

Unveiling Loyola's new ladder of success

Last-minute work saves sculpture's dedication party

By Hunter Drohojowska

The Claes Oldenburg/Coosje Van Bruggen sculpture so long and eagerly awaited by Loyola Law School and the L.A. art community almost didn't make it.

When it was dedicated Friday night, you could hear a collective sigh of relief from the Loyola crowd. It seems the sculpture, which depicts a chain-link ladder toppling and spilling a bucket of paint, arrived from the Lippincott foundry cracked in several places. Lippincott flew an agent out at 3 a.m. Wednesday, the day of the massive deluge. Repairs began Thursday and the finishing touches were applied minutes before guests arrived to welcome the artists and their sculpture.

Oldenburg and his wife, Van Bruggen, sought to create the sculpture after seeing the award-winning law school buildings designed by Frank Gehry. The chain-link twisted around the ladder is an homage to the architect, as is the tilted angle.

Gehry had suggested to the Loyola fathers when he built the school that at the end of a row of four pillars, he add one lying on its side, as a comment on the deterioration of classical form and education. The fathers declined, but Oldenburg made reference to the decision in his falling pillar of a ladder.

Gehry made a wry remark about freedoms

permitted artists and denied to architects but was clearly pleased with the addition to his plaza. Among the art and architecture community who came to drink wine and nosh on dim sum and tacos were Philip and Bea Gersh, Stanley and Elyse Grinstein, Marcia Weisman and Sy Stuart, Pam Berg, Ellie Blankfort and Peter Clothier, Gil Alkire, Sherri Geldin, Doug Wheeler and Briget Johnson, John Baldessari, Fred and Kady Hoffman, Sam Francis, and Dan Flavin.

With that kind of crowd, opinions were flying. Merry Norris, president of the Cultural Affairs Commission, demurred to her husband's interpretation as an federal appeals court judge. William Norris said the sculpture represented "the promises and messages of life and the law."

Loyola Dean Arthur Frakt told the crowd that the Gehry architecture and the new sculpture were telling the law students and professors not to take themselves too seriously.

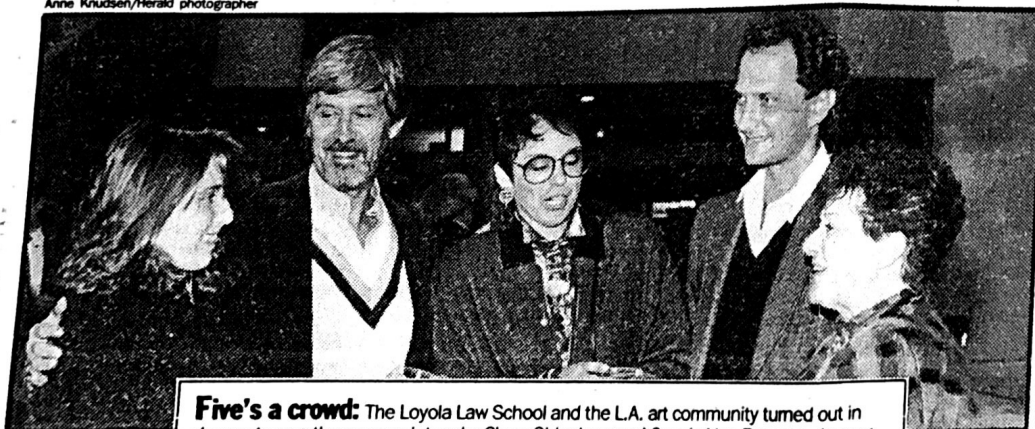
Loyola law professor Robert Benson, chairman of the art committee, noted that responses to the sculpture had ranged from the incredulous — "You guys really paid for that?" — to the profound. Some felt it was a metaphor for the scales of justice, scales that in this case are composed of man-made materials and problems. Others said the paint represented fine arts and the ladder indicated architecture and together they were in a clear but precarious relationship. One wag even thought the sculpture was symbolic of Oldenburg and Van Bruggen's relationship.

Benson, who delivered a refreshingly intelligent dedication, concluded that the sculpture was a "contrivance for generating interpretations," a thought that reminded him of the Constitution's function.

Hunter Drohojowska frequently writes about art for the Herald.



Claes Oldenburg, back right, poses Friday in front of his new sculpture. At the unveiling reception were, from left to right, John Baldessari, Coosje Van Bruggen and architect Frank Gehry.



Five's a crowd: The Loyola Law School and the L.A. art community turned out in droves to see the new sculpture by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje Van Bruggen. Among the ogers were, from left to right, Sarah and Peter Clothier; Ellie Blankfort; Jeff Daniels; and Elyse Grinstein.