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Movie Review

"Stolen": Painting a vivid portrait of "Stolen" art classics

By Tom Keogh

Special to The Seattle Times

In the early morning hours after St. Patrick's Day in 1990, unknown thieves dressed as police officers penetrated Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, tying up security guards and stealing a number of valuable works.

Among the appropriated items were a Rembrandt seascape, four Degas sketches, a Manet and Vermeer's "The Concert," one of 35 surviving pieces by the 17th-century Dutch painter.

None of the missing art has been recovered, and yet, according to the extraordinary documentary "Stolen," there is little reason to suspect anything's been fenced. Investigators think the creations are stored somewhere and possibly deteriorating, awaiting action by anyone who controls their fate.



ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM
"The Concert" by Johannes Vermeer is part of the real-life mystery in "Stolen."

Movie review ★★★★★

[Showtimes and trailer](#)

"Stolen," with Harold Smith, Tracy Chevalier, Blythe Danner (voice), Campbell Scott (voice). Written and directed by Rebecca Dreyfus. 85 minutes. Not rated; suitable for general audiences. Northwest Film Forum.

It's a sad situation, for Bostonians, for art lovers everywhere and for those who feel a deep connection to Gardner, a fascinating arts patron who turned her Italian villa-style home into the museum. She died in 1924.

Several contemporary mourners (including Tracy Chevalier, author of the novel "Girl with a Pearl Earring") appear in Rebecca Dreyfus' "Stolen," a movie that becomes an engrossing search for the missing works of art.

Dreyfus and her cameraman, the legendary documentary maker Albert Maysles ("Gimme Shelter"), follow a trail from Fenway to

New York and London, encountering all kinds of people who know or suspect something about the case.

Former art thieves, FBI agents, a con man, a British operator who negotiates deals between cops and criminals, and a journalist who received Vermeer-era paint chips from an anonymous source all figure into the story.

At first, "Stolen" is stuck in interview mode. But the film shifts into higher gear with the arrival of

Harold Smith, a remarkable man and renowned art detective who's been looking into the Gardner theft for years. Smith responds to Dreyfus' request for a chat with his own invitation: Join him in his last, big push to find and return "The Concert" and other works to where they belong.

The ravaged-looking yet elegant Smith, 75 at the time of filming and suffering from skin cancer, clearly wants recovery of these paintings and sketches to be part of his legacy.

Running parallel to the investigation is a beautifully told story of Gardner, a friend to the likes of John Singer Sargent (who painted a famous 1888 portrait of her) and novelist Henry James.

Gardner turned a personal tragedy into a mission to build the museum, and her dramatic correspondence with Bernard Berenson, her curator, is read movingly by Blythe Danner. (Campbell Scott reads Berenson's missives.)

"Stolen" captures a great yearning among many different people across time, all affected by Gardner and her legacy, especially those parts now missing. This is a movie that takes hold of one's heart and imagination.

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