

# n'Ketiah Brakohiapa

Ghana: clothing designer, teacher

Object: Sankofa fabric print resist

*Seh owere fi na wo san ko fa aa yen kyiri.*  
(Twi)

*[Forgetfulness is not an abomination if you return to reclaim the good teachings you learned in life.]*

At age 12, I was a pro at making adinkra cloth patterns. My hands and knees were always covered in dye. I would wake up early, at 6:30 am—in Ghana the sun is up early—and make sure we had water. Then I would sweep the whole printing space and put in the pegs for pinning the fabric. I had to prepare the space for the day's work. I had to make sure we had the dye potion, water, and blocks for printing. After that, I put the ink in pots. My grandfather executed the main designs, but he would leave small parts of the fabric for me to print.

The one pattern that I brought with me from Ghana is the sankofa symbol of a bird form—it's a symbol of a mythical bird with the neck going all the way back with an egg held within its beak. It symbolizes going back to your roots to fetch or connect with the good things that you've learned—maybe from your community, elders, or your parents. The symbol cautions me when I am wavering off course to bring me back on point. When I use the symbols, it's my way of talking through the fabric.

Now thanks to that symbol and the other woodcut designs I learned as a young boy, and thanks to the U.S., and the Fashion Institute of Technology, I have been able to use adinkra symbolism to create stylish cloth garments. Also, these symbols have inspired sculptors and crafters of wooden doors and furniture designs.



## Bio:

n'Ketiah Brakohiapa grew up in Kumasi in the Ashanti region of Ghana. He learned the art of adinkra from his grandparents and uncles. Adinkra is a process of making the dyes and tools to print the fabric from local, natural materials. In Ghana the fabric is used in every community setting during happy occasions and rituals, such as births and funerals. n'Ketiah came to the U.S. in the fall of 1999. He studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology, where he currently works as a technologist and classroom assistant. He has also run his own fabric and clothing business since 1999. His adinkra-inspired designs have been sold to Ralph Lauren, TJ Maxx, Donna Karan, and other well known designers. He continues to teach about the tradition of Adinkra in public schools as a teaching artist with City Lore. Follow him on Facebook and Instagram @nketiah.brakohiapa