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Cinematheque

FOR DANIEL BY ERNIE GEHR

Ernie Gehr in Person

Thursday, May 15, 1997—Center for the Arts

Gehr's quiet and thoughtful personality is all over his films, which can best be described as human and humanizing. His film expression is a means to grow as a person, and one can't help participating in his personal odyssey while sitting in the darkness of a screening room.

—Steve Goldstein, *Film/Tape World*

Ernie Gehr began making films in the 1960s and has since completed more than 24 films. A self-taught artist, Gehr has established himself as one of the true masters of film form, and his graceful sense of style and subtle, poetic sensibility have deeply affected the cinematic avant-garde. His films have screened internationally, and he has received awards and grants from numerous institutions. Having lectured and taught internationally, Gehr has been a member of the film faculty at the San Francisco Art Institute since 1988. Previous Cinematheque screenings of his work include a four-part retrospective of his work in 1993 which was accompanied by the publication of a monograph, *The Films of Ernie Gehr*, and the Adeline Kent Award Screening in 1995. Tonight the Cinematheque presents the latest of his works, *For Daniel*.

For Daniel (1996); 16mm, color, silent, 72 minutes

Before my son was born, friends would ask, "Will you make a baby movie now?" "Of course not!" I would answer. Yet, right after Daniel was born I found myself filming him, not with the intention of making a *film*, but with a need to retain, hold on to some moving images of this early and miraculous stage of his life. I kept filming. Sort of snapshots with a movie camera. Very much in the tradition of home movies: all focused on my subject and no concern with film form or syntax. Time passed. The rolls kept accumulating. Three or four months later, they were developed. As I began to look at the footage I sensed the need to keep on filming as well as the possibility of giving the material a form of its own and eventually perhaps sharing the work with a few other individuals in the world. While I continued to film as before (not systematically but intermittently, as the occasion and the need presented itself), tentative shape containing footage of Daniel's first three months was arrived at in early 1993. After a couple of viewings, it became apparent that limiting the work to that period of Daniel's life would not suffice. In addition, there was something about my approach to film here that attracted me and I felt that I needed a larger expanse of time to work with. Sometime in 1995 the earlier edited material was revised and expanded. In the summer of 1996 the decision was made to conclude *For Daniel* with footage recorded in May 1996.

Having just completed the work, what can I say? . . . First of all I need some distance to see and re-experience the film from the outside in order to be able to articulate in words what so far I have pursued instinctively and intuitively, working out and resolving issues largely through felt perceptions and using verbal language minimally.

The title implies the work is for my son and that I am for him. My main interest in the film is Daniel. In conjunction with that, one thing that moves me about the work is its casual, intimate, quiet, person-to-person, home-movie character; its focus on observing and celebrating little moments of everyday life, such as a yawn, a smile, an expression of pain, a gesture here, a half gesture there, quiet acknowledgments of growth and metamorphosis, the passage of time. (EG)