

Dumbing Up

A Downtown exhibit has its roots in a Japanese artists' collective

BY ALICE WINN

Lovers at Wood Street Galleries emerges from the Japanese artists' collective "dumb type" — a name which refers to a society saturated with information but devoid of understanding. Social Activism mixes with nightclub events and seminar discussions for the group's performance works, videos and installations. The late artist Teigji Furuhashi founded "dumb type" in 1984 at Kyoto University, recruiting students from multiple disciplines including electronic music, dance, computer science and visual arts. In the mid-80s he was part of New York's Lower East Side avant-garde scene, where he performed at the Pyramid Club along with other underground artists such as John Lelly, Lipsinka and the late Ethyl Eichelberger.

Lovers was Furuhashi's first major solo work. It

Art's *Video Spaces* exhibition and traveled to Toronto before coming to Pittsburgh. Furuhashi created the installation with technical assistance from architect/designer Shiro Takatani, computer programmer Tomohiro Ueshiba and Canon ARTLAB.

In the gallery, a central stack of seven automated laser-activated projectors surround viewers with an interactive cinematic narrative played out by the spare, raw images of nude "dumb type" members. The pictures are fluid and transitive, a shifting constellation of figures that materialize and vanish, like stones skipping across an abandoned lake. They enter the drama with the slow motion approach of long distance runners, running through a landscape of solitude. Some are searching, restless, passing each other by, caught between longing and despair

— road movies, abruptly jump-cut, leaving trails of love and its aftermath, sexuality and its fallout. They become personal histories that can suddenly turn and rush away into disintegration or else turn and speed towards another, seeking connection. As witnesses, we trigger the flow of storylines by activating motion sensors within the artwork. We're caught in the projects' rays that cross the gallery like lighthouse beacons sweeping a river. We drift into a language of gestures that mirror our own, provide for us the comfort of seeing our private experiences in a public space. We're led to make formal and emotional connections across the panorama of imagery. We experience the whole with the kaleidoscopic view that history and time exist as an aggregate of individual lives.

There are moments of self-presentation, spaces of interaction, retreat and contemplation — glimpses of interior worlds where boundaries are stretched or erased, lands without borders or fear. Couples superimposed in embrace press into the walls — vagrant frescoes which come to life as briefly as lightning at the window of a darkened room.

Transparencies of a lover flicker on a lone man's skin — a ghost he hugs that shakes and leaves him, passing silently into the revolving screen of memory. The sounds and lyrics of faraway voices, wind and machine music mingle the primitive with the industrial, giving images a beat and shaping their themes.

Victor Masayeswa felt that "photography reveals that life and death can be so indissolubly one. Photography is an affiliation of opposites: the negative contains the positive." Furuhashi uses the photographic image to express his own mortality, freeze-framing himself in a final self-portrait for the installation which was visualized in the shadow of his HIV-positive status. He opens his arms to us, then falls backwards out of sight with the weightless grace of light fading over the curve of the earth, leaving us with the quiet presence of his absence. He becomes a metaphor for compassion, empathy and understanding against a backdrop of isolation and alienation in which we all struggle. ■

Lovers continues at the Wood Street Galleries, Downtown, through Wed., Dec. 31. 471-5605.



explores perceptions of human rights and AIDS. The piece was conceived at a New York Gay Pride parade where police forced marchers to walk in a single line. It champions sexual diversity and responsibility and exalts the bonds of friendship, standing as a counterforce to the stigmatization of the gay population and other groups that are marginalized by society.

The late writer, photographer and painter David Wojnarowicz once said that "People have found it necessary to define their sexuality in images, in photographs and movies in order not to disappear ... We can all affect each other by being open enough to make each other feel less alienated. We are all able to have a profound effect on each other, a positive effect that sustains us ... I'm beginning to believe that one of the last frontiers left for radical gestures is the imagination." In the imaginative flight of *Lovers*, equal representation of images about homosexual and heterosexual relationships have the vivid immediacy of dreams. The installation reflects the flawed beauty of our shared vulnerability in a subtle, understated style.

Lovers appeared in the Museum of Modern