

NEWS

Sculpture to go 'Ladder' to get hook this week

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The Corporate Ladder" — the sculpture that proved that one person's satire is another person's insult — will be removed from the Lakeview II office building this week, according to a spokesman for the building's management company.

The dismantling will come more than four months after Lakeview II's owners promised to remove the artwork in response to complaints that the piece is racist and sexist.

The sculpture of five plaster figures fighting their way to the top of a 19½-foot aluminum ladder will be removed "by Memorial Day," said Jim Bracco of Trammell Crow Co., which manages the building in the 9800 block of Broken Land Parkway in Columbia.

The artwork was installed inside the building's rear atrium entrance in early January and quickly drew gripes from several of Lakeview II's 35 tenants.

The work shows an older, white businessman perched atop the ladder aiming a kick at the jaw of a younger white man below. A white woman, a black man and another white man are shown at lower rungs of the ladder, struggling with each other to advance.

Several tenants termed the work "sexist," "offensive" and "a slap in the face" to business people, and some

threatened to move if the sculpture remained.

But others defended the piece as a humorous poke at an all-too-real situation.

The ensuing controversy made its way from the local news pages to national television and radio reports, and the front page of The Wall Street Journal.

By the third week of January, the building's owner, Iowa-based Principal Mutual Life Insurance Co., had announced the sculpture would be removed. "It's a bottom-line decision," spokeswoman Michelle Warnke said then. "We have to be a responsive and concerned landlord."

Four months later, the sculpture remained in place, with one detail mysteriously altered. Originally, the female figure was plucking a piece of paper from the briefcase of the man just above her. Now the paper has been removed, giving the appearance that the woman is pinching the man's backside.

"Oh, I like it much better this way," joked Alison Bartel, a secretary in the building, on Monday.

"Really," Bartel continued, "I can't wait for it to come down."

"I've been hearing for months that it's coming down 'soon,'" said Mark Feinberg, president of Consumer First Mortgage, on Tuesday. "I don't be-



"The Corporate Ladder," a sculpture by a New York artist, has been a source of controversy since it appeared in a Columbia office building in January.

lieve it's coming down now."

"We didn't want to move it until we were absolutely certain of its destination," explained Mary O'Keefe, a spokeswoman for Principal Mutual, this week. "The sculpture is very deli-

cate, and we didn't want to move it twice."

O'Keefe confirmed Tuesday that the piece would be moved imminently, but said she didn't know where it would be taken.