

CLOSE-LOOKING EXERCISE



Atong Atem, *Fruit of the Earth*, 2016
Digital C-print on Dibond, 45 x 30 in.
Tang purchase, 2017.12

CLOSE-LOOKING EXERCISE: ATONG ATEM

Look closely: Examine the image closely.

Investigate: Take about 10–15 minutes to write down and/or discuss your observations. Here are some things to think about to help you get started:

- What are some elements in this photograph that make it similar or different from other portraits that you have seen?
- What could the decorative features, such as face paint and jewelry, signify in this photograph? How does design and ornamentation reflect identity?
- Why do you think the artist included flowers and fruit surrounding the face? What type of symbols or metaphors could these elements reference?
- The artist digitally added color to a black-and-white photograph. Why didn't the artist simply take a color photograph instead? What are possible meanings in this intentional decision by the artist to add color to some areas but not others?
- Why do you think the figure has her eyes closed? How does looking at a portrait with closed eyes affect you, the viewer? If you were the sitter, why might you pose with your eyes closed?

Explain your ideas about the artwork, including how you understand the image and why. What are you seeing that leads you to those ideas? Back up your ideas with visual evidence from the image. Ask yourself and others: What do you see that makes you say that?

Refer back to the image and look closer. What more can you find?

Reflect: What have you discovered from looking closely and writing and/or discussing the artwork with others? What did you discover about how you unpack and understand this portrait?

- What could the artist be saying about what is visible and what is not? What is seen and what is not being seen?
- The artist is South Sudanese and *Fruit of the Earth* is a self-portrait. Thinking about visibility, what could the artist be discussing in terms of representation of people of color by people of color?
- How does this work and the ideas opened up by this work relate to what's going on in your community and in the world today?
- What connections can you make from this work and our world right now or from history?