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Video poems pack double the meaning

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"Women without children grow orchids/whose fuchsia lips hang down with spittle, the very tips of fragrant vowels," a female voice intoned. "These women hold flower sepals [petals] near water/and bathe them with mists. They do wipe with mouths that are always open and slightly obscene."

During that last verse, a drop of dew rolled from a leaf into a superimposed, red-lip-stacked mouth. The mouth faded and an orchid received the drop in its place.

These and images of flowers and plants, talking red lips, and old pictures of a woman surrounded by a large family filled a screen at the Hot House, 1565 N. Milwaukee Ave., Wednesday night.

An audience of fewer than 100 people was watching a video poem, which is "almost everything that you can write a poem about, which is everything," said Jean Howard, 40, the author of that particular piece (the photos were of Howard's great-grandmother).

Several video poems were visually recited at the beginning of the third annual Na-



Tribune photo by John Bartley

The audience watches a performance during the beginning of the third annual National Poetry Video Festival at the Hot House, 1565 N. Milwaukee Ave.

Video poetry

tional Poetry Video Festival, in which about 30 artists from across the country participate. Howard is also on the committee putting the four-day festival together.

The images covered everything from sitting poets reciting their work, to pieces that more resembled music videos, with quick edits, moody lighting and corresponding music.

"I call [video poems] a synthesis of text, image and sounds at varying levels," said Ida Jeter, executive director of the Center for New Television, a resource center for independent video artists and community media outlets that is co-sponsoring the event.

"Some pictures can sort of take the lead, and sometimes words can critique the image and the image can critique the words," said Kurt Heintz, chairman of the festival, about the art form he said has been

around since the early 1980s.

Wednesday's activities included a poetry video "slam," or competition. Also scheduled are workshops, a national gallery of videos by young people, and a vidphone exchange, in which telephone lines are hooked up to send pictures and words between poets in Los Angeles and Chicago.

The National Poetry Video Festival runs through Saturday at the Center for New Television, 1440 N. Dayton St. Call 312-951-6868.