

fine
ART

'Lovers' and other strangers

Furuhashi's installation is a technical wonder

By DONALD MILLER
Post-Gazette Art Critic

There are two ways to experience "Lovers," an unusual and strangely beautiful Japanese electronic environment at the Wood Street Galleries, Downtown.

Enter and be carried away by the bounding images of nude young men and women moving about the black walls. Or learn in the gallery about the larger purpose of the exhibition.

Make no mistake. This is not intended as a titillating experience. The unfettered freedom of the filmed participants is mesmerizing rather than erotic. And knowing the piece's background adds an elegiac mood.

The late artist Teiji Furuhashi designed this video art work with images the exhibition catalog claims are better integrated systematically and with greater flexibility than any other.

The artist found a method of

art REVIEW

"LOVERS"

WHERE: Wood Street Galleries, 601 Wood St. above T. station.

WHEN: Tues.-Wed. 11 a.m.-6 p.m.; Thurs.-Fri. 11-7; Sat. noon-7. Through Dec. 31.

ADMISSION: Free.

DETAILS: It's underwritten by Canon ARTLAB with local sponsor WYEP-FM (91.3).

horizontally rotating many images, in this case young nude Japanese men and women who move through space in a way recalling the multiple action images of American photographer Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904).

But Furuhashi invests his work

with a serious message that is an evocation of understanding and intermixing of men and women. He was the first HIV-positive homosexual man in Japan to openly state his medical status, and died of HIV-related causes two years ago.

Born in Kyoto, Furuhashi founded Dumb Type, an avant-garde Japanese performance group, while studying video art and conceptual planning at Kyoto University of Arts in 1984.

In the gallery, the viewer removes his shoes at the entrance and proceeds into a dark twisting hallway. In a 30-by-30-foot white linoleumed space stands a seven-tier metal tower holding automated laser-activated projection equipment aimed at walls.

Life-sized men and women walk, run, stand still and embrace each other, keyed by motion sensors to the movements of visitors in the room.

Occasionally the viewer notes some figures are blacked out, only

to realize his own body blocks the projection. The most startling motion is of Furuhashi. He occasionally stands fully frontal with arms outstretched. Then slowly he leans backward from the viewer and falls out of sight as though being consumed.

All of the figures appear and disappear, fading in and out of virtual existence while sometimes seeming to interact with the viewer.

The installation carries two words: "limit" and "fear" in small white letters against black. Furuhashi saw and heard them during New York gay-rights demonstrations. Electronic pings and barely audible human mutters punctuate the quiet, apparently coming from everywhere and nowhere.

This is one of the most moving contemporary art experiences ever shown here. The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust and Murray Horne, Wood Street curator, are to be congratulated for bringing this outstanding work here.



The viewer observes men and women in fluid movements at Wood Street Galleries.