

## Best in Show

***Recommendations***  
***by Robert Shuster***



### **R.C. Baker: '... and Nixon's coming'**

Renowned experimenter Kirby Holland, a former comic-book illustrator who once helped repatriate Nazi treasure, gets a lively retrospective here. If you've never heard of him, it's because he's the protagonist of R.C. Baker's sprawling in-progress novel of 20th-century art and culture, which takes in (among other history) Stalin's show trials, Göring's taste for schlock, and the shooting of Andy Warhol. At regular intervals, as a parallel progression of the character, the book includes Holland's (Baker's) art, which the gallery displays next to short excerpts from the prose. Baker, who knows a thing or two about painting and writing (he's the regular guy for this column), works a brush like a pro, too. He's given his hero a wide-ranging oeuvre, including skilled drawings in the styles of old masters, comic books, engaging gouache "defacings" of Warhol's mug shots, and lush collages of wild Kandinsky color and movement. Impressive, too, are the larger paintings that layer streaks, splatter, and a kind of artificial craquelure on top of Barnett Newman-like stripes, and a spooky monoprint of bluish ovals against a curtain of red. Holland is fictional, but his art is the real thing. *Zone: Contemporary Art, 41 W 57th, 212-255-2177. Through May 30.*