

USC PAM Distance Learning Program
Contemporary Asian Art and Artists Response

Pre-visit lesson: Family, Memory, and Displacement

Grades: 9-12

Time: 1-2 class periods

Essential Questions:

- How do political issues, like war and resulting displacement, impact personal and family histories and identities?
- What does it mean to know someone? Do we need to physically meet a person to know them?
- How do artists use their personal experiences to shed light on issues that affect large groups of people?

Key Concepts/Vocabulary/Art Elements:

Portraits, memory, displacement, refugee, diaspora, source material, collage

Materials:

Computer/tablet, glue, scissors, collage materials (magazines, junk mail, newspaper, family photos or copies), card stock (such as from a cereal box)

Artworks in Focus:

- Ann Le, *Faux Family Album: Family Portrait I* (2011)
- Ann Le, *Faux Family Album :Grandparents* (2018)
- Phung Huynh, *Hao Vuong Huynh* (2019)
- Phung Huynh, *Hoa Bang Huynh*, (2019)
- Phung Huynh, *Phung Xuan Huynh*, (2019)

Notes and Tips for Teachers:

- Assign partners prior to starting the lesson. The pair sharing can be done via written chat or in a pre-assigned video break out groups.
- You can assign students to look at the art and answer the questions in writing independently, then come together as a group and share everyone's thoughts.
- When discussing an artwork together, use an annotation feature to point out details students mention on the screen

- Ask students to prepare materials before and allow 20-30 minutes for students to do the art activity. Doing the activity individually while on a video meeting will help create a sense of community with students. Ideas can be shared as they are working.

Looking at, Talking, and Writing about Art

Part I:

Take a close look at Ann Le's photographs *Family Portrait I* and *Grandparents*. What do you notice about them? Do the compositions of people in front of houses remind you of anything you've seen or experienced before? Can you find the subtle visual differences between the people and the houses? Do they look like they are from the same time and place or are they somehow different?

Think Pair Share:

These images are part of a series called *Home: Faux Family Photo Album*. With a partner, discuss the following:

- What similarities and differences do you notice between these photos and other family albums you have seen?
- What observations can you make about the people's facial expressions? What about their body language?
- Are there any clues that tell you when and where these photos were taken?
- What can all of these elements say about their family and social culture?

Write down your answers and share some observations with the whole group.

Learn More:

Artist Ann Le creates her images by digitally scanning and manipulating old photographs of her extended family in Vietnam with photographs of middle class houses in San Diego, CA, where she was born and grew up. Many Vietnamese families have been displaced and separated from each other following the Vietnam War (1955-1975). Le's parents were **refugees**, meaning they were forced to escape their home country due to war, persecution, or natural disaster.

With your partner, consider the following:

- Why do you think the artist creates these *faux*, or fake, family albums?
- Do you think she knows the people in the photographs personally?
- Why might she not have current photos of them in front of their actual houses?
- Can you think of other historical events that have displaced families from their native lands to foreign ones? What do you think happened to their family albums?

Part II:

Now, take a look at the three images by Phung Huynh. With the whole groups discuss the following:

- How would you describe the people's expressions?
- Do you think they are connected in some way? What do you see that makes you say that?
- What materials do you think the artist is using to make these artworks? Do you think it is significant to the meaning of the work? Why or why not?

Learn More:

Artist Phung Huynh creates art that inspires viewers to think about society's role in forming how we see ourselves and each other. She draws from her multi-cultural heritage of survival and migration as a Vietnam War refugee. The three artworks are drawings based on mugshots of her parents and herself as a baby in a Cambodian refugee camp. They are part of a larger series by the artist of portraits of influential Vietnamese and Cambodian Americans drawn on flat, un-folded pink donut boxes.

The pink donut box has a unique history in Southern California. Many Cambodian refugees found their livelihoods by opening donut shops that helped members of the community survive and thrive in their new home. Legend has it that one shop owner was looking for a way to save money on boxes so that money could be used for better ingredients. The box manufacturer sold them pink boxes and the rest is regional history.

Part III:

In a short essay (1-2 paragraphs) compare and contrast the two artist's responses to their personal and familial refugee experiences. Consider the following questions in your writing:

- What similarities do you notice between the approaches Le and Huynh took in creating art about the refugee experience? What differences do you notice?
- How does the artists' choice of medium (photography and drawing) help them bring their message across?
- How do both artists reference memory in their work?
- What is the artists' *source material*, or information/imagery used to create their original artwork? How does it inform their work?

Learn More:

Both Ann Le and Phung Huynh are contemporary artists living and working in Los Angeles. These artworks are part of a special exhibition at USC PAM called, *We Are Here: Contemporary Art and Asian Voices in Los Angeles*. The exhibition celebrates the diverse Asian **diaspora** in this city, where residents have sought fresh new opportunities, arriving as refugees, economic migrants, students, or professionals. The exhibition features seven female artists who embody the vitality of the city's Asian populations. Each of them speaks to the fluidity of an individual's sense of place and self. Their artworks

spark important conversations about the creation of art, memory, and meaning in complex social and cultural spaces. The galleries are interwoven with narratives that give voice to L.A. while simultaneously speaking to the transnational reality of life in the twenty-first century.

You can see all of the featured artists and learn more about the exhibition on the museum's website (link in resources below).

Activity: Collage

Think about your own family history and how you got to where you live now. Were any of your family members migrants, refugees, or immigrants? Or are you indigenous to this land? What was their, or your, experience of coming to (or living) in this country?

Create a collage that shows your personal response to the refugee, migrant, or immigrant experience. As you are creating your artwork, imagine being in someone else's shoes. Imagine what they felt like taking this journey, what their hopes and dreams were, and how they overcame challenges.

A **collage** is an artwork that uses found pictures and pieces of paper glued to a flat surface to create a new image. Ann Le creates digital collages, but the concept of overlapping different images to create a new one goes back over a century.

Steps and tips for making your collage:

- Use a piece of cardstock as your collage surface (where you will glue the pictures). This can be any size you have available and can be made by cutting the side of a boxed product, like cereal.
- You can use family photos, magazine pictures, newspapers, or even drawing. Consider using figurative images (pictures of people) overlapping unfamiliar landscapes.
- You can use words, either cut out or written by hand.
- Cut out and arrange all your pieces before glueing them. Move things around until you find a composition that looks best.

Reflection

- What did you discover in your artmaking process?
- Do you have any new thoughts or questions about the migrant experience?
- How has your own family's experience of arriving in this country influenced you and your way of life?
- In what ways do you think our society can be more supportive of refugees and people displaced from their homelands?

Tips, Modifications, and Extensions

- Students can create a digital collage using computer software or their phones.
- Students can research the artists by reviewing the resources prior to writing (artists' website, museum documentaries, exhibition website, etc.)
- Students can use the exhibition as inspiration to make digital presentations. They can select a theme and research the artists whose work connects to it. The presentation can conclude with their original digital collage.

Curriculum Connections

CCSS for ELA – Writing Standards for 6-12

W.9-12.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)

W.9-12.7 - Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS for ELA – Speaking and Listening Standards for 6-12

SL.9-12.1. - Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively

National Core Arts Standards

HS Proficient

VA:Cr1.2.1a - Shape an artistic investigation of an aspect of present day life using a contemporary practice

VA:Cr2.1.1a - Engage in making a work of art or design without having a preconceived plan.

VA:Re.7.1.1a - Hypothesize ways in which art influences perception and understanding of human experiences.

VA:Re8.1.1a - Interpret an artwork or collection of works, supported by relevant and sufficient evidence found in the work and its various contexts.

VA:Cn11.1.1a - Describe how knowledge of culture, traditions, and history may influence personal responses to art.

Resources

- *We Are Here* exhibition website: <https://pacificasiamuseum.usc.edu/exhibitions/current/we-are-here-contemporary-art-and-asian-voices-in-los-angeles/>
- USC PAM Short Documentary on artist Ann Le
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HD17iSVZGQU&feature=emb_logo
- Ann Le's Artist Website <https://annle.net/>
- USC PAM Short Documentary on artist Phung Huyng
https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=5i3WVkpZTG4&feature=emb_logo
- Phung Huynh's Artist Website: <http://www.phunghuynh.com/about.html>
- Information on Vietnamese Diaspora <https://www.pilotguides.com/study-guides/vietnamese-diaspora/>



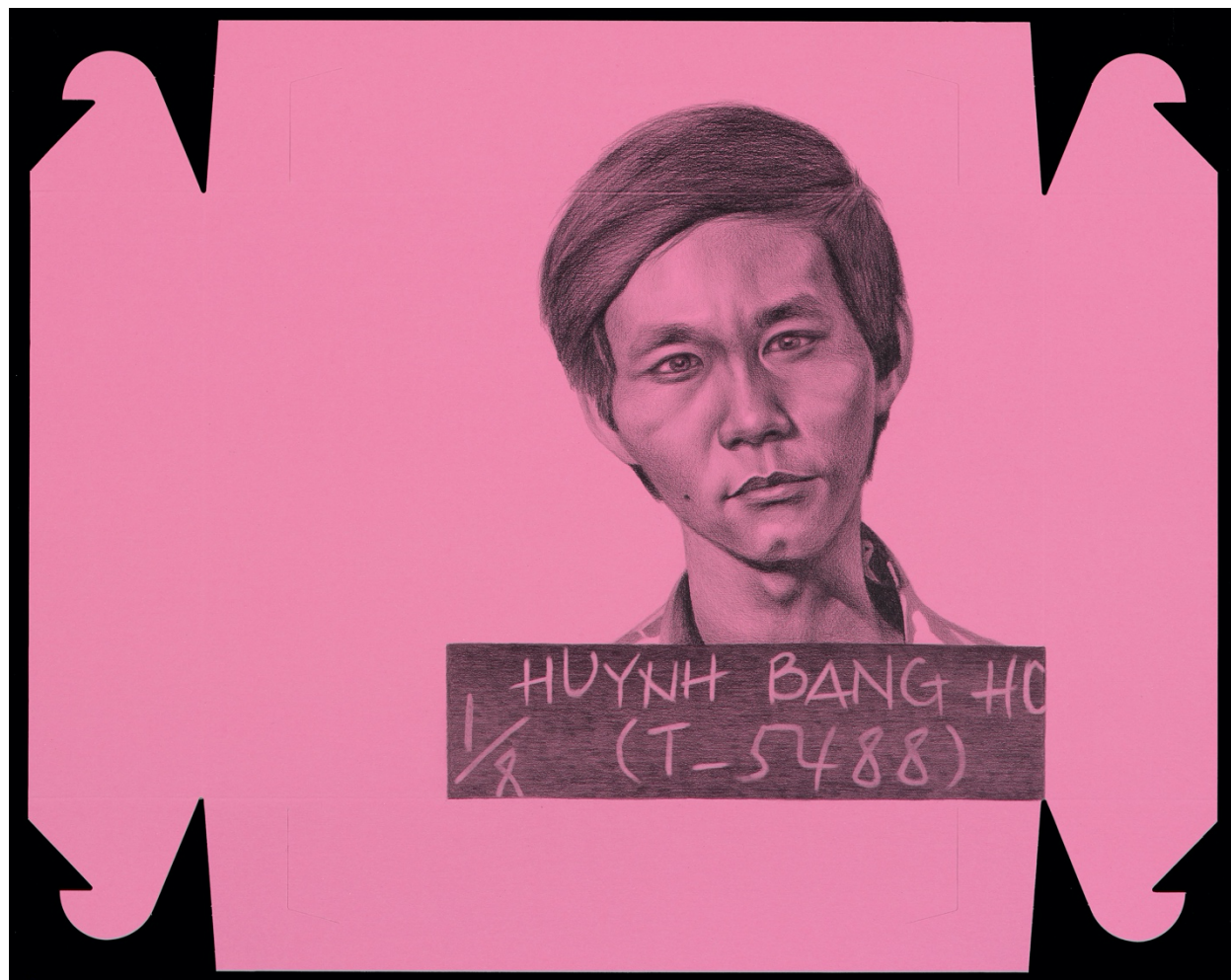
Ann Le
Family Portrait I, 2011
Archival Pigment Print
Courtesy of the artist



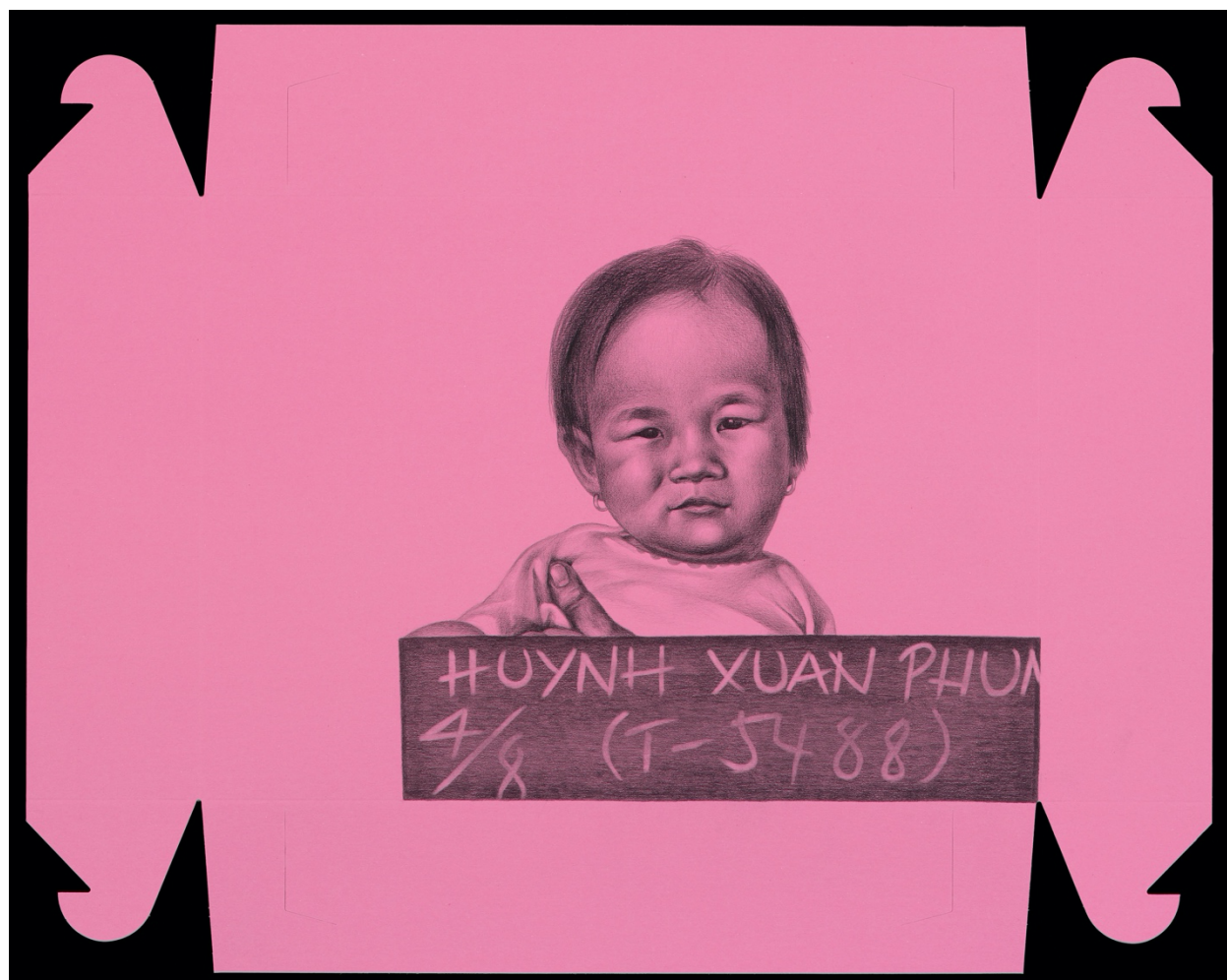
Ann Le
Grandparents, 2018
Archival Pigment Print
Courtesy of the artist



Phung Huynh
Hao Vuong Huynh
Graphite on pink donut box
Courtesy of the artist



Phung Huynh
Hoa Bang Huynh
Graphite on pink donut box
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Phung Xuan Huynh
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