

through with strips bearing the names and colors of marketing, red, blue, yellow, white, black, cutting into their bodies with a dangerous and provocative beauty. Like gazing into a shattered mirror, the iconic photographs speak to a

past that threatens to be endlessly repeated. The horrific pictures of a man with a gun to his head, *Doi Moi (Têt Offensive street execution)*, is similarly woven with labels urging us to buy, eat, consume, even as the tragedy unfolds. Other, less dramatic weavings, mix the product images with Buddhist ones, inviting a comparison between victims of violence and enlightened beings, and between the diffusive powers of political and spiritual images.

With *The Imaginary Country*, Lê ventures into new territory, effectively integrating his practiced

technique with newer media and collaboration. The result feels not entirely unified, yet offers more depth, reflection, and, like the actors in the video remind us, the eternal promise of return, albeit to a place or time that will never be entirely the same.

—Annie Buckley

Dinh Q. Lê: *The Imaginary Country* closed in October at Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Santa Monica.

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Dinh Q. Lê, *Doi Moi (napalmed girl)*, 2006, C-print, linen tape, 55-1/2" x 78-1/8", at Shoshana Wayne Gallery, Santa Monica.

Where are they going? Will they return? Is this an escape to freedom, a daily trek, or a move toward death? To the artists' credit, the questions remain largely unanswered. One clue, however, is provided in the video on the opposite wall. Here, individual young men and women stand full frame, larger than life, and relate various their various experiences of visiting Vietnam. For some it was a homecoming, years after fleeing the war as children. For others it was a first encounter with the land of their cultural heritage. At times touching, funny and frustrating, the straightforward nature of the camera provides a counterpoint to the enigmatic and opposing—literally and figuratively—*The Imaginary Country*. As a whole, the unfolding projection spurs thoughts of new refugees from conflicts around the world, and the ongoing process leaving and rebuilding.

The nearby color photographs of clam pickers are beautiful, but do not substantiate the ideas in the video and, in some ways, provide a too simple explanation. The artist saw these workers on the beach in Vietnam while filming. Their movements echo those of the figures in the video, but mystery is replaced by practicality and the intriguing questions meet too fast a response.

In another area of the gallery, several large woven photographs intermingle giant, brightly colored images of the ubiquitous "stuff" of consumerism—chips, soda, candy, wrappers, containers, labels—with images now burned into our brain from Vietnam-era photojournalism. The effect is startling and provides emphasis where the video had depth. *Doi Moi (napalmed girl)* contains the ghostlike apparitions of the three napalmed girls running naked towards a likely death. The images of their bodies are woven

Dinh Q. Lê at Shoshana Wayne Gallery

If not careful or inventive, an artist can fall into the trap of repeating oneself. But Dinh Q. Lê, known for his striking photoweavings, shows that he is not afraid to branch out. In this recent exhibition, woven pieces remain, but are buoyed, to various degrees of success, by photographs and a four-channel video installation, *The Imaginary Country*. Like two sides of a whole, the different media create a dialogue around the cycle of loss and repatriation that goes hand in hand with the violence of war. The two sets of works almost seem to be by different artists, and in a sense they are; Lê collaborated with Nguyen Andrew Tuan and Ha Thuc Phu Nam on the ambitious and evocative video installation. In the other half of the gallery, excellent new photoweavings blend the profound and the trivial. These works punctuate the subtle and dreamy sensibility of the video, creating an interesting reflection on consumption and redemption.

The Imaginary Country consists of two video projections on opposite walls. In the larger one, three panels of video shift

