

Model Artist Newsletter

Sisavanh Phouthavong-Houghton



FIGURE 1 Sisavanh Phouthavong-Houghton, *Displacement: Sandra Phengvongsa*, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 36 in. (60.96 x 91.44 cm), 2004.

Source: Courtesy of the artist; www.sisavanhphouthavong.com.



FIGURE 2 Sisavanh Phouthavong-Houghton, *Displacement: Chris Phouthavong*, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 36 in. (60.96 x 91.44 cm), 2004.

Source: Courtesy of the artist; www.sisavanhphouthavong.com.

Big Idea: Displacement

Sisavanh Phouthavong-Houghton is a painter. In 1976, she was born in a country named Laos. She and her family moved to the United States four years later. They lived in Winfield, Kansas. In the United States, she felt like she belonged to two different cultures. At home she spoke Laotian. She spoke English everywhere else.

In 2004, shortly after earning her Master of Fine Arts degree, Phouthavong-Houghton made paintings titled *Displacement*. They show pictures of Laotian-Americans who changed their names legally. She learned about the people in her portraits by asking them questions about what it was like to live in a different country. She also examined the photographs on their citizenship certificates.

To make people look at her Laotian-American portraits, she built the *Displacement* canvases to project 5-inches (12 cm) away from the wall. She filled their portraits with colorful Ben-Day dots. Printers use these dots to make pictures in magazines and newspapers. The dots give her work the look of cartoon characters. They also abstract the Laotian-Americans' portraits, thereby removing part of their identity.

Through her research she learned that the Laotian-Americans in her study changed their names for different reasons. A few did so because some Americans felt frustrated when they could not say their names. Others changed their names because it seemed easier to do. The rest were given American names by Americans as they were growing up and got used to hearing them.

What Is Displacement?

A change, shift, or move that has a bad feeling associated with it. It may make a person feel out of place, foreign, different, misplaced, homeless, and/or cultureless.

Reading Questions

1. Who is Sisavanh Phouthavong-Houghton?
2. Where was she born?
3. When did she move to the United States?
4. What does displacement mean?
5. What are Ben-Day dots?
6. Why did Phouthavong-Houghton use Ben-Day dots in *Displacement*?
7. Why do you think she named her paintings *Displacement*?
8. Have you ever changed your name? Do you go by a nickname? Why do you think people change their names?

Artist Facts

- Phouthavong-Houghton was born in 1976 in Vientiane, Laos.
- She moved to Winfield, Kansas with her family at the age of 4.
- She studied painting.
- She created the *Displacement* series in 2004.
- She was inspired by American Pop Artist Roy Lichtenstein's *Ben Day Dots*.

