



Sculpture of rape draws gazes and gasps

By Ann LoLordo
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With ice-cream cone in hand, Christian Green studied the scene in the storefront — a partially clad woman crawling on a cement-like floor and, hovering above, the likenesses of two nude men hanging by their genitals.

He inched closer to the pained glass and then stepped back again. His eyes followed the rope as it looped over a beam and fell taut where it strung the men up. He spotted the splashes of red paint in the palms of the male figures, the woman rising up, her brassiere hiked above her breasts, her underwear and pantyhose pulled down about an ankle.

Mr. Green's gaze shifted from the woman to the male figures to the rope and back again as the 18-year-old art student contemplated this provocative study of rape.

"A lot of people would be afraid of expressing themselves [on such a sensitive

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issue], so they'd shy away," he said of the statue's artist. "He didn't shy away."

Not everyone walking along Georgetown's fashionable Wisconsin Avenue has turned as critical an eye on this storefront sculpture as Mr. Christian did yesterday. But the artwork has provoked plenty of comments, from gasps to indignant one-word bursts, since Ed Massey's sculpture appeared in the window of a one-time clothing store last week.

"Good grief," said one casually dressed woman yesterday as she and an older gentleman strolled past the shop at 1525 Wisconsin Ave., neither one stopping for a closer look.

"I think it's necessary," said Anne Schwab as she arrived at her second-story townhouse office, just two doors away from the window sculpture. "It shows the horror

of rape. And it was done by a man. I think it's really important."

Ed Massey would display his piece, titled "Morality/Mortality," nowhere else — not a gallery, not a museum.

"The frequency and undeniable horror of sexual assault dictates that the sculpture be exhibited on a large scale — boldly, forthrightly, and without apology," the 31-year-old Los Angeles-based artist wrote in an introduction to the piece that is tacked to the door of the storefront.

A sculptor with a degree in sociology, Mr. Massey uses life-size figures to highlight, critique or lambaste the cultural and social phenomena of the day. This is the same artist whose sculpture "Corporate Ladder" — a lampoon of office politics — caused a flap in Columbia when it appeared in the lobby of an office building in January 1990.

Another work, "Checkmate," skewered American businessmen's futile attempts to

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compete with the Japanese.

Mr. Massey got the idea for the "Morality/Mortality" piece from conversations with female friends. There are "too many women who fear every day the possibility of attack, who are so concerned with it, and it makes their life so miserable," said the artist in a telephone conversation from his California home.

Five-city exhibit

The sculpture is appearing simultaneously in storefronts in Miami, Chicago, Santa Monica, Washington and New York. "It's really a piece about crime, denouncing the violation of women," said Mr. Massey, a marathon runner with a master's degree in fine arts from Columbia University. "It's my turn to do a project about this, to see if I could generate some discourse."

Passers-by may not be debating Mr. Massey's work on the street, but the customers at the hair salon next door to the storefront certainly have been talking. So have the clerks at the corner market and the State Department employees working in an office above the storefront.

"Everyone interprets it a different way," said Jean Pierre Sarfati, the owner of Jacques Dessange salon. "Two women told me last week [that the sculpture represented] the pain men go through, the remorse of a man after he has done something like that. Everyone has different eyes."

Others have noted the objects strewn about the female figure — a blouse, a gray suit jacket, one black high heel, and a black purse and maroon briefcase, both unopened — and remarked on how the woman's

attackers appear not to have robbed her. Nearly every female customer has assumed the artist is a woman, Mr. Sarfati said.

"It's mind-boggling," said photographer Shelley Langston, as her eyes focused on the hanging figures. "Is this the raped person?"

"From a man's point of view, it's a little rough," said her companion, George deVincent, as the two walked down Wisconsin Avenue.

"That's what they should have done to [John Wayne] Bobbitt," added Ms. Langston, referring to the Northern Virginia man whose penis was cut off by his wife after she claimed he had raped her.

Unlike many shoppers who casually glanced at the window, Theo Carroll and Ramona Gale paused for a few minutes before the window and read Mr. Massey's introduction.

"It's frightening to look at that, but what a horrible statement it makes," said Ms. Carroll, who was visiting from Sarasota, Fla.

"It's certainly something people don't want to talk about and face," Ms. Carroll said, referring to the crime of rape. "And it's something so common and minimized."

'I'm offended'

Sid Elliott, a market researcher who lives in the neighborhood, described the sculpture in one word — "hideous."

"What feminist group did this?" he asked with disdain. "Rape is despicable, but not all men rape. Very few men rape. I'm offended. I think it's absurd. I hope none of my tax dollars paid for this."

Although created by a man, the financing for the sculpture came from Peg Yorkin, a 67-year-old Californian and co-founder of the Fund

for a Feminist Majority.

"I was very taken with it. It was making a very strong statement, and I thought it might be very hard to find funding for that piece," said Ms. Yorkin, who describes herself as a dyed-in-the-wool feminist. "I do know people are talking about it . . . Should that be done to these guys? Is that a fantasy? Is that what she's imagining?"

Confusing image

Despite the sculpture's graphic nature, some passers-by are confused by what they see.

"Gosh," said an awed Maria Sta-

pia, as she peered through the window. "The man is . . . sick. He's got problems with manhood. Maybe he was abused."

But when told that the scene depicts a rape victim and her attackers, Ms. Stapia returned her gaze to the sculpture. As others walked past, she contemplated the scene before her again. "I take back [what I said]. I didn't realize . . . I just focused on the" — she pointed to the male figures. "I just forgot about the woman."

Ms. Stapia paused to collect her thoughts about the work and its creator: "To tell you the truth now, I admire the man."