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Guido van der Werve

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Guido van der Werve’s latest film, *Nummer veertien, home*, 2012, opens with a somber text recounting the events surrounding composer Frédéric Chopin’s troubled life and untimely death. Taking the some 1,058 miles between Warsaw and Paris that now separate Chopin’s heart and body as his subject, van der Werve has composed a film-*cum*-requiem—made up of lush, HD video and the artist’s own dramatic musical compositions—which follows him on a one-man triathlon, with the artist swimming, cycling, and running the entire distance. The film takes a few detours as van der Werve introduces scenery from Alexander the Great’s biography as well as his own.

At first, Alexander, arguably history’s most successful conqueror and certainly its most ambitious figure, seems miscast appearing in a film steeped in such pathos. Then again, so does van der Werve; after all, there’s nothing inherently sad or pitiful about the degree to which he exerts himself in the film—or in any of his thirteen other films, several of which are now on display at Luhring Augustine’s second location in Brooklyn. Yet van der Werve’s constitution remains despondent throughout *Nummer veertien*. Despite his successful completion of the journey, there is little to celebrate as the film progresses, and apart from several great location shots indebted to Caspar David Friedrich’s awe-inspiring approach to landscape painting, there is little sense of celebration in its delivery.

Still, he is not ultimately attempting straightforward doom and gloom. A few small bits of irony and the unexpected displace what would be an oppressive seriousness. In one scene, shot in the artist’s hometown, van der Werve walks on camera; he kneels, then suddenly explodes. In the next, shot nearby, he crosses the frame on fire—literally. Here, the often made association with fellow Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader is most resonant. Consider Ader in relation to a lakeside scene from van der Werve’s fourth film, *Nummer vier: I don’t want to get involved in this. I don’t want to be part of this. Talk me out of it* (2005). Van der Werve plunges from above view into the water so fast that he barely even registers in frame, raising the stakes. Where Ader chose simply to fall (out of a tree or into a canal), van der Werve plummets.



Guido van der Werve, *Nummer veertien, home*, 2012, HD video, color, 54 minutes 9 seconds.

— Nathaniel Lee