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Karen Yasinsky

"L'Atalante"

Mireille Mosler

35 East 67th Street, Manhattan
Through Nov. 17

If Ingmar Bergman had created short, stop-action silent films starring handmade dolls, they might have resembled Karen Yasinsky's haunting six-minute black-and-white movie "La Nuit." Ms. Yasinsky actually took her inspiration from a famous 1934 French film by Jean Vigo called "L'Atalante," but her film's darkly comic, visionary gloom seems distinctly Nordic.

Despite their painted clay heads, stuffed fabric bodies and twitchy movements, Ms. Yasinsky's dolls appear magically animated by human emotions. In a disjunctive handful of scenes they act out the story of a new marriage between a country girl and a barge captain. The wonderfully odd soundtrack includes a song from an early Betty Boop cartoon and original music by Winston Rice, with whom Ms. Yasinsky collaborated on her previous films.

The newlyweds first appear in their nuptial finery, promenading outdoors with linked arms. Then comes the night. In an apparently suicidal gesture, he throws himself into the river, in whose watery depths he has a hallucinatory vision of his bride. Ensuing scenes show each in a separate bed, restlessly longing for the other. There is no happy ending, only disillusioned misery.

Along with drawings on paper and on flat screens, Ms. Yasinsky's exhibition includes another take on "L'Atalante," in the form of a two-and-a-half-minute hand-drawn cartoon narrative shown on an old television. Its faux-antique surrealism produces a spooky charm, but "La Nuit" is the emotional heart of the show.

KEN JOHNSON