

ALEXANDRE



Brett Bigbee

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In this show of oil paintings and graphite drawings, Brett Bigbee's meticulous renderings expressed a sensibility that is at once old-fashioned and eerily post-modern. The artist's small, beautifully limned still lifes of apples, tomatoes, and pears lined up neatly on tables recall the controlled 19th-century canvases of Raphaelle

Peale. But Bigbee's portraits, whose subjects look uncomfortable in their classic New England settings, are less comprehensible and convey a sense of unease and otherworldliness.

In *Joe and James* (2001–3), the artist's two young sons, painted in sepia tones, stand somberly and awkwardly on a brown beach, their backs turned to a bland, blue sea. Because the perspective is subtly skewed, the boys appear to be cut from separate images. Their monochromatic skin seems drained of blood—as if they were not real children but specters. The little girl in *Abby* (2005–10) staring out at the viewer is brilliantly lit, but the crepuscular coastal landscape reveals that it's actually late in the day. Why, we wonder, is the girl portrayed so brightly? Could she be from another world?

Less mysterious but still disquieting is *James* (1999–2001). Painted with a stylized realism that marries Piero della Francesca with George Tooker, it shows Bigbee's toddler son standing before the artist's wife, Ann, his left hand raised,



Brett Bigbee, *James*, 1999–2001, oil on canvas, 47 7/8" x 22 1/2".
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as if in reverse benediction. Ann looks placidly into the middle distance, as modest and chaste as the Virgin. Behind them, a simple, wood-frame window opens onto nightfall. Despite the Renaissance references, this canvas, like all Bigbee's work, feels very American.

—Mona Molarsky

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