

Disciples of a Crazy Saint: Photographing the Buchen of Spiti



Patrick Sutherland

4.30-6pm, Monday 14 February, 2011

CRASSH, 17 Mill Lane, Cambridge

The Buchen of Spiti in the Indian Himalayas are performers of rituals, actors and disciples of the fourteenth / fifteenth-century "crazy saint" Thang Tong Gyalpo. They are renowned for performing an elaborate exorcism called the *Ceremony of Breaking the Stone*. They also enact a local form of the Tibetan Opera for village audiences. These Buddhist morality plays illustrate the principles of karma and ideas of impermanence but also offer a space for uninhibited speech and earthy humour. Photographer Patrick Sutherland has been photographing the Buchen for many years. When he recently gave them some prints he was told that they were so awful that the performers had torn them up and thrown them in the fire. *Disciples of a Crazy Saint* describes Sutherland's further return to Spiti to investigate Buchen ideas about photography and to negotiate a form of documentation more appropriate to the Buchen self-image as specialist religious practitioners.

Patrick Sutherland is a documentary photographer and Reader in Photojournalism at the University of the Arts London. He has been photographing in Spiti since 1993 and his work has been exhibited and published internationally. A book entitled Spiti: The Forbidden Valley with an essay by Tibetan filmmaker Tenzing Sonam and a dedication by Henri Cartier-Bresson was published in 2000. Disciples of a Crazy Saint was funded by a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, with project partnership from the Pitt Rivers Museum, where it is being exhibited until 3 July, 2011.

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