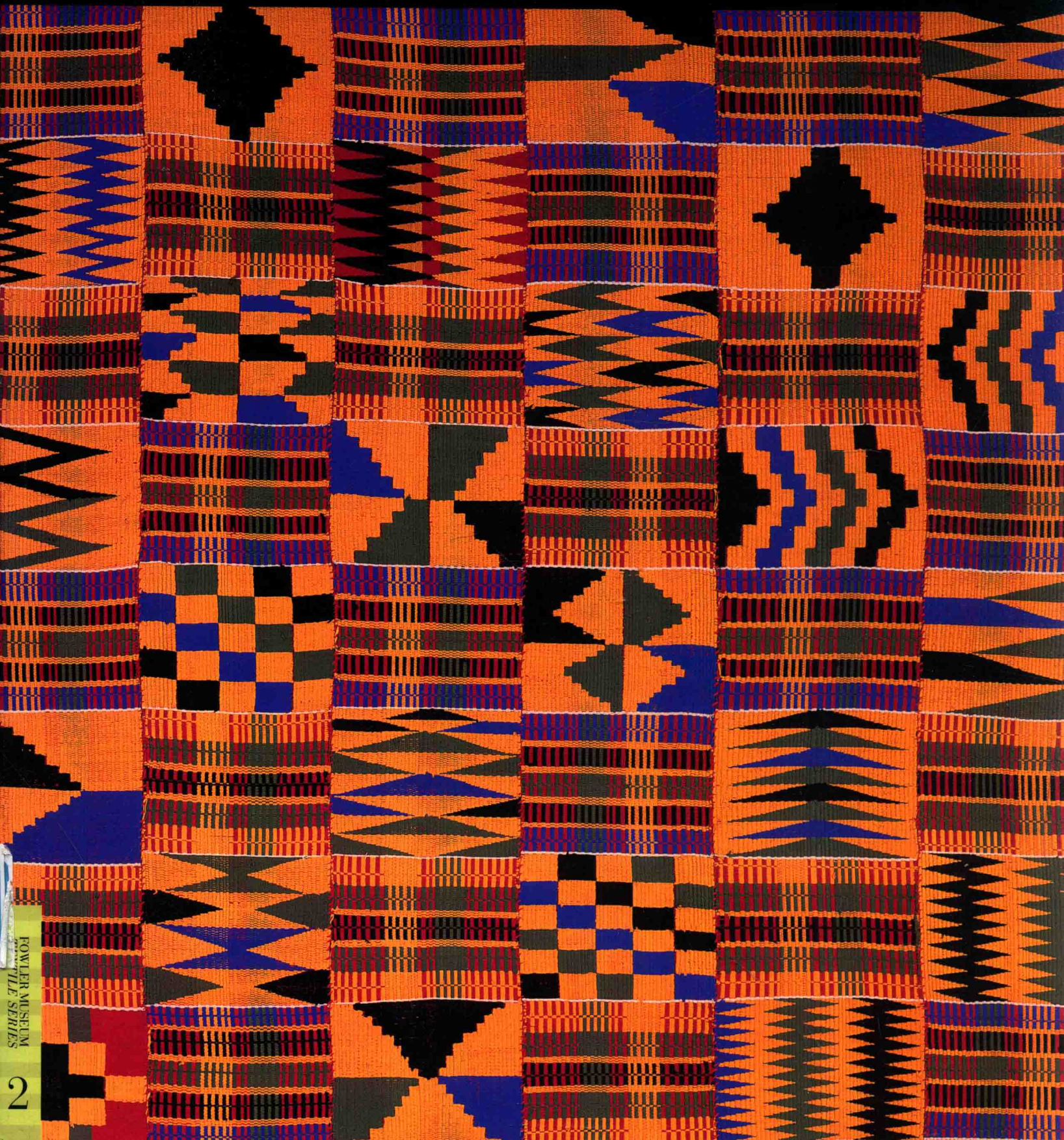


# Wrapped in Pride

*Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity*





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**Doran H. Ross**

*With Contributions by*

Agbenyega Adedze

Abena P. A. Busia

Nii O. Quarcoopome

Betsy D. Quick

Raymond A. Silverman

Anne Spencer

**UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History**

Los Angeles

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*Editorial Board*  
Doran H. Ross  
Patricia Rieff Anawalt  
Roy W. Hamilton  
Betsy D. Quick  
Lynne Kostman  
Daniel R. Brauer



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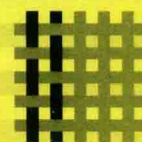
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I first began thinking about kente in 1973 while attending the exhibition *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. There were only a few examples of the cloth, mounted on the walls as if they were paintings. Indeed with their electric colors, vibrant geometry, and impressive scale, the weavings worked well (in the early 1970s) as dynamic examples of modern, if not contemporary, art.

My next encounter with kente occurred at the opening of *African Art in Motion* (1974) at the newly expanded Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery on the UCLA campus. My own exaggerated memory of that evening finds all the African attendees wearing stylish dark suits and elegant Western dresses with the rest of us, White and Black, wearing some version of African adornment—ranging from comparatively inconspicuous items of jewelry to complete African ensembles.

This static image of kente changed dramatically with my first visit to Ghana in 1974. At a festival in Cape Coast several Fante chiefs wore and “danced” kente. Images of the cloth as a flat work of art disappeared in favor of something more akin to a kinetic sculpture, part kaleidoscope and part kite. Kente was made for movement, whether in a fast powerful dance or a slow majestic procession.

These first impressions of kente were shaped primarily by visual responses to the cloth. It was only after repeated visits to Ghana that I began to appreciate the variety of contexts that helped define the importance of kente. These events in turn were themselves defined in part by the presence of the cloth. With time I also began to understand some of the complexities of cloth names, which serve as catalysts for the contemporary construction and expansion of meaning, both surrounding and embedded within the cloth. For me, this is the most engaging and telling part of kente’s history—how it has come to mean so many things to so many people at the end of the twentieth century. This volume attempts to bring the history and significance of kente up to date. It is my hope that it will eventually serve as a benchmark for subsequent studies that examine the further growth of the tradition.

Doran H. Ross

Director, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History

## Daa Daa Kente

J. T. Essuman

Daa daa Kente, Daa daa Kente Daa (repeat)

Mo dɔfo 'dɔfo bekyɛ m' Kente, daa

Mo dɔfo 'dɔfo bekyɛ m' Kente, daa

Mo dɔfo papa bekyɛm Kente dabaa

Kyɛm bi O, Kyɛm bi O!

Daa, Daa, Kente Daa.

Everyday Kente, Everyday Kente, Always (repeat)

My beloved lover will give me a gift of Kente, Always

My beloved lover will give me a gift of Kente, Always

My good lover will give me a gift of Kente, Always

Give me one as a gift, Give me one as a gift

Everyday Kente, Always.





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This project began with a telephone call from Anne Spencer, Curator of Africa, the Americas and the Pacific at the Newark Museum, inquiring about the possibility of organizing an exhibition on kente cloth that would bring the tradition up to date and consider its history on both sides of the Atlantic. I want to thank Anne for all her efforts on behalf of this project. There are few museum professionals as dedicated and hard working as she is. I would also like to thank Director Mary Sue Sweeney Price, Ward L. E. Mintz, Peggy Dougherty, David Mayhew, Isimeme Omogbai, Lucy Voorhees Brotman, Eathon G. Hall Jr., Gregory Blackburn, Rebecca A. Buck, Vivian James, Alejandro Ramirez, Jane Stein, Catherine Jellinek, and Lorelei Rowars of the Newark Museum for their many contributions to *Wrapped in Pride* and for facilitating the collaboration between our two institutions.

For me, this book and its companion exhibition are the culmination of nearly twenty-five years of involvement with the expressive culture of Ghana. My mentor Herbert M. Cole first led me to West Africa in 1974 to begin preliminary research for the UCLA exhibition and publication *The Arts of Ghana* (1977). As always I want to thank Skip for his faith in my work and for his consistent support through the years. Initial research on *Wrapped in Pride* in Ghana was facilitated by Professor J. H. K. Nketia. His good offices opened many doors and provided the catalyst for even more friendships. At the National Museum of Ghana Joe Nkrumah regularly offered enlightened humor and wise counsel, and Bruce Lohoff and Nick Robertson at the United States Information Service in Accra extended many courtesies. Cornelius Adedze provided considerable research assistance and documented the first Bonwire Kente Festival. Samuel Adams was a driver "pass all." Others who provided important assistance include Joseph Armah Niiattoh, Ablade Glover, Hayford Appiah-Kubi, Jemina Hayfron-Benjamin, Kwame Labi, Kwasi Boady, Isaac Azey, Garbah Ibrahim, Ephraim Agawu, and Osei Kwadwo.

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Doran H. Ross  
Director, UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History

*Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity* is the result of the collaborative efforts of many individuals, who, in a truly community-based undertaking, joined with us to promote the greater understanding of the transatlantic meaning of this beautiful and complicated cloth, as well as those who make it and those who wear it. I commend Anne Spencer, Curator of Africa, the Americas and the Pacific at the Newark Museum, and Doran H. Ross, Director of the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History in Los Angeles, whose work together on this subject has broadened our horizons immeasurably. Their knowledge of and enthusiasm for this subject have truly enriched us all.

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That component, in which Newark and Los Angeles high school students were invited to participate, became integral to the entire fabric of the exhibition. On both coasts, students learned techniques of oral history and documentary photography in order to interview their elders about the subject of kente in African American life. Their contributions will be precious components of the exhibition at both venues.

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