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Sculpture takes strong stand on assault

By Charles Storch
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Sculptor Ed Massey said he wanted to assault people's senses about the horror of sexual assault. And he wanted to bring his art to the public, not closet it away in a gallery where only a few would find it.

His solution: A sculpture that shows two men lynched, strung up by their genitals; in the foreground is a woman, her clothes half torn off, trying to crawl away. The piece is in a storefront on Ontario Street, between LaSalle and Wells Streets, within an area that is a magnet for young adults and tourists.

Copies of Massey's piece, "Morality/Mortality," have been on display simultaneously in Chicago and in storefront settings in New York, Washington, Miami

and Los Angeles since May 2. They are to be exhibited until May 29.

Massey, 31, said he was at the Chicago site last Friday. He said he was somewhat disappointed that some passersby laughed or giggled nervously. But he was pleased that several tour buses stopped near the site.

The storefront is a short walk from Planet Hollywood, Ed Debevic's, the Original Rock 'n' Roll McDonald's, the Hard Rock Cafe and other eateries and attractions catering to young people.

Reached in Los Angeles on Monday, Massey said he purposely avoided sites near schools or playgrounds. He said he sympathized with parents who didn't want very young children to see his work, but thought it was suitable for older children.

"A 5-year-old wouldn't understand it. A 10-year-old should understand it," he said, adding that children that young have been reported as victims and perpetrators of rape.

Ald. Burton Natarus (42nd) said Monday his office hasn't received any complaints about the work. A spokesman for MAC Management Co., which manages the building at 640 N. LaSalle St., in which the sculpture is housed, said the work has generated a lot of comment from passersby and people working in the building, but no formal complaints.

Bridgett Collier, 27, a real estate agent, called the piece "sickening, disgusting." Another passerby, Michele Messmer, a 28-year-old actor, described it as "very powerful, very emotional and almost cathartic for a woman."