

DIGITAL AGNES

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Alone in the Crowd?

Agnes Learns
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SPEAKERS

Jessica Endress

KEYWORDS

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TRANSCRIPT

Jessica Endress: Have you ever felt alone in a crowd?

Emebet Belete's works *Enkutatash #12* and *Contemplation* investigate the juxtaposition of our inner self, and our relationship with our community.

Writing about Belete's exhibition *Turning Back: Filaments of Renewal* curator Sebastian De Line remarks that Belete's work "Vacillat[es] between participant and observer...transpos[ing] relationships between inclusion and exclusion while mediating private life or public-facing expectations."

The figure in Belete's painting *Enkutatash #12* faces away from the viewer, creating an air of mystery, revealing only her headscarf, or what is called "shash" in Amharic, and silver hoop earrings. The thick, expressive brushstrokes and subtle shading gives a sense of intensity to the figure, which suggests to me that she is the protagonist of the exhibition.

In contrast, *Contemplation's* figures stand huddled together, yet turned away. Are we observers in this crowd? Do we belong to the crowd? For me, the sense of mysterious introspection gives way to the feeling of isolation, of being an outsider looking in... perhaps even of longing to be part of this collective of people.

The paintings in this exhibition were inspired by Belete's experience at the Enkutatash (Ethiopian New Year's) celebration at Christie Pits Park in Toronto. Are there any community gatherings that you participate in to connect to your culture? What other ways do you connect with your community? With your heritage and family?