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Secession, Association of Visual Artists, Friedrichstrasse 12, A-1010 Vienna, 6 Jan 2014

Guido Van der Werve: at war with oneself



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Artist : Guido Van der Werve
Dimensions : Installation view at Secession 2013
Website : <http://www.secession.at/>
Credit : Photo: Wolfgang Thaler

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Guido Van der Werve: at war with oneself
Secession, Association of Visual Artists, Friedrichstrasse 12, A-1010 Vienna
23 November 2013 – 19 January 2014
From the Press Release

As the protagonist of his own films, Dutch video and performance artist Guido van der Werve makes great physical demands upon himself. His works chart approaches to the experience of self and the world by staging an existentialist competition with himself. However, he not only documents the realisation of the conceived events; this documentation is also taken as a starting point from which to condense them into complex narratives about physical endurance, struggling with (one's own) nature, the passage of time, and the uncontrollable dynamics of chance. Van der Werve, who has also completed training as a classical pianist, often anchors his narratives structurally by reference to the biographies of composers such as Rachmaninov or Chopin, as well as using his own musical compositions. In this way he produces works that measure spatial and temporal determinants by means of physical effort, yet also bear witness to a deep melancholy and the need to come to terms with isolation.

Nummer vijftien, at war with oneself is an extensive artist's book produced with the exhibition, which includes textual and pictorial documents, self-reflective pieces and analyses of his most recent group of works from the years 2008 to 2012, in which his main theme is sport alongside classical music. In the Secession, in addition to the publication van der Werve is showing two works documented in it: the several-part photo piece Nummer dertien, emotional poverty. Effugio b, portrait of the artist as a mountaineer (2011) and the film Nummer veertien, home (2012). The latter has already been highly acknowledged: This year he has the Gouden Kalf at the film festival in Utrecht and a nomination in the short film category at the International Film Festival Rotterdam

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In the 56-minute film *Nummer veertien*, home van der Werve completes a 1,700 km triathlon – seven times the stretch of the Ironman triathlon. Swimming, cycling and running he covered the distance from Warsaw to Paris to retrace, in the opposite direction, the route that Chopin's heart travelled before being buried.

The division of the plot into three parts not only corresponds to the triathlon but also to the requiem that van der Werve composed himself for this occasion. It is also used as a soundtrack. Inserted into the main thread of the narrative – long durational sporting performance – we find various episodes with situations in the lives of Frédéric Chopin and Alexander the Great. The metaphorical potential of the persistently realised physical activity is plumbed with its full ambiguity, not least through this multilayered construction: it incorporates self-determination and self-fulfilment as well as ambition and achievement, but also isolation and the pointlessness of existence in repetition. Although van der Werve's works have obvious autobiographical traits and deal with his personal passions, he generally remains in the background as a person and artist-subject, as this allows him to create intense moods and space for the viewers' associations.

"Abstracting my personal memories and experiences is a process that I always apply in my work. I try to make my work as open as possible by doing this; I abstract the narrative until only the mood is left. Mood is a medium that everybody can relate to and, more importantly, everyone has their own relationship to the mood. The artist stops being important." (Guido van der Werve, Interview with Xander Karskens)

In *Nummer dertien*, emotional poverty. *Effugio b*, portrait of the artist as a mountaineer, van der Werve captures the moment of successfully climbing a mountain and the emotionality associated with such an effort. To make this work he conquered Aconcagua Peak in Argentina, which is 6,962 metres high. However, van der Werve undermines the sublimity or magnificence of the landscape perhaps to be expected in connection with this achievement by opposing the image of a bright blue sky with a portrait of himself wearing an anorak, lying on his back with wide, staring eyes.