

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

© 1990 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

VOL. CCXV NO. 18



EASTERN EDITION

THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 1990

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

... 50 CENTS

They Could Give Some Thought To Installing It Bottom End Up

By JOLIE SOLOMON

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

It's hard enough to climb the corporate ladder; some people don't want to have to stare it in the face every day.

In Lakeview II, an office building in Columbia, Md., the corporate ladder came to life recently in the form of a 19½-foot sculpture installed by the landlord. It features a placid white man, larger than life size, relaxing comfortably on top, while he aims a foot to the jaw of one of four underlings scrambling up below.

People in nearby offices aren't happy about the struggle in the lobby. "It's a slap in the face," says Mark Noble, a loan officer at Consumer First Mortgage Inc. "Here you are, working your way up, and you've got a guy at the top kind of laughing, saying, 'The water's great, and I'm not going to let you in.' It can take a lot of air out of your balloon."

At the Lakeview Deli on the first floor, owner Joann Wagner is disgusted. It's all her customers are talking about, she says. But she thinks art like this belongs in an art gallery, not her office building. "They have a beautiful wall here," she says, "and I think they've destroyed it."

Some tenants resent the portrayal of women and blacks as the lowest on the ladder except for a white workman. The art-

ist, New Yorker Ed Massey, says he's shocked. He thought the sculpture would evoke empathy for exactly those climbers. He knows about dog-eat-dog, he says—it's the same in the art world.

Principal Mutual Insurance Co., the Des Moines, Iowa, owner of the building, is also surprised. It commissioned the work specifically after seeing a smaller version.

But when tenants started hinting this week that it was them or the ladder, Principal gave in. "It's a bottom-line decision," says Michelle Warnke, a spokeswoman. The sculpture will go.

Not every tenant is celebrating. "I'm sorry," says Bruce O'Connor, also a Consumer First loan officer. The sculpture has a point worth making, he says, and not just in his building. "You could hang this baby in the Trump Tower and it would get the same reaction. Probably the Donald Trumps of the world are the people who don't like it. My boss hates it. Most of the bosses in the building hate it."

His colleague, Mr. Noble, says it would have helped if the CEO's kicking foot was replaced by a helping hand. "This is the American Dream," he says, "the land of the free, 'use your imagination to do whatever you need to make some money.' If a foreigner walked in here, he might get a different picture."