

Real Films for Real People: 2005 L.A. Film Fest Chooses Diversity Over Monotony for 11th Consecutive Year

by Jonny Leahan
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The renowned international art detective Harold J. Smith, who has handled fine art and jewelry theft cases for more than five decades, attempts to solve the greatest art heist in modern history: The stolen originals from Boston's Gardner Museum, in Rebecca Dreyfus' award-winning documentary, "Stolen." Photo by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders.

When people think about Los Angeles and the movie business, the first word that comes to mind might be "premiere" or "paparazzi," but it's almost never "diversity." Yet somehow, amid a sea of mega-budget pictures about evil aliens or friendly witches, the 2005 **Los Angeles Film Festival** has once again managed to offer up a summer slew of genuine films for moviegoers from all walks of life. Presented by **Film Independent**, or **FIND** (formerly **IFP/LA**), LAFF not only offered a slate of over 260 films from around the world, but also assembled an array of panels and special events packed into a ten-day festival, which ran from June 16-26.

Among the standout documentaries was **Rebecca Dreyfus'** "**Stolen**," a fascinating exploration of largest art heist in modern history, still unsolved, in which two thieves disguised as Boston cops entered the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, making off with 13 priceless works of art. One of the more fascinating aspects of the documentary was the unexpected discovery of its most compelling character, art investigator Harold Smith, who is tragically disfigured due to skin cancer resulting from a military experiment, but remains full of enthusiasm and wit. "I guess that's what you hope happens in a documentary," Dreyfus told indieWIRE, "that you go about your business and you stumble upon something that changes the course of your film... We went to do an expert interview with Harold, and it turned out that he was kind of flabbergasted that we were doing this, because he had his own private obsession about what had happened to the Gardner art. So I think we opened the door to that, and once we met him he started calling us every day... it just kind of unfolded very naturally."

Another unexpected treat in "Stolen" is the beautiful camera work of legendary documentarian **Albert Maysles** ("**Grey Gardens**," "**Salesman**"), a mentor to Dreyfus who graciously agreed to help her shoot the film. "It was really cool," says Dreyfus, "and what was particularly cool about it was that I'd been getting a lot of feedback... because the main character in my film is physically disfigured, people have been saying to me the way he's photographed, which was a lot by Albert, is with so much love. He approaches his subject with so much love that even though this man is disfigured you wind up loving him."