

Holman credits Chicago poet Rose Lesniak with creating the first poetry videos in New York in 1985 when she produced segments for the Manhattan Video Project featuring Holman, Anne Waldman and Allen Ginsberg. The poster for that event featured Holman leaping into the air above the words "I think that I shall never see, a poetry video on TV."

"Now, 10 years later we can say, maybe we will be able to see (on TV) quite a few of these little beauties," smiles Holman, who has directed and produced more than 60 "Poetry Spots" for public television station WNYC in New York.

"We try to do the impossible. To take the poem, the pure beauty shard, and see if we can manage to put it into somebody's living room and use it instead of a fireplace."

Holman acknowledges there is a challenge to finding the proper balance between words and images.

"It is an extremely dangerous task," says Holman. "I would have never undertaken it if I hadn't felt that poetry is an essential element in the soul of this country."

He names Chicago as the center of the new performance-based poetry. For that reason he has supported the Poetry Video Festival since its conception and features Chicago poets Marc Smith,

Luis Rodriguez and Peter Cook in "The United States of Poetry." By including Cook, who uses American Sign Language to convey his creativity, Holman literally gives the last word to a person who cannot speak.

"Having an American Sign Language poet is a metaphor to give voice to those who have not been heard," he believes.

In his upcoming series Holman hopes to reduce the stigma that surrounds the public perception of poetry and in doing so democra-

"(Poetry) gets us in touch with ourselves and allows us to listen to other people," he believes.

Among those impressed with "The United States of Poetry" was South Side native, Marc Smith, the founder of the Chicago Poetry Slam, a combative war of words and poets where original poems are judged by a panel picked at random in the enthusiastic audience visiting the Green Mill Lounge, at Broadway and Lawrence, every Sunday evening.

"I think that Bob Holman's 'United States of Poetry' really does a good thing. It shows that everyone does this thing called poetry. Not only that, it shows how important words are to us all. Real words by real people. I was moved by a TV thing, and that doesn't happen to me very often."

For festival organizer and performance poet Jean Howard, poetry videos were initially an ideal way of documenting her work.

Howard, who has been involved in the National Poetry Video Festival since its second year, said she received more than 200 entries this year.

She explains a poetry video is much more than "just setting a camera on a stick and reading."

"We have to create something that is created for video to get it right. With the imagery and physicality of performance poetry, video was the perfect next step. I truly believe in trying everything with poetry. I (even) sold fortune cookies at Marshall Field's with poems in them."

"Poetry video is just one more way to get poetry into the mainstream, just like the slam. The slam's birth was to get (poetry) past our little poetry corner and into everyman's face. Poetry videos get into everyman's television. It was logical. It was the tool that people were communicating with and there was no reason why poetry shouldn't be doing it too."

For this festival, she contribut-



This video brings to life a poem by Chicago performance poet Jean Howard. The video is one of several that will be shown on WTTW's "Image Union" Saturday night.

ed the poetry video, "Harley and the Hill" which celebrates how her parents met in Utah. It was filmed in front of 300 bikers which she says was, "thrilling and a little scary."

"We are encouraging people actually to create a new art form, a new medium with poetry and video together," said Howard. "Right now we are very open because we want to see what people are thinking video poems are. We really want to see what is out there. If it moves us and has the feel of poetry, the emotion of poetry and at least addresses or tries to incorporate language, then we are interested."

At this time, there are no cash awards for those who enter their work. Those judged to be winners in the Video Slam event do receive customized trophies, but, notes Howard, those who enter are in it "purely for the exposure, the expression and the recognition."

Award-winning Chicago videomaker and poet Kurt Heintz believes "there has always been a natural urge to present poetry as a living thing."

For Heintz, film is "simply the elucidation of memory." The one mechanical process — expressed in either film, video or computer memory — that allows us "to keep our ideas in the arrangement which we prefer to keep them."

"At this point in history," said Heintz, "we have the means to record and amplify, augment and transmute the presence of a poet as he or she recites their very words. We now can visualize a poem as we think it."

"I don't think (video) is THE future of poetry, but it is A future. Every time someone comes up with a new way to present a given art form, the older and previous examples don't necessarily go away. Performance poetry, and

particularly slam poetry seemed to draw a lot of ire from the folks who insisted that publishing is the only legitimate form."

Heintz realizes that words could be in danger of being overwhelmed by the image but cautions "a poem isn't so precious that we can't afford to be rough with it, but there has to be an appropriate measure of image to word."

"You can't spew pictures onto a tape and expect it to make sense and never distract the viewer from what is being communicated in the poem."

"Of course," Heintz points out, "that assumes that the poem is spoken and that is not necessarily so. Some things make sense because you read it. Peter Cook performs in sign language, and that is a poetic form."

"All these informational channels can find the way into a video and all of them lend something to the expression of the poem. Your breath, your presence. How people read your facial gestures, if they are allowed to see them at all. The timing of how images are cut. This has a lot to do with how we remember a poem."

"I am in it because it is fantastic cultural experiment I can engage in firsthand. I see tremendous potentials in this to awaken people's minds to things they would otherwise not address."

"Years ago, I used to have this fantasy where I would be standing in a room and I would press one button and be able to ignite people's imaginations in places where I could never even see."

With the rise of the poetry videos that dream is a now more than a possibility.