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May 30

Keys: His work here is done Sculptor Don Meserve's lovingly rendered Stations of the Cross are home for good.

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Staff Writer

PORTLAND - Don Meserve smiled and gripped as friend after friend walked over to him, grabbed his hand and offered thanks and congratulations.

Finally, after 30 years of thinking about it and two decades of actively trying, Meserve had the satisfaction of knowing that his installation of 14 lead panels of his Stations of the Cross was here to stay, forever mounted on the walls of the chapel at the Cathedral Church of St. Luke on State Street.

Understated and elegant, the 14-by-14-inch bas relief panels blend nicely into the brick walls and dark-wood interior of the octagonal chapel, one of the most sacred and intimate spaces in all of Portland.

"This is the other thing that art can do besides tune up people's houses," said Meserve, surveying his installation.

"This is a good day. A very good day."

Meserve is a sculptor from Round Pond who is perhaps best known for his large stone carvings with nautical and industrial themes. He also has a long-abiding concern for art of the sacred, and has taken particular interest in the Cathedral of St. Luke, the Episcopal diocese of Maine.

Meserve came to Portland to work as a mason in the early 1990s. The Rev. Don Webster hired him when the church was struggling with a project that involved the wonderful stained-glass window at the far end of the cathedral's main sanctuary.

The project was not going well.

"But thank God, we found Don Meserve," Webster recounted. "He was our mason-in-residence through that project, which lasted six weeks."

In the process of working together, Webster and Meserve became pretty good friends. They had long talks about stone work, building construction, religion -- pretty much any topic was fair game. Eventually, they got to talking about Meserve and his work as an artist.

"I thought of him as a stone mason," Webster said. "It took me quite a while to connect up with the fact that this man is an artist, and a very fine artist."

When Webster got wind that Meserve had created his Stations of the Cross, he was immediately interested. He wanted the stations for the chapel.

Read in sequence, the panels tell the story of Jesus' final journey, from condemnation to crucifixion and burial. Meserve's stations are unique, because they tell the story from Jesus' perspective. He titled the piece "Through His Eyes."

The panels suggest what Jesus might have seen and felt during his final, blurry-eyed journey and about those who judged him, wept for him and attempted to aid him.

They are enormously powerful, and the small circular space of the chapel lends itself well



Sculptor Don Meserve created 14 lead panels -- each 14-by-14 inches in bas relief -- depicting the Stations of the Cross. A dedication of the permanent installation, which is mounted in the chapel of the Cathedral of St. Luke in Portland, was held recently.

John Patriquin/Staff Photographer

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to their quiet and personal contemplation and interpretation.

Webster's desire could not overcome the cathedral's lack of financial wherewithal to engage a sale. Instead, Webster arranged a temporary installation one season during Lent. "We made it a long Lent," he said wryly, explaining the art's extended stay.

Webster assumed his last best chance at acquiring the stations had vanished. But then, as fate often does, it intervened.

A while back, Webster learned that Meserve's panels were still unattached to a permanent home. Further, he learned that Meserve very much wanted them to be in Maine and, if possible, at St. Luke's.

Motivated by the opportunity at hand, a group of active church members led by Lee Urban began a campaign to raise money for the purchase of the panels. Two weeks ago, they got their final check, crossing the \$25,000 threshold.

It's a story with a happy ending.

As the Rev. Ben Shambaugh, dean of the cathedral, said during the dedication, "We know that God is seeing us now and smiling."

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