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## A chance to watch every move they make Slow-motion camera helps demystify an athletic art

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BY ROBERT JOHNSON  
Star-Ledger Staff

DANCE

NEW YORK -- "How did you do that?" is a question people often ask dancers. A dancer passes by, whirling and gesturing, and the moment is over. Afterward, audience members leave the theater filled with joy or melancholy, but may not understand why.

For all their calculations, the dancers themselves don't know exactly how their magic works. But today no mystery rests unexamined. So, who're you going to call?

Try calling David Michalek, the installation artist whose latest project, "Slow Dancing," opens Tues day at the Lincoln Center Festival. Taking the mystery out of dance, Michalek uses an experimental slow-motion camera developed by Vision Research in Wayne. The camera captures movement slowed to a fraction of its original speed.

Engineers use this type of camera to study ballistics or to analyze crash tests. Aiming it at dancers in motion, Michalek can lock onto a their elusive spirits the way the Ghost Busters' PKE meter detects psychokinetic energy.

By scrutinizing what dancers do, Michalek hopes to foster appreciation for their art. "The closer you are to it, the more you realize what it takes to be a dancer," says Michalek, who is married to New York City Ballet ballerina Wendy Whelan.

"Slow Dancing" recalls the outdoor son-et-lumière show that Lincoln Center presented in 1979 to celebrate the center's 20th anniversary. Every night, from 9 p.m. until one in the morning, Michalek's videos will play side by side, projected on 40-by-30-foot screens hung between the piers of the New York State Theater balcony. The difference is that instead of watching Gelsey Kirkland and Mikhail Baryshnikov dance "Theme and Variations" across the face of the Metropolitan Opera House, this time dance fans can study the movement of many different kinds of dancers in detail.

Michalek recorded the work of 42 dancers, from Paris Opera Ballet étoile Isabelle Guérin to voguers, krumpers and Southeast Asian masters. From Bill T. Jones to Holly Farmer, from capoeira Mestre João Grande to Trisha Brown and tapper Roxane Butterfly, all these artists choreographed and performed their own five-second dances. Viewed in slow motion, however, each five-second piece stretches to a full 10 minutes.

Ironically, Eiko & Koma, who normally dance at a glacial pace, had to accelerate their work so the movement would be visible when Michalek suspended it.

"Eiko does one very simple movement. She reaches up and she descends into a ball, but it is still filled with intensity," Michalek says. "Lemi Ponafasio, the

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Maori dancer, does very little. All he does is go up on his toes and reach out, but what he's generating within himself is extremely powerful."

Along with the images' monumental scale, the slow-motion camera magnifies the effect of the simplest gesture.

"Slow Dancing" highlights the dancers' athleticism and superb physical control, but also uncovers what happens beyond the limits of technique and perception. Michalek points out that at its normal speed dance is subliminally expressive, delivering messages and metaphors that lie beyond our conscious awareness.

By seizing control of time, which the dancer normally manipulates, Michalek also distorts these performances. In these videos, as hair or draperies float about them, the dancers' limbs move with a serene inevitability drained of weight and effort.

"This isn't dance," Michalek says. "But I think it gives some insight into what dance is, while you're watching it."

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