

Adinkra



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Adinkra symbols, like many other visual symbols, have been used over many years to communicate, represent and characterize a myriad of ideas, beliefs and concepts. Originally created by the people of Gyaman, Adinkra has grown to become the most extensively used and widely known traditional symbolic art in Ghana and to an appreciable extent, West Africa. By carefully considering the depth of wisdom in the meanings of these symbols, is not surprising that they are often linked with a host of several proverbial maxims.

The very essence of the word ‘ Adinkra’ is ‘ farewell’; as such, every symbol that is encapsulated in the whole body of Adinkra communicates or corresponds to a unique message or idea. Documented history has it that, as far back as the nineteenth century, unique Adinkra symbols were used in customary and traditional rites of society to depict the ideological stance of that society as regards to the ceremony or event in question. The art was showcased in various forms during festivals, funerals, marriages among others.

Today, the use of Adinkra has been widely extended to cover almost every facet of life. In recent times, Adinkra symbols have become a suitable choice of branding the modern, competitive, and trendy Ghanaian clothing lifestyle. Over the years, Adinkra has gone beyond traditional cloth-making designs and has been fashionably incorporated into the designing of t-shirts, buttons, linen fabric clothes. Today, young people would prefer t-shirts with screen-printing inscriptions like ‘ Me firi Ghana’, with an Adinkra like ‘ Gye Nyame’ boldly designed beneath.

Indeed, some acclaimed Ghanaian fashion designers like Mawuli Okudzeto, Kofi Ansah among others, have received international recognition by carving such niches for themselves, with popular brand names like MKOGH and PKOG, just to mention a few. Beyond that, apparels like footwear have also had a taste of Adinkra art. Artisans who make local footwear like sandals, slippers and ‘ ahenema’ have also included these symbols in their designs. For instance, a locally made ‘ ahenema’ has a carefully designed Adinkra symbol of three concentric rings encircling each other, known as ‘ adinkrahene’ at the nose of each slipper.

One other art is the design of bags with Adinkra symbols woven or sewn on the surface with fabric, (often kente pieces). The most popular addition to this art collection is the use of these designs in making jewellery and other fashion accessories. It is popular to see rings, pendants, earrings, necklaces, anklets, beads and many others designed with symbols like ‘ ohene aniwa’, ‘ epa’, ‘ nkonsonkonson’, etc. In Ghana, the Precious Mineral Marketing Company (PMMC) is a typical example of an enterprise in this regard.

Thus, on the international stage, Adinkra symbols have been employed as one of, if not the best indigenous symbols that give all manner of clothing, a unique fashion identity easily recognisable as truly Ghanaian. Quite apart from clothing, these symbols have formed part of locally designed fine and visual art. This has been such that, in creation of several Ghanaian sculptures, Adinkra has been one of the most recognisable themes. There many instances of metal and wooden sculpture designed into Adinkra. More often than not, these visual and fine arts have been used by individuals for decorative purposes.

It is now commonplace to see a wall hanging in someone's home, at the lobby of a corporate institution or in the sitting area of an afro-centric restaurant with the caption 'welcome' and a popular symbol like 'Gye Nyame' underneath it. Without a shred of doubt any Ghanaian who sees this in any institution in any distant part of the world, feels quite homey and comfortable, to some extent, immediately. Moreover, the designs of wooden plaques lately have also adopted Adinkra symbols. For instance, African institutions of late present Adinkra-designed plaques to individuals and entities, as gifts and awards for splendid performances.

Woodcarvers as at today, still design stools for domestic as well as traditional purposes with these popular symbols. In Akan traditional homes, stools often known as 'asesedwa' are carved out of wood with these designs. Today as a unique of catching up with the west, local artisans have modernized their design of home furniture placed in areas like the living room, dining room and the study. Beautiful and attractive-looking sets are being carved daily. A common example is wooden coffee-table, which has an Adinkra symbol like 'sankofa' at the base with a glass plane on the surface.

Hence it is ordinary to see the prolific use of Adinkra in fine and visual art because of the inherent artistic merits they possess. In present day, the use of symbols for trademarks and emblems cannot be over-emphasized. In corporate branding and marketing, many institutions have resorted to the use of symbols, both tactile and visual, as a mark of exclusivity and Adinkra are symbols of no exception. There are countless examples of institutions of all sorts who have adopted these symbols as logos, emblem, etc.

In Ghana, for instance, a corporate institution like HFC Bank uses the symbol ‘ ebankese’ as its corporate logo. Interestingly, Vodafone Ghana has designed their recharge cards such that whichever denomination has a long strip Adinkra symbols in front of the card. A popular plastics company by name ‘ Strong Plast Ltd’ also uses the popular symbol, ‘ Gye Nyame’ as a brand name for its plastic chairs. A very popular flour mill also uses ‘ sankofa’ as the brand name of its flour. On a lighter side, along the coastal area it is fun to see fishermen decorate their canoes with these symbols as an interesting way of ownership.