ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICK

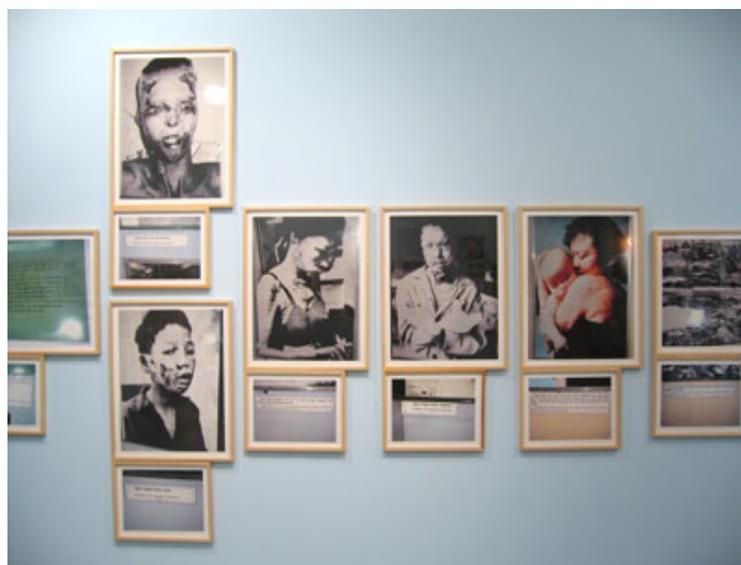### Harrell Fletcher

WHITE COLUMNS
320 West 13th Street (entrance on Horatio St.)
May 05–June 10

It's difficult to recommend this exhibition, which documents with painful specificity the horrors of the Vietnam War. Nearly one whole wall is taken up demonstrating the effects of Agent Orange; in one horrifying image, a soldier nonchalantly dangles part of a body blown apart by shells. Nonetheless, the show has a gripping quality quite apart from the spell of violence it weaves.

Fletcher, on a visit to Vietnam last year, found himself at the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City and was so affected by it that he photographed the entire museum—each image and each caption—with his digital camera. The bootlegged museum has been partly reassembled here, and the irony of the layers of distance (a museum halfway around the world collects mass-media images that are then rephotographed by an American artist and imported back) is immediately evident. The gallery becomes an echo chamber for the tiny voice of the country that took the beating of America's war.

Still, this exhibition has more to recommend it than irony; more, even, than impeccable politics (at earlier venues, Fletcher organized community events around veterans and Vietnamese living in America who want to tell their stories). The sense that one knows precisely what the artist is up to—a neat reversal of the official narrative—dissipates; the images are terribly hard to walk away from. Something of the artist's fascination with them has been communicated through his stealthy photographic act; the distance from the original is collapsed by the subjective way the images were shot (taken slightly aslant, flash flares often visible). Fletcher's project, both repellent and endearing, poses questions similar to those asked by Alfredo Jaar's art, but here the artist brings you along with him as he ponders the answers.

—*Emily Hall*

Installation view from Harrell Fletcher's 'The American War'