

Columbia protests topple 'Corporate Ladder'

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The "Corporate Ladder" is coming down — at least inside a Columbia office building.

The satirical sculpture that set the 35 corporate tenants abuzz in the Lakeview office building proved too "upsetting," said a spokeswoman for Principal Financial Group, owner of the building.

"It is a bottom-line decision, very much so. We are concerned about the tenants in the building who are upset," said Michelle T. Warnke, spokeswoman for the Des Moines, Iowa-based insurance and investment

business.

The sculpture features a mailman at the foot of the ladder, a young black man in a business suit near the bottom with a woman holding the papers of a 40ish, white man who is grasping a briefcase. On the top rung is an older, grinning, balding white man.

Angry tenants have called it insulting and sexist, a "slap in the face" to corporate life.

Ed Massey, the 26-year-old New York City sculptor of the controversial work, said yesterday that he was "upset because they had the opportunity to review a model of the work, and they knew exactly what they

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were getting.

"Also, I feel people of Columbia are being deprived of an important work of art that deals with social commentary," he said. "Behind the humor is also the reality of the imbalance in the ethnic and gender

composition in the great majority of corporations."

Ms. Warnke said Principal Financial views "art as an investment and a capital expenditure," noting that the company has a series of commissioned works on view at its home office. She said it is possible that the controversial Massey work would be relocated there.

One tenant overjoyed at the decision to remove the sculpture is Betsy Faulkner, president of Travel Masters.

"I am very happy it's being removed because this was an inappropriate setting," she said. "This sculpture has the chief executive officer

kicking the executive below, and the woman executive is stealing papers from the briefcase of her male counterpart.

"It sends a very hostile message, when we have taken great strides to change the corporate structure," Ms. Faulkner added. "That is definitely stepping back."

Pam Mack, a vice president of the Columbia Association, also a tenant in the Lakeview building, said she was writing a letter urging Principal Financial to retain the sculpture.

"Most of us here find it humorous," she said. "Yet it puts you in contact with reality. The furor seems blown out of proportion."