

LOS ANGELES CITY BEAT

LAFF-ING IT UP

Another L.A. Film Festival brings many, many more movies to town

~ By ANDY KLEIN ~

Stolen. On St. Patrick's Day in 1990, three men broke into Boston's Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and made off with 13 paintings, including Vermeer's "The Concert," considered to be the most valuable missing work of art in the world. More than a decade later, filmmaker Rebecca Dreyfus reopens the case, enlisting 75-year-old art detective Harold J. Smith (who has died since the film was shot). Dreyfus's film intercuts the quest with some history about Gardner and her expert buyer, Bernard Berenson – their letters are read in voiceover by Blythe Danner and Campbell Scott – as well as art historians' views about the Vermeer. The history is informative but can't compare to the often comic experiences of Smith and Dreyfus. Near the end, they hook up with Paul "The Turbo Charger" Hendry, a British art-thief-turned-informer, with a personality so large he would seem too outrageous in a fictional film; he tries to convince them of a plan to recover the Vermeer, involving the participation of Sen. Edward Kennedy, the IRA, and the Catholic Church. Even though there's no neat resolution, the entire ride is a pleasure. (AK) (Sun. 5 p.m., Mon. 2:30 p.m., at Laemmle's Sunset 5)

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