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ERIK VAN LIESHOUT 'Sex is Sentimental'

Maccarone
630 Greenwich Street, at Morton Street, West Village
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Art in Review

By KEN
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The Dutch artist Erik van Lieshout is a riot. His videos, while exposing him as self-absorbed and small-minded, convey a disarming candor and psychological complexity. His messy paintings and collages are another story.

The video in this exhibition, Mr. van Lieshout's first New York solo, is projected in a gallery with a raised, carpeted platform that has channels cut into it allowing visitors to enter and sit. In the video Mr. van Lieshout -- a doughy, balding, average-looking fellow wearing rectangular, plastic-rimmed glasses -- ruminates anxiously in a squeaky, sing-songy voice about a new romance. His former assistant has recently become his lover, which has thrown him into a tizzy. He's afraid she'll take away valuable time for art making. As he worries in English-subtitled Dutch, his mood ranges from irritable to defiant to abject. We also see him painting and making mixed media collages in manic, stop-action animation, in many cases using (and defacing) photographs of his girlfriend.

Mr. van Lieshout's shameless narcissism is funny. He comes off as absurdly superficial and touchingly real as he reveals the sorts of traits -- his insecurities, infantilism, selfishness and desire for power -- that most of us try to hide.

The paintings and collages are less interesting. Made with expressionistic impatience, his pictures of sexy women in their underwear, collages featuring images of the artist and his girlfriend and purely abstract paintings are far less idiosyncratic than his cannily goofy video.