

Process and Materials

Clara Nartey uses a multi-media approach to her art making. Drawing on her African heritage, she employs varying techniques to create textured portraits.

She begins by painting the form of the human figure on a digital device. She then creates fabrics for dressing up her figures by combining intricate repeating motifs with bold color palettes. The patterns and figure forms are then printed onto fabrics.

Nartey carefully chooses the motifs and symbols she uses specifically for storytelling purposes, in order to give multi-layered meanings to her works. Her textile designs are reminiscent of African fabrics like kente, mud cloth and adinkra cloth.

Next, Nartey uses the techniques of quilting to construct a structure made up of layers of fiber materials – cotton, and polyester - underneath the printed fabric. This enables it to withstand the hours of high speed machine stitching that is to follow.

At the sewing machine, Nartey manually guides the sewing machine needle to sew patterns on the printed fabric while moving the multi-layer fiber construction around to ensure that patterns are stitched exactly where she wants them. Of particular interest to Nartey during the sewing process, is creating patterns which feature the figure's hair style as an important component of her composition, to highlight other significant details, and to transform an otherwise smooth printed fabric surface into textured works of art.