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Epic Art Crescendoes at ACCA

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

By Katya Wachtel,
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Only a few days remain to view the blockbuster all-video exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

With all eyes recently on large-scale art events such as *Melbourne Now* and *White Night*, it's easy to let those exhibitions you've been meaning to get to slip through the cracks of your calendar. It's highly possible that *Crescendo*, the current video exhibition at ACCA – which wraps up this weekend – has been one of those oversights. While the number of works on show (just seven) is modest, the scope of the work is anything but. Featuring video projects from seven artists, *Crescendo* uses film and music to explore myth, history and ceremony; and to visually reflect the inevitability of life and death.

Take for instance *Nummer veertien, Home*, a 54-minute film by Dutch artist Guido van der Werve, who regularly incorporates epic feats of endurance into his work.

For the 2012 film, Van der Werve not only plays the role of cinematographer and composer, he's also the film's stupefying protagonist. Van der Werve completed the equivalent of seven-and-a-half Ironman triathlons to make the film, which follows his epic journey through Poland, Germany and France in an absurd yet magnificent tribute to his favourite composer, Frederic Chopin. It's an epic artwork in every sense of the word.

"You could never have made a work like Guido's [in earlier years]", says Juliana Engberg, ACCA's Artistic Director. According to her, video art, "has evolved greatly in the past 20-or-so years, from quite home-spun, DIY-looking 'moments' to full scale, almost cinematic-quality narratives with an arc."

While many artists can produce work in a variety of mediums, few utilise so many art forms in a singular work. Van der Werve and his *Crescendo* compatriots "do it all," Engberg says. Van der Werve's work in particular epitomises the original premise for the *Crescendo* exhibition: the 'gesamtkunstwerk', a 'total' or 'universal' work that combines various art forms.

Originally hatched as a side-program to the [Wagner Ring Cycle](#) operas performed in Melbourne late last year, the ‘gesamtkunstwerk’ idea hit a roadblock due to a lack of funding. However, “by then the show was forming, so I concentrated on the works that seemed to have the feeling of a total world,” Engberg says. “Each of the works in *Crescendo* delivers a quite complex set of entwinements.”

As for the title, *Crescendo*, Enberg says she picked it because she, “liked the idea of something building to a climax,” and because it also referenced the musicality of many of the works in the exhibition.

For his hypnotic video work, *Parade*, Hans Op de Beeck composed a waltz especially for the film, which he describes as a visual representation of life and death. Staged inside a theatre, “The red velvet curtain rises ... and then a seemingly never-ending, colorful procession of people walk past in slow motion, like passers-by on a street,” Op de Beeck explains in his catalogue essay.

“What matters is the journey, the adventure of our personal voyage, and not the final destination,” he writes. “Because let’s face it, that destination is ultimately the same for all of us.”

Crescendo shows at Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) until March 2. Entry is free.

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