

CINEASTE

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As is often the case at disparate film festivals, several feature documentaries came to the rescue and served as at least partial antidotes to the many mediocre fiction films on display. As a case in point, Rebecca Dreyfus's *Stolen* (produced, rather incongruously, by Court TV), **a non-fiction "heist film" as compelling as genre fare such as *Topkapi* or *Rififi***, proved much more entertaining than the turgid narrative films in the official competition. Dreyfus chronicles the fallout from a daring 1990 robbery at Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in which thieves walked off with ten paintings (the seizure of Vermeer's "The Concert" was their biggest coup) worth approximately 300 million dollars. **The charm of Dreyfus's film resides in its loving evocation of an assortment of colorful characters that attempt to solve the mystery of why valuable paintings, which could never be sold under even the most clandestine circumstances, were stolen with such utter audacity.** The late detective Harold Smith emerges as the putative hero, a gentle man plagued with skin cancer whose indefatigable efforts to unmask the culprits ends in abject, if honorable, failure. His search is abetted by a few charming rogues— an Irish -American gangster named Myles Connor and Paul "Turbocharger" Hendry, a former British thief who now shares his expertise with Scotland Yard. **Letters exchanged between Isabella Stewart Gardner and her confidante, the connoisseur and art historian Bernard Berenson, (read on the soundtrack by Blythe Danner and Campbell Scott) add another layer of delicious irony** to this convoluted tale. These eminently respectable Bostonians openly discuss the possible smuggling of paintings for the museum's collection; the film slyly intimates that curators and collectors are possessed by larcenous and/or fetishistic passions that have at least a family resemblance to the antics of professional thieves.

Excerpted from an article by Richard Porton about the Montreal Film Festival