

TURIN

## Paola Pivi

CASTELLO DI RIVOLI

Paola Pivi's exhibition "Tulkus 1880 to 2018" was open to various levels of interpretation, full of the interweaving articulations and nuances that characterize the larger project of which it is a part. This show represented only the initial phase of a program comprising a number of exhibitions that will unfold over the next six years, with the second stage currently taking place at the Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam. This exhibition takes on the tradition in Tibetan Buddhism surrounding a *tulku*, the recognized reincarnation of a great master. Often the tulku, having achieved a high level of spiri-



tual and intellectual realization, is able to identify the circumstances of his own rebirth—both the place and the person—and to communicate these through encoded messages to other masters, who are charged with indicating the prechosen subject, generally a child. Once identified, the latter must undergo tests that validate his recognition as the tulku of the previous master, a title assigned during an official ceremony.

Since the late nineteenth century, many tulkus have been portrayed through photography. The oldest-known tulku photograph, which was included in the show, dates from circa 1873. In collecting and displaying this imagery, Pivi has created an iconographic repertory both varied and unexpected, resulting in a visual manifestation of the concepts of association and perception so central to her practice. In other words: How does the semantic value of images of things and individuals vary in relation to the form of their presentation? And to what extent does our ability to assimilate their content—intellectually or even, perhaps, physically—depend on the syntactic apparatus that explicates them?

As is typical of the artist, Pivi has for this project entrusted the execution of her ideas to others, emphasizing, perhaps even more than usual, the universal nature of her material precisely by virtue of her separation from it. She did not take any of the more than one thousand

photographs she collected (approximately seven hundred of which were exhibited in this first show), and for the most part she did not commission them. She has collected and selected these images according to criteria that are historical and philological, but also profoundly plastic and pictorial: These are images capable of involving the viewer, both rationally and emotionally. And herein lies the work's magic. One needed only to walk through Castello di Rivoli's Manica Lunga gallery, some four hundred fifty feet long, to realize that the installation, resembling a cross between an old-fashioned salon-style picture gallery and the grand hall of some ethno-anthropological museum, struck both mind and eye. The image of the sacred was thematically articulated not only in terms of its cultural coordinates, but also in terms of its pictorial, perspectival, and compositional elements, strengthening its capacity for meaning with innumerable spurs to inspiration.

—Pier Paolo Pancotto

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.