

Moving with the Military

Permanent Change of Station, Zoë Charlton



Zoë Charlton. *Permanent Change of Station*. 2022. Collage on wood panel; and graphite, gouache, and collage on paper. 73 1/8 x 195 3/4 x 120 1/4 in. (185.7 x 497.2 x 305.4 cm) and 82 x 211 1/4 in. (208.3 x 536.6 cm). Courtesy the artist

What landscapes remind you of home?

The Great Migration was the movement of nearly six million Black Americans from the South to the North and West between 1915 and 1970. Like many others, Zoë Charlton's family turned to the military to seek economic and educational opportunities and escape the oppression and racism they faced in southern states. But while many people left the South, others stayed. Zoë's grandmother put down roots in North Florida and remained there for her life. In Zoë's installation, entitled *Permanent Change of Station*, her grandmother's house, a blue bungalow, appears in the middle of the artwork as what the artist calls "a marker of stability to herself and her family."

This three-dimensional artwork blurs reality and the imaginary. Rows of flowering trees stand in front of Southeast Asian rice fields and Floridian Spanish moss, creating a mix of plants not often found in the same environment. This lush landscape reflects Zoë's Florida roots as well as the flora her relatives saw in their migrant experience, overseas military service, and global travels.

Enlisting in the military did offer a path away from the South, but many Black veterans continued to encounter segregation, racism, and systemic oppression after their service. Levittown, Pennsylvania, for example, was one of many suburban living communities created for veterans returning home after World War I (1914–1918), but it was built exclusively for white families. In the installation, a Black female figure dressed in American military attire prepares to launch a toy cargo plane towards Levittown.

Classroom Activities

- Invite students to make pop-up artwork inspired by Zoë Charlton's installation. The artist grew up moving wherever her father was stationed. Flora and fauna from the different regions she called home and from where her family members were stationed are included in *Permanent Change of Station*. Ask students to include plants, animals, and objects from places that remind them of home.

[wikihow.com/Make-a-Pop-Up-Card](https://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Pop-Up-Card)

- Zoë's grandmother chose to stay in Florida while the rest of her family moved north. Instruct students to ask their elders about their migration story. If they don't know their migration story or if the family chose to stay in one place, encourage students to ask why. Have students write a paragraph about their family's story to share with the class. Extension: plot points on a map indicating where student's families have lived.

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