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Nikola Piromanishvili lived, died and painted in Russian Georgia around the turn of the century. His works have a haunted folk-primitive quality — figures painted with a solid blockishness and lack of detail. There's a spiritual kinship with the natives of Gauguin, the beast of Rousseau. They are lovely to look at, particularly admirable for their unpretentiousness.

Georgi Shengelaya's *Piromansi* (opening Friday at the Cinema Studio) is a fictionalized study of Piromanishvili's rather bleak life; like the paintings it is lovely to look at, relatively unpretentious and full of a kind of mysterious blankness. Made originally in Shengelaya's native Georgia, the New York print has unfortunately been dubbed in Russian (dubbing always being unfortunate, but particularly here: How often does one get to hear Georgian on the screen?).

The film is "painterly," which is both an asset and a debit. Virtually every scene is perfectly framed, beautiful to behold (given that Piromanishvili always found beauty in the commonplace), but at times this studied, calculated reality begins to look static, slow and dull. Piromanishvili himself (played by Avtandil Varazi, who doubled as the film's art director) is moreover, not very interesting — a sort of sexless, acharismatic drunk who managed — almost in spite of himself — to produce some great art.

A lot of people have liked the film more than I did, so see for yourself.

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