



Ken Aptekar's most recent body of work examines the personal and artistic exploits of Mme de Pompadour (1721–64): Louis XV's mistress, and one of the most prodigious and influential artistic patrons of 18th century Europe. Aptekar's sensuous, narrative oil paintings consist of faithfully repainted passages from historical portraits of Mme de Pompadour—primarily by François Boucher (1703–70)—that are bolted under thick glass. Each sheet of glass is etched with a story or textual fragment that interacts with the painting's imagery—and the viewer—in enigmatic and temporally discontinuous ways. As described by art historian Mieke Bal, "The performance asked of the viewer/reader is time-consuming, slowed-down by the work's commitment to promote caring, loving and reciprocal attention, promoted by the various elements that slow it down—from glaring glass to the enticing text, from the verbal, visual and verbal/visual puns to the ambiguities of tense and tone." (Mieke Bal, "Sticky Images," in *Time and the Image*, Carolyn Bailly Gill, ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 93).

Aptekar delves into Mme de Pompadour's rise to prominence in the court of Louis XV, reflecting upon her common origins, her relationship with Louis, her insecurities, her passion for art, and the vicious personal and political

attacks that were a constant during her public years. In Aptekar's intimate exploration, he also positions personal and familial narratives among Pompadour's likenesses, ruminating, for example, on the difficulties his Jewish grandmother faced in evading an arranged marriage and fleeing Russia for America—a juxtaposed narrative of social mobility and the reinvention of the self. The crystalline story of Aptekar's grandmother—who became an accomplished seamstress—embraces a full-body portrait of Mme de Pompadour wearing a gown as embellished and as rosy as a wedding cake. The words cast their shadow-selves back onto the painting, and the bright glass captures and reflects the light and movement within the surrounding space.

Aptekar also exhibits a suite of digital prints that reference Mme de Pompadour's relationship to one of the most significant intellectual projects of her time: Diderot's *Encyclopedia*. The most comprehensive compendium of practical knowledge at the time, it was brought to fruition, in part, by the support of Mme de Pompadour who helped convince Louis XV that the project would be worth the incredible time and expense. Alongside Aptekar's prints, the Cooley will exhibit volumes from the *Encyclopedia*, courtesy of the Special Collections Library of the Eric. V. Hauser Memorial Library at Reed College.



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Commissioned for *A Personal Public*, Aptekar debuts a provocative new video piece entitled *Three Acts*. Nestled in a small private viewing room—the video is a chronicle of Aptekar's transformation into several important 18th century French personages at the hands of a Parisian *chef-maquilleur* (couture stylist). Aptekar uses his body as a vehicle for exploring historical presence and representation—gender and masquerade.

For this special exhibition, the Cooley Gallery is honored to be collaborating with the Portland Art Museum in order to exhibit the Museum's Boucher painting (c.1750) of a young woman dressed in flowing garments and holding a bouquet of flowers. The painting, once thought to be a portrait of Mme de Pompadour and now definitively judged not to be, offers a rich historical presence in dialogue with Aptekar's contemporary project.

Stephanie Snyder, curator
Director, Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery