

ALL THE DALAI LAMAS ARE IN ZURICH

The Dalai Lama represents an institution that dates back several centuries and is unique in the world today: it is a reincarnation lineage at the intersection of spirituality and politics. Two exhibitions at the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich examine the lives of the 14 Dalai Lamas who make up the lineage.

Although the world learned a lot about Tibet after the rapid and painful opening of the country that followed the Chinese invasion in 1950, much of this information never received widespread attention. The 14th Dalai Lama, Nobel Peace laureate Tenzin Gyatso, symbolizes this situation in all its complexity: he is not only the leader of the Tibetan people but also one of most revered personalities in the world. At the same time he is a monk and a refugee who is blacklisted by the Chinese government whose intransigence has forced him into political activity.

Surprisingly, no one has yet taken a closer look at the unique, centuries-old institution of the Dalai Lamas and their 14 reincarnations. The two exhibitions in Zurich with their exclusive focus on the Dalai Lamas break new ground and represent a significant international cultural event.

The 14 Dalai Lamas

Tibetan reincarnations of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara

The main exhibition on the 1st floor of the Ethnographic Museum presents the 600-year history of Tibet as personified by a single line of some of its leading historical figures. Displayed in a succession of rooms and smaller spaces are historic treasures that relate to each of the 14 men who have wielded spiritual and secular power. The most esteemed among them, due to their sacred and worldly significance, were well-documented in their own lifetime and are given more space in the exhibition. These include the "Great Fifth" (1617-1682); the forward looking and reform-minded "Thirteenth" (1876-1933); and the current "Fourteenth" (born 1935). The exhibits, some seen for the first time, include rare items such as a set of seven delicate paintings; a set of throne room accessories; objects from the estate of the 14th Dalai Lama; a gift presented to Tsar Nicholas II by the 13th Dalai Lama; a seven-foot statue of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva the Dalai Lamas are said to be reincarnations of; pages from the 5th Dalai Lama's 'Secret Biography'; and a scroll documenting the life and enthronement of the 9th Dalai Lama (1806-1815).

20 museums, 20 private collectors, 16 authors

Almost 20 private collectors and an equal number of museums - including the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, the Musée Guimet in Paris, Basel's Museum der Kulturen (Essen-Collection), the Ethnographic Museum of Stockholm (Sven Hedin-Collection), the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Royal Collection

of Elizabeth II.), and the Rubin Museum of Art in New York – have loaned works for the show. From its own holdings the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich is showing five very delicate scrolls, recently restored, depicting the Dalai Lamas 2 to 6 from the Heinrich Harrer Collection and – from a private collection - a set of seven newly discovered scrolls depicting the first nine Dalai Lamas. “The Dalai Lamas”, a lavishly illustrated volume with articles by 16 well-known authors accompanies the exhibition (Martin Brauen, editor; Serindia Publications, Chicago, 304 pages, 350 illustrations, including a 7- page accordion-style fold out with a series of images and a historical print).

Photography Exhibition

“His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama – Journey to Peace”.

The photography exhibition on the 2nd floor of the Ethnographic Museum, from August 4, 2005 through January 8, 2006, features the work of Manuel Bauer, a Swiss photographer and a Tibet specialist. Culled from some 75'000 mostly black and white photographs of the 14th Dalai Lama, taken between 2001 and 2004 in Dharamsala and all around the world, Bauer's photographs document the Tenzin Gyatso's dedication to the Tibetan people and to world peace. The eponymous book of photographs with text by Matthieu Ricard and Christian Schmidt is published by Scalo Books.

Main exhibition:

The 14 Dalai Lamas – Tibetan Reincarnations of Bodhisattva

Avalokiteshvara, August 4, 2005, through April 30, 2006.

(Curator: Martin Brauen; assistant curators: Amy Heller and Michael Henss; staff: Dario Donati and Renate Koller.)

Photography exhibition:

“The 14th Dalai Lama – Journey to Peace”

by Manuel Bauer, August 4, 2005, through January 8, 2006.

Hours:

Tue-Fri 10-13 and 14-17; Sat 14-17; Sun 11-17.

Closed Mondays.

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www.musethno.unizh.ch and www.diedalailamas.ch

(text by Urs Haller and Martin Brauen)