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WEEKEND Arts FINE ARTS LEISURE

The New York Times

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Guy Ben-Ner

Performa Hub
41 Cooper Square, East Village
Through Nov. 22

The Performa biennial, now two-thirds complete, has been entrancing New Yorkers with had-to-be-there, blink-and-you-missed-it art. Fortunately for those without flexible schedules, the organizers have commissioned a few projects that function more or less like regular gallery shows. One of them is a film by Guy Ben-Ner that is shown on an eight-minute loop, every day from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. at the Performa Hub. It's delightful and, despite its brevity, deep.

Mr. Ben-Ner, who is from Israel, explores various forms of storytelling in antic video installations that usually involve his wife and children. (In a recent one, "Stealing Beauty," the family staged guerrilla theater in Ikea showrooms.) In his *Përförma* film, which is untitled, Mr. Ben-Ner acts alone. Actually, he has a conversation with himself, via cell-phone, as the film moves between Berlin and Tel Aviv. The conceit is simple yet effective: the action takes place in real time, and the film never leaves the camera, so Mr. Ben-Ner has to travel back and forth between cities.

There are more layers to the story, including a romance gone sour and a career on the line. Mr. Ben-Ner's character, under contract to a nameless institution for a year of filming, is an existentialist art nomad. His T-shirt reads, "I Wish I Was Somewhere Else." At one point he stares into the camera and quotes T. S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock.

All of this may sound like a whiny inside joke, but Mr. Ben-Ner aspires to something bigger: a comic, well-constructed fable. Slapstick gestures interrupt the phone conversation, and the dialogue consists entirely of rhymed verse (Hebrew, with English subtitles). In Seussian cadences, Mr. Ben-Ner intones:

*The borders between life and art
Are not a game of ball.
Do not try to cross them
Thinking you won't fall.*

KAREN ROSENBERG