

Royal Mbebana

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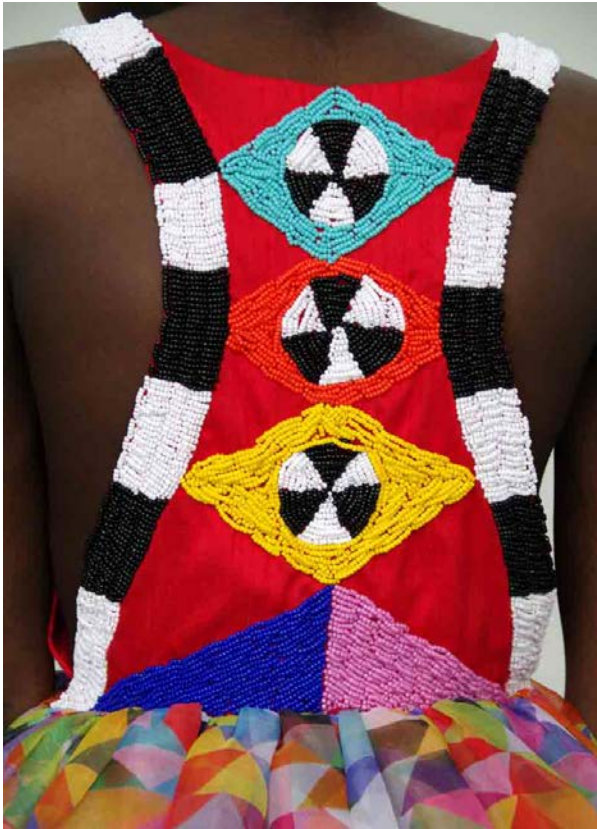
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*Royal Mbebana* is a continuation of exploration into various African cultures and fables. I have been working with digital fabric printing for the past few years and with this piece, I continue to expand my knowledge of developing prints. I also experimented for the first time with beading patterns.

This piece was inspired by the Basotho tribe of North Sotho, South Africa. In this culture the girls are initiated into womanhood at 14-16 years of age at a ceremony where they wear a tradition beaded apron. The aprons or thithos that are worn by the “common” population of girls are made of white beads backed on cotton fabrics. The ornate beaded garments are handed down to all the daughters in the family and given to them by their mothers. A more elaborate version of the thito, is the mbebana which is worn by the daughters of headmen or chiefs (royalty). The mbebana is an apron of multi-colored beads in ornate triangular patterns. These mbebanas are higher quality than that of the thithos because of the more expensive beading used as well as being backed by animal hide instead of cotton.

The design process began by draping the silhouette of the dress in silk dupioni. Repeating the traditional triangular shape used in the mbebana, the bodice was created with a V-neck and triangular shaped fit seaming at the bust. The back of the bodice was draped in a racer back silhouette with a beaded design in multi-color triangular shapes mimicking that of the mbebana.





The ball gown skirt was created in three main layers: The underskirt in cotton batiste, the middle skirt created from silk dupioni and the exterior layer of the skirt in silk organza. This exterior layer is adorned with a multi-colored triangular pattern reminiscent of the mbehana. The print was designed on Adobe Illustrator and was digitally printed onto the silk organza. This work contributes to the field more knowledge of African cultures as well as new techniques of using digital printing and beading. Overall, this work gives us a better understanding of the Basotho peoples of South Africa.

Completed: January 2015

Measurements: Bust 36", Waist 27", Hips 80"

Gallery Ezakwantu. (n.d.). *The North Sotho - Northern Basotho: Northern Basuto - Tswana – Bechwana*. Retrieve from <http://www.ezakwantu.com/Tribes%20-%20North%20Sotho%20%20Northern%20Basotho.htm>.