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"Alex Katz/Dara Friedman," at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, pairs one artist's painted cutouts with another's videos. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's enterprise

Alex Katz / Dara Friedman

Gavin Brown's Enterprise
620 Greenwich Street, at Leroy Street, West Village
Through Feb. 22

- Karen Rosenberg

An unlikely but inspired pairing, this show of the works of the painter Alex Katz and the video artist Dara Friedman finds both artists exploring the state of coupledness. It moves effortlessly from Mr. Katz's portrait cutouts to Ms. Friedman's part-improvised, part-staged romances.

The cutout — essentially a figure liberated from a painting and given new life as a stand-alone object — is a signature form for Mr. Katz, dating back to the early 1960s. But these new cutouts don't much resemble his earlier, Pop-inflected works; attached to wide, U-shaped aluminum stands, they have a flickering, cinematic presence that's enhanced by warm spotlights. Most are close-ups, showing either front-and-back views of the same figure's head or, as in "Duffy and Lucy," two figures who regard each other from opposite edges of the stand. Though ostensibly all about surface, these works are rich in narrative possibility.

Ms. Friedman's installation "PLAY," meanwhile, completed during a recent residency at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, consists of 17 brief episodes that both flaunt and sabotage romantic chemistry. Some of her actors are real-life couples and others have been yoked together by casting, and it's not always easy to tell the difference — or, for that matter, to distinguish between scripted dialogue and spontaneous utterances. Using both Super-8 and high-definition video, Ms. Friedman, like Mr. Katz, makes us aware of the staginess of all relationships (not just the Hollywood variety).