

Schneebett: An installation at the Philharmonic

By Gerhard Forck

Translation by Louisa Schaefer

The Schneebett installation by the Cuban-American artist Enrique Martínez Celaya will be on display in the Berlin Philharmonic's "Green Room" until January 1, 2005. Viewers can enter the closed installation space through only one door. A bed covered in frost stands in the room. Ice crystals form with the help of a cooling compressor; the condensation water is collected in a large, flat basin under the bed. The sound emitted by the compressor has been muffled so that viewers hear only a soft hum.

The installation, which portrays Ludwig van Beethoven's deathbed, is the third and final part of the Beethoven series. Here, Martínez Celaya artistically depicts the last years of Beethoven's life that were so marked by illness. The artist studied drawings of Beethoven's actual deathbed to help him create this work. A dark picture is displayed behind the bed; it shows the horizon and is meant to symbolize the view from Beethoven's room. The work confronts us with the sense of emptiness and fear felt before death, but it also reflects the horror and pain experienced by the mourners left behind. The title Schneebett refers to a poem by Paul Celan, and points to the transition from life to death and its resemblance to the winter season. In the Schneebett room, viewers are supposed to address their own mortality and the authenticity of their existence. Martínez Celaya has created a room of memory that seems to possess its own recollection through the objects, scents, and sounds found inside it.

Enrique Martínez Celaya was born in Cuba in 1964 and lives in Los Angeles. He became interested in fine art at an early age, but also in poetry, literature, philosophy, and physics. After studying applied physics at Cornell University and quantum electronics at the University of California, Berkeley, he received a Master's of Fine Arts from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Martínez Celaya has shown his works in more than 20 solo and numerous group exhibitions. He has also published books and essays on various subjects. His artworks are found in many important American museum collections. The artist, who employs various media in his works, currently holds a scholarship from the renowned California Community Foundation's Visual Arts Initiative, J. Paul Getty Trust.

Concert visitors can view the installation as of 6:30 p.m. on performance days.

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