

# ARTnews

reviews: new york

## Dinh Q. Lê

### P.P.O.W.

Dinh Q. Lê was born in Vietnam near the Cambodian border. In 1978, shortly after the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, his family immigrated to Los Angeles; he now divides his time between Vietnam and the U.S. For two decades, he has been known for his photoweavings, made using a traditional Vietnamese grass-weaving technique. These works, which intermix strips cut



Dinh Q. Lê, *The Scroll of Thich Quang Duc*, 2013. C-print scroll and gold-leaf lacquer box, 150". P.P.O.W.

photos of both the Vietnam War and recent conflicts with images from Hollywood films and documentaries, blend history and memory, atrocity and nostalgia, fixation and amnesia. At the same time, these barely decipherable woven images bear witness to the other side of the American War, as it is called in Vietnam.

This exhibition, aptly titled "Warp. Woof. Zero. One," documented the artist's transition from making handmade objects to using digital technology. While the woven photoworks have always signified a fragmented vision, these new works—using stretched and manipulated Photoshopped digital images—verge on digital dissolution and patterned pixelation.

The focus of Gallery I was *The Last of the Alchemists* (2013), a long silver-leaf lacquer box on the floor that entombed a virgin roll of chemical color photographic paper—never to be exposed to light or developed. Photoweavings on the walls incorporating pictures of the Sistine Chapel and faces of war survivors trailed off at their bottoms into fringes of unwoven paper. These fixed images of lost identities and cultural memories, verging on amnesia, exist in a

chemical-based technology that is threatening to become obsolete.

Gallery II contained the highlight of this show: *The Scroll of Thich Quang Duc* (2013). The 150-foot-long C-print turns a digitally stretched image of a Buddhist monk who has publicly immolated himself into a river of flame that flows off the wall and ripples across the gallery floor. A gold-leaf lacquer box—a counterpart to the silver-leaf one—houses the scroll when it's not on display.

Transforming silver into gold, the artist has transmuted the first box's homage to an obsolete medium into an incorruptible memorial to a horrific suicidal protest.

Gallery III featured *WTC in Four Moments* (2014), a four-channel video with ambient sound. The vertical stripes on the four monitors are abstracted images of the World Trade Center, depicted before the attack, during it, after the collapse, and during rebuilding. Digitized, stretched, and scrolling ever downward, the images are altered beyond recognition, thanks to a computer program called *After Effects*. They signify smoke, fire, ashes, and rebirth—seared in memory but lost to representation.

—Kim Levin