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For Immediate Release

Michelangelo of the Northwest Nears Completion of Masterpiece

In an out-of-the-way corner of Whidbey Island, WA, the Russian-born sculptor Alexei Kazantsev is putting the finishing touches on a nine-foot-tall marble figure of St. Joseph. Nearby, a gigantic guardian angel and larger-than-life donkey are emerging from their own huge blocks of the same gleaming white Italian stone. Waiting her turn to be rendered in marble, a 7-foot-tall plaster model of the Virgin Mary, holding the infant Jesus on her lap, sits patiently in a meadow rimmed by cedars as cows and horses graze nearby.

The sculptor, who recently relocated to Whidbey Island from Louisiana, is nearing completion on his largest-ever commission: a scene of the Holy Family for Holy Ghost Catholic Church in Hammond, Louisiana. Alexei has already completed several major works for the same church including an immense bronze crucifix and a marble baptistery.

A year ago, Alexei traveled to Carrara Italy, to the same quarry which sold marble to Michelangelo some 500 years ago. There he hand-selected four gigantic blocks of marble, each weighing close to 10 tons. They were shipped to his island home in containers and lifted into place at his studio by cranes.

If the Mary of the Gospel narratives seemed unfazed by visits from angels, shepherds and Magi, this Mary, too, seems to find her present circumstances unremarkable. The meadow surrounding Alexei's studio resembles an archeological dig with dozens of experimental works and fragments of statuary scattered here and there. A nine-foot-tall model of St. Joseph made of wood and rebar presides, android-like, over the scene.

The unexpected sight attracts curious tourists and the easy-going Alexei is always happy to take a break from his toils to answer questions. Locals don't pay much attention, although the ad hoc sculpture garden has become a useful landmark.

Alexei expects to finish his masterpiece within the next few months. The figures will be crated and lifted by crane onto the back of an 18-wheeler and begin the journey across the country to their home in Louisiana.

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The sculptor Alexei Kazantsev works in an open air studio on rural Whidbey Island, WA.