



TO FEBRUARY 15

"Ken Aptekar: Talking to Pictures"

Ken Aptekar has been talking to pictures for some time, only now he's inviting everyone else to speak up. He no longer repaints only master-works, and while some of the texts that overlay his pictures are autobiographical, others bear the reactions of museum guards and school-children to various Corcoran holdings, and still others offer glimpses into the hidden world of the museum. When possible, the source paintings hang salon-style above the new works, making for the bizarre spectacle of an actual museum appearance of one of the schlock portraits of Armand Hammer pressed upon institutions willing to take his money. The show also suggests that the Corcoran has at times purchased out of a not-misguided compassion and sold out of greed. By revealing what transpires behind closed doors, Aptekar portrays the museum as a snazzy cultural center perched atop so much historical landfill. But he also addresses the slippery meaning of pictures as something controlled not by the institution but by the viewer. One guard objects vehemently to the sitter in a not-Rembrandt *An Elderly Man in an Armchair*, while 14-year-old visitor Bruce Holmes is willing to cut frilly little *Robert Lea* some slack for his effeminacy. Prompted by paintings, the artist himself recounts everything from his grandmother's new life in America to his brother's mental illness to his rabbi's murder (pictured, *It wasn't my brother who shot the rabbi*). Aptekar achieves something of a rarity in these multiculti days: a show that sets out to address many diverse audiences and succeeds without pandering, snobbishness, or a loss of focus. At the Corcoran Gallery of Art, 17th & New York Ave. NW. FREE. (202) 638-1439. (Glenn Dixon)