

Sculptor's fear: that his eagles might fly away

By Harry Jupiter
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

The artist who re-created eight massive eagles for Pacific Bell's San Francisco headquarters had some unusual problems to overcome, including the fear that the huge sculptured birds might actually fly.

Sculptor Manuel Palos explained that the new eagles, which look just like the old, heavier, terra cotta ones, are made of reinforced fiberglass over a stainless steel skeleton.

"The concern," he said, "is for the difficulty of installing the birds on the sides of the building, 20 stories above the ground.

"They would not take wing, but the air currents at that height could create a lot of movement. If they were to fly, they would fly down."

The 13-foot tall birds weigh 1,000 pounds each, about half the weight of the old terra cotta eagles that guarded the phone company's building at 140 New Montgomery St.

That relative lightness raised the spectre of inadvertent flight, the possibility of the gigantic eagles wafting out of control during efforts to set them into place outside the 20th floor of the 26-story building.

"They were worried about the aerodynamics — about the bird liter-

ally flying away," said Marge Williams, manager of Palos' Sculpture Services in San Francisco's Bayview district.

"It was not your normal monumental project," Williams added.

The handsome building, completed in May 1983, cost \$5 million, including the land. The current restoration is costing more than \$13 million and probably will be completed later this year.

The work involved inspecting and repairing nearly six acres of glazed terra cotta tile panels.

Sculptor Palos spent a year re-creating the massive eagles that had been slowly crumbling during the past half-century.

Palos, 47, the son of a shoemaker, was born in Zacatecas, Mexico, 400 miles northeast of Mexico City. He has been in San Francisco since 1964.

He has won national acclaim for his work restoring massive bronzes and other heroic sculptures.

Palos did the interior castings for the Norman Marcus Building on Union Square, restored the original bronze doors for Crocker Bank's building at 901 Market St. and is now restoring six life-sized figures for the top of the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in Lincoln Park.

"I used to play with clay, model-

ing faces and figures when I was 13 or 14 years," Palos said, "but I didn't really begin sculpting until I was 22.

"I wasted a lot of time. I wish I started at 15. In Italy, kids 5 or 6 years old are already chipping marble."

Palos has seen many children chipping away in Carrara, where he goes every year for marble and for inspiration.

"That's where Michelangelo cut all his marble for The Pieta and the best pieces he did," Palos said.

"When you're there, you feel the presence and the power of Michelangelo and it's a good feeling. You get inspired."

That inspiration carries over to Palos' work in San Francisco, where he believes his huge fiberglass eagles are indestructible.

"These birds will last forever," Palos declared.

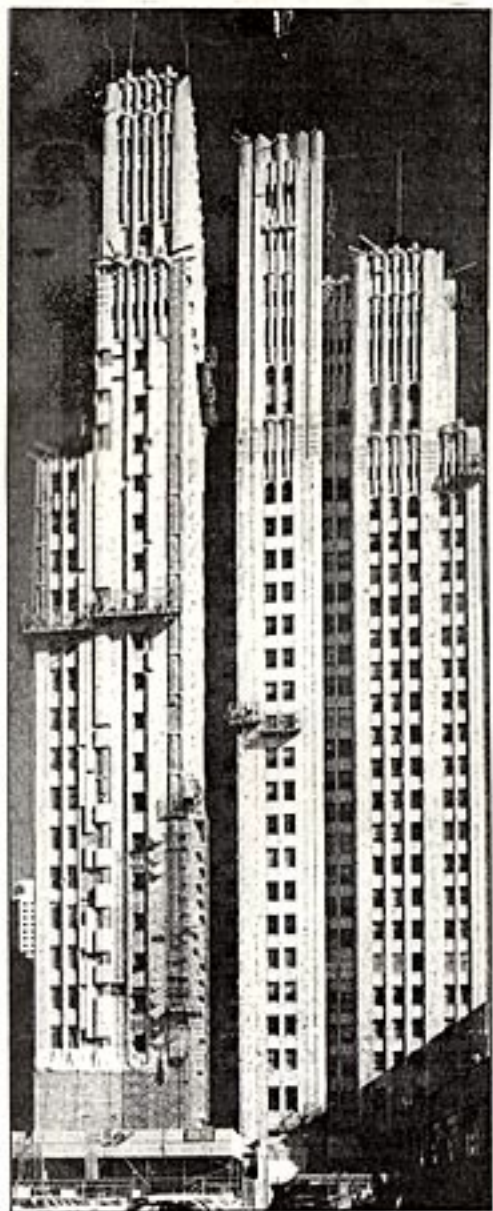
If Palos is exaggerating, Williams says he's not exaggerating much.

"The birds will certainly last longer than the building," she said.



Sculptor Manuel Palos, left, is dwarfed by one of the eight 13-foot eagles he has re-created. Above, Fabian Bianchi grouts the new terra cotta that faces the building. At top right, a worker uses a spatula to restore the deteriorated material.





Examiner photos by Paul Gines

The 51-year-old phone company building on New Montgomery Street, above, is undergoing a \$13 million restoration. The terra cotta on the 26-story landmark has deteriorated badly. At right, a steeljacker hangs out on a glider about 20 stories up. Below, sculptor Manuel Palos on a small eagle that will adorn the renovated building. Palos has also re-created eight 13-foot-tall fiberglass eagles to replace the old terra cotta ones.





Examiner/Paul Glass

Standing tall again in The City, with honor

San Francisco sculptor Manuel Palos Friday installed six 9-foot-tall replicas he made of 19th century Paris figures, at S.F.'s Legion of Honor.

He worked from photographs of the originals. Palos and his crew put the statues on top of the domed roof in the rear of the building, overlooking the golf course, by lifting them into place by cranes and fastening them down. The first replicas had been in place since 1924, and had begun to come apart.

