

ARTnews

Guy Ben-Ner

Postmasters

New York-based Israeli artist Guy Ben-Ner investigates the relationship between parents and children, approaching the subject in deeply engaging, deceptively homespun, and wittily

subversive videos and installations.

The video *Berkeley's Island* (1999), the first of two works on view here, introduces the artist's obsessions: his daughter (joined by an infant son in later works), who jolts him forcefully from self-absorption; and film and literary history. We see Ben-Ner sitting on a little plot of sand decorated only by a palm tree. He is a castaway, condemned to loneliness. His far-off desert island, how-

ever, is actually in the middle of his kitchen. Ben-Ner steadfastly hews to his conceit of extreme isolation, acting out the plight of Robinson Crusoe. He is a man alone—until his daughter wanders through the frame and starts to play mischievously with the sand. Now Ben-Ner's plight is that of the stay-at-home parent trying to get a little work done. Some of that work, viewer be warned, might be considered a private pleasure.

The Crusoe theme continued in *Treehouse Kit* (2005), a wooden assembly that was positioned in the middle of the gallery. In an instructional video playing on the main wall, Ben-Ner, in his cast-away costume of beach shorts, swings pieces of the kit into place to make a bed, a table, a chair. His paean to do-it-yourself culture touches on Ikea-style home-improvement schemes, as well as the pioneering spirit of early Israeli settlers.

Ben-Ner explores the self-created societies of the family and the nation in a gentle, nondidactic manner. Unlike so many home movies, his are truly fun to watch. —Carly Berwick

rate the colors and strokes of Paul Cézanne, and the acid tones in *Three Lemons* (1907) recalls the Fauves. *Abstraction* (1911), a tiny gouache made after his return to New York, acknowledges Weber's exposure to Braque and Picasso, and is among the earliest Cubist-inflected paintings made by anyone in the United States.

The superb plotting of shapes and colors in *Abstract Tassels* (1914) and *Imaginative Still Life* (1918) underscores Weber's influence on such American still-life masters as Stuart Davis and Jan Matulka. While Weber may not have been a true innovator, he made up for it with a pre-scient eye for the important developments of his time, his exquisite draftsmanship, and a brilliant sense of color and mood. In *Apples in a Glass Bowl* (1928), an elegant



Guy Ben-Ner, video still from *Berkeley's Island*, 1999, 16 minutes. Postmasters.