Emmett & White
ANTIQUES & INTERIORS

Zulu Beaded Isigege Apron, Circa 1920

£145

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Description

One important correction: an *isigege* is traditionally a Zulu beaded apron or girdle, not a medicine bag. Colour meanings can vary by region and design, but blue, white, and pink are widely associated with loyalty, love, and poverty respectively. [Museums Victoria reference](https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/16600)

A finely beaded Zulu isigege , or ceremonial apron/girdle, from KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, dating to circa 1920. Carefully constructed from coloured glass beads, this intimate and richly expressive work belongs to the long tradition of Zulu beadwork, in which pattern, colour, and form could communicate personal feeling, social identity, and matters of courtship.

The isigege was traditionally worn by young Zulu women and formed part of a highly meaningful language of dress. Rather than serving as simple ornament, beadwork could convey messages that were understood within a particular social and regional context. The colours on this example have traditionally been read as a message of loyalty, love, and love that endures despite poverty: a moving expression of devotion, affection, and constancy.

Each bead has been placed by hand to create a precise geometric composition, demonstrating the remarkable patience, skill, and visual intelligence of the maker. The clarity of the design and the powerful contrast of coloured beads make the piece compelling both as a work of textile art and as a record of personal communication.

Now over a century old, this isigege retains a direct connection to the social and artistic traditions of Zulu women's beadwork. It would make an important addition to a collection of Southern African art, historic beadwork, ethnographic textiles, or decorative objects with a strong human story.

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