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Review: Guido van der Werve gives heart and soul in video requiem

March 29, 2013 | By Christopher Knight, Los Angeles Times Art Critic

"Number fourteen, *home*" is an elaborate video requiem for the dead -- specifically for the great Romantic composer Frédéric Chopin but, by implication, for the entire network of cultural relations that made his work possible.

Dutch artist and composer Guido van der Werve enacts a metaphoric lament for an era that has passed into history. At Marc Foxx Gallery, the 54-minute video screens every hour on the hour.

In three movements and 12 acts, the artist performs a trans-European triathlon of swimming, bicycling and running from Warsaw, where Chopin grew up, to Paris, where he died of respiratory disease at 39. Chopin was buried at Père Lachaise cemetery, but legend has it that his heart was smuggled out of France and interred at Warsaw's Holy Cross Church. The video starts at one and ends at the other.

FULL COVERAGE: 2013 Spring arts preview

In between, the rigor of a modern athletic endurance test couldn't be more different from the theatrical soap opera that was Chopin's life, from his days as a child prodigy through chronic illnesses, including deep despair over unrequited love and tragic early death. Van Der Werve, who also composed the music, evokes the grandiosity and epic trauma in numerous ways: He sets himself on fire, explodes a house, drags a stringed orchestra and choir along with him on the journey and more.



Guido van der Werve's 54-minute video is a requiem for Chopin. (Marc Foxx Gallery)

He even intersperses bits of personal history into the narrative, plus elements of Alexander the Great's conquest of the known universe in the 4th century BC.

For all its lush eccentricity, this requiem is performed with the utmost respect. Typically the camera remains static, events both lyrical and spectacular unfolding within a fixed frame, or else it trails the athlete moving through fluid space.

A Minimalist ethos describes the continuity between the video's elaborate formal structure and its internal extravagance. Van Der Werve's finally touching art reunites heart and soul, mind and body, reversing the shredded disarray of a dislocated life.

Marc Foxx Gallery, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 857-5571, through April 20. Closed Sun. and Mon.
www.marccoxx.com

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