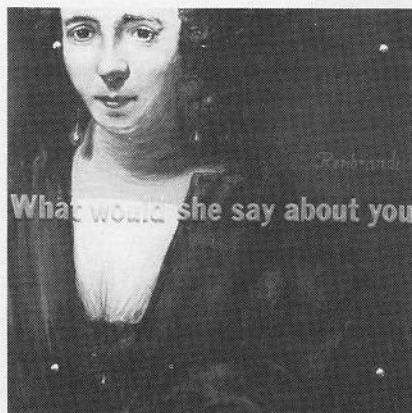


Born in 1950, Ken Aptekar received a BFA from the University of Michigan and MFA from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. His awards include grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, Ucross Foundation, Djerassi Foundation, Pollock-Krasner Foundation, Artists' Space, and National Endowment for the Arts. In the last four years alone, his paintings have been exhibited at: Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; Center for Contemporary Art at Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco; Wight Art Gallery at UCLA, Los Angeles; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Flint Institute of Arts, Flint, Michigan; School 33 Art Center, Baltimore; Carnegie Mellon University Art Gallery, Pittsburgh; Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, Snug Harbor, Staten Island; Artists' Space, New York; Bess Cutler Gallery, New York; P.S. 1, Long Island City; and Margulies-Taplin Gallery, Miami.

Rembrandt Redux The Paintings of Ken Aptekar

January 3 - March 5, 1995

Palmer Museum of Art



Illustrations

front: *PINK FRICK*, 1993

inside right: *How Could You Believe Me?*, 1992

inside bottom: *Heavy Equipment*, 1992

back: *What Would She Say About You?*, 1994

Paintings are oil on wood with sandblasted glass

All works are presented courtesy of

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Photos are by Joe Coscia



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Ken Aptekar is a thoroughly modern New York artist with an eye on the past and a certain irreverence for the present. These two predilections converge in *Rembrandt Redux: The Paintings of Ken Aptekar*. While Aptekar begins by painting large scale sections from well-known Rembrandt works, he quickly jettisons whatever traditional notions surround these masterpieces of western art, and presents instead a perspective that is right out of the nineties. Response to these paintings will vary with the viewer: purists might cringe, cynics might nod in agreement, and Rembrandt scholars might laugh out loud. All reactions are valid and welcome.

To his rendition of Rembrandt's painting *Man with the Golden Helmet*, Aptekar overlays a glass panel etched with the lyrics of the Burton Lane/Alan Jay Lerner tune "How Could You Believe Me When I Said I Love You When You Know I've Been A Liar All My Life?" Anyone who has followed the upheavals in Rembrandt connoisseurship knows that the much-loved *Man with the Golden Helmet* is now attributed to a Rembrandt follower. Aptekar sympathizes with the admiring public who reluctantly must let go of this treasure-now-impostor. At the same time, he scoffs at the museum curators who attempt to hide the demotion by including on the painting's label: REMBRANDT (circle of). *Pink Frick*, which reproduces in rosy tones Rembrandt's imposing self portrait in The Frick Collection in New York, contains on its overlaid etched panel word plays on Aptekar's title. PINK FRICK FINK FICK FRICK PICK, etc., march in bold pairs across one of Rembrandt's most riveting self images. Some of the unflattering word combinations that result point an accusatory finger, not at Rembrandt, but at the coke magnate turned philanthropist, Henry Clay Frick.

In *Heavy Equipment* Aptekar recreates in large scale only the torsos from Rembrandt's double portrait of Maerten Soolmans and Oopjen Coppit. The couple's excessive adornment, including cut lace collars, wide lace cuffs, and satin rosettes, hints that their wealth was recently acquired. Aptekar did not need to include either the vacuous faces Rembrandt gave this pair, or their ridiculous silver shoe ornaments, to suggest that Maerten and Oopjen depend on the trappings of wealth

for assurance that they belong. Were Rembrandt's (now Aptekar's) focus on the sitters' penchant for overdressing not enough to deflate their obviously delicate egos, Aptekar goes for the jugular by having snippets of type from *The New York Times* wedding announcements float across the image. The already insecure couple are here pilloried by the very recitation of status, wealth, and lineage they rely on to verify their elevated position.



And so it goes with Aptekar's paintings which use stolid seventeenth-century burghers to illustrate foibles that span the centuries. Viewers can immediately relate to Aptekar's painting of Hendrickje Stoffels, Rembrandt's common law wife, which asks the age-old question, "What Would She Say About You?" (trust me, she would say plenty). But Aptekar's paintings are more than a study in subject

matter. Those viewers who do not immediately grasp the conceits interwoven into Aptekar's compositions, still can appreciate the artistry of his painting style. The careful study of Rembrandt's brushwork has served this artist well. Along with the wit and satire in these works, there is much pleasure to be found in the paint.

Kahren Jones Arbitman
Director, Palmer Museum of Art

