

The Jewish Week

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‘The Greatest Thieves’

By George Robinson
(08/31/2007)

“The Rape of Europa” is a much more conventional talking-heads documentary, written, produced and directed by Richard Berge, Bonni Cohen and Nicole Newnham.

Using Lynn Nicholas’ book of the same title as their jumping-off point, the directors tell one of the less-known stories of World War II, the Nazis’ systematic looting of Europe’s great art collections, with a particular animus directed towards Jewish-owned art.

As one interviewee says, the Nazis were “the greatest thieves” in history, guilty of looting on an industrial scale. Even more fascinating is the story of the U.S. Army officers who were assigned to find, preserve and return these treasures, and one yearns to hear more about them than the film offers.

The film’s producers include Oregon Public Broadcasting, and while there are times when it threatens to degenerate into a run-of-the-mill PBS documentary, for the most part “The Rape of Europa” is a reminder of just how good PBS-style documentaries can be when the subject is riveting and the talking heads are worth hearing.

“The Unknown Soldier” opens at the Quad Cinema (34 W. 13th St.) on Friday, Sept. 7. For more information, call (212) 255-8800, or go to www.quadcinema.com.

“The Rape of Europa” opens Sept. 14 at the Paris Theater (4 W. 58th St; [212] 688-3800 or www.theparistheatre.com) and the Angelika Film Center (18 W. Houston St.; [212] 995-2000 or www.angelikafilmcenter.com/newyork.)