

## Streetfront Art Shocks With Painful Message



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**T**he in-line skater lurched to a sudden stop just east of the corner of La Salle and Ontario and called for her two girlfriends to turn around.

"Holy [cow]!" she exclaimed, pointing at a window display. "Those guys are hanging by their, by their..."

Precisely.

What grabbed the woman's attention is a piece of streetfront art that's causing quite a stir since it was unveiled a week ago.

"Morality/Mortality" by Ed Massey is an exhibit of life-size polyurethane foam figures that depicts the gruesome retribution dealt to two men who have sexually assaulted and beaten a young woman. The battered, partially

undressed woman is on the ground and apparently trying to crawl to safety while her attackers hang from a beam above her—strung up by their genitals.

At exactly 5 p.m. on May 2, the curtain was lifted from a storefront window in the building at 640 N. La Salle, just around the corner from Planet Hollywood, and "Morality/Mortality" suddenly was foisted on unsuspecting passersby. Nearly identical versions of the exhibit were simultaneously revealed in windows in New York, Washington, Miami and Los Angeles.

So far the strongest negative reaction has been in Los Angeles. Protesters there have repeatedly covered the window with posters, and a rally against the exhibit is scheduled for Thursday. In Chicago, "Morality/Mortality" has created some word of mouth buzz and is picking up media steam, but surprisingly, we've yet to hear cries of outrage from any aldermen or community activists.

On Friday afternoon, "Morality/Mortality" was succeeding in putting the brakes on the steady stream of touristy traffic parading up and down Ontario. Some chuckled, a few voiced their displeasure ("It's unseemly and disgusting!" screeched one woman) and most seemed more than a bit confused by the whole idea.

Three middle-aged ladies who were in town from Cincinnati took turns posing for snapshots in front of the display.

"This is the best thing we've seen so far—better than Capone's Chicago," said Gale Lawson. "I guess it's supposed to be a statement against rape. It looks like those boys are in a lot of pain."

"If they raped that poor girl, hanging them by their members is too good for 'em," said her friend, Lindy Elliott. "They should whack it off."

**D**eanna Kerns, the in-line skater who was stopped in her tracks by the display, found it "fairly sick" and didn't like the fact that families with small children who were on their way to Planet Hollywood were exposed to it.

"It would be all right in a private gallery but not out on a public street," she said. "Anyway, what's the point? The guy who did this is probably pretty strange. You look at it and think, 'What's his kick?'"

I returned on Saturday night to see how the lighted display of "Morality/Mortality" would play with pedestrians.

"Oh my God!" yelped one young woman in prom dress. She and her friends laughed wildly at the hanging figures, but the laughter died down when they read the window card explaining what the art was about.

Massey was in town over the weekend to gauge Chicago's reaction to the exhibit, which will run until the end of May.

"Actually I'm not surprised to hear about people laughing," he said. "That's a pretty common response. I think people laugh out of nervousness, because they're not used to seeing something like this."

"That's the beauty of this project, to see how people react. It's quite amazing to see the impact it has—and that's why I'm showing it in storefront windows and not in a gallery, where it would have a limited audience."

Massey said he created the project as a protest against a criminal justice system that allows repeat offenders to return to the streets.

"I consider rape to be as deplorable, if not worse, than murder," he told me. "Whenever women are alone, they have to live with this fear that men can't understand, this fear of rape, of being spiritually killed inside. That's what this exhibit is about."