

POLLUTERS, SPARE THAT TREE!

An artist's statement awaits its fate atop a 70-foot chimney

By INGRID DEVITA

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It took three tries and a brush with Long Island Rail Road police before Daniel Pittman and three cohorts managed, in the dead of night, to pull the 300-pound bundle up the side of a 70-foot chimney owned by the LIRR on 30th St. near 11th Ave.

"A couple of times I said to myself, 'This is a crazy, ridiculous idea.' I was risking my life up there," recalls the 24-year-old Pittman.

Now, three months later, Pittman's "tree of life" is weathering it atop the tower.

A member of 4D Basement Inc., a nonprofit East Village artists' network, Pittman is

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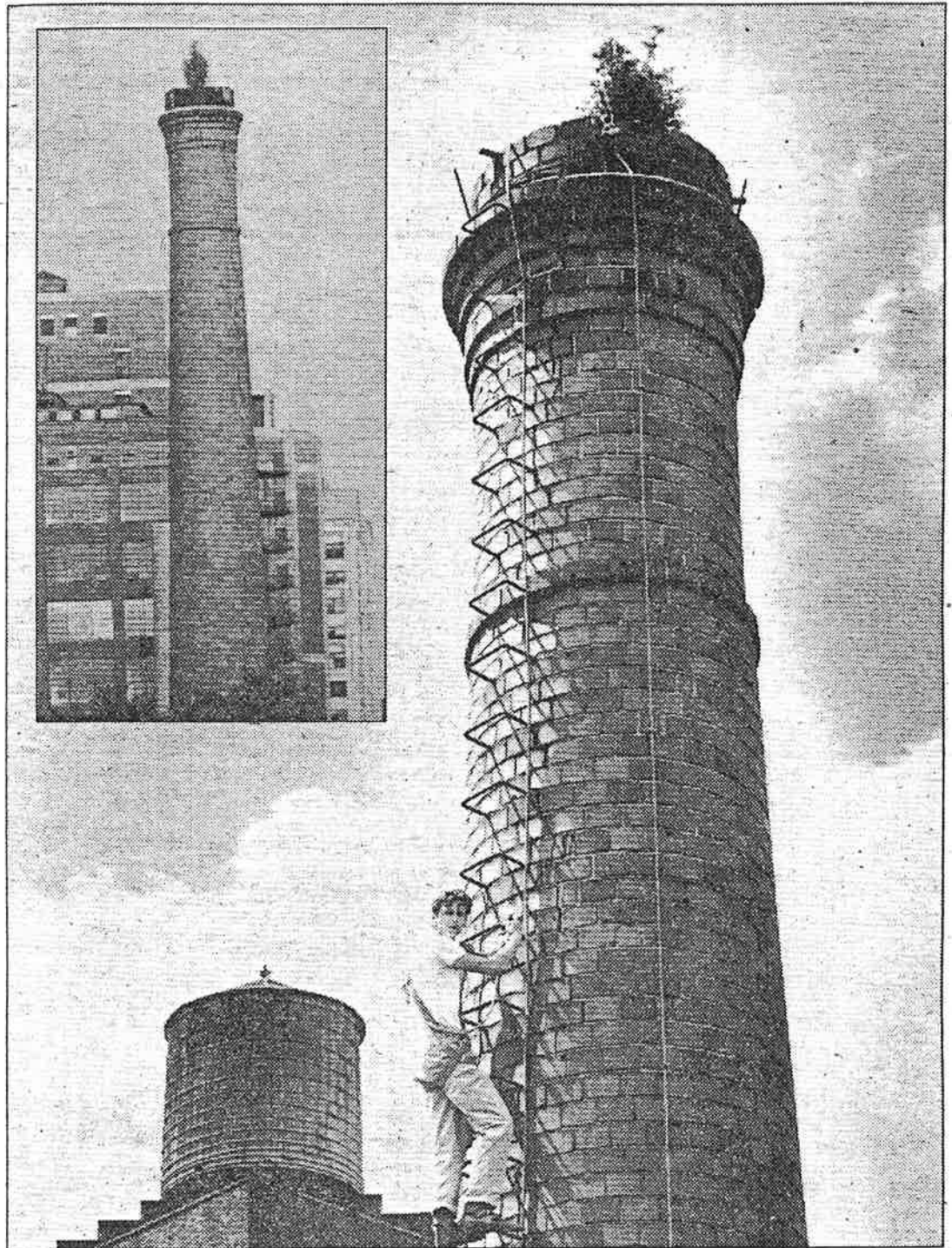
placing trees atop abandoned chimneys as a statement against air pollution. His two other "plantings" were in Brooklyn, where legend has it trees love to grow. Developers, alas, swept away the seedlings in their march toward gentrification.

As Pittman sees it, "Trees filter the air and chimneys pollute the air. The opposites intrigue me. It reminds me of the alienation that has developed between humans and their planet."

LIRR spokeswoman Susan McGowan had a terse "no comment" regarding the status of the illegally planted cedar above W. 30th St. Passers-by are less reticent.

"Nicest part of the whole block," notes salesman Harvey Steinhardt on his way to a call. "Everything else has got to go." Two daytime prostitutes plying their trade in the shadow of the chimney give the tree an affirmative nod.

Pittman is eyeing the Pfizer



CARE & FEEDING: Pittman ascends to "tree of life" he planted in May (inset). **MONICA ALMEIDA DAILY NEWS**

property on the Brooklyn side of the Williamsburg Bridge for his next chimney tree. This time he's going through channels.

"We are talking with Mr. Pittman," acknowledges Tom Kline, plant manager for Pfizer's chemical division, "but no one can say what

Pfizer's position is."

Personally, Kline believes that "creative and innovative art like Mr. Pittman's should be given consideration. There has always been an interest in beautifying old residential structures, but very little has been done with old manufacturing structures. I like his

concept and think there should be more people like him."

Despite the lofty goals, Pittman says that "live" art can be stressful.

"It's a lot like having a child. You have to feed it and worry that something might go wrong. But the trees energize me."