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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sacred Site at OLANA by Artist Diana Wege Highlights Intersection of Art and Environmental History

HUDSON, NY – Artist and environmentalist Diana Wege studied one of Frederic Church’s masterpieces for a decade. Her impulse was to focus on Church’s traditional representation of Niagara Falls as a way to raise contemporary awareness of the climatic and environmental challenges we face today. The result is *Sacred Site*, an installation of twelve hand-painted full-scale replicas of Church’s largest painting, *Niagara, from the American Side*. Placed in the North Meadow at Olana State Historic Site, this installation is accessible and free for all visitors to Olana’s designed historic landscape.

Of the twelve canvases she painted, Wege altered four of them to emphasize abstract qualities of Church’s imagery. A closer look at all the reproductions shows changes which reflect humanity’s destructive impact on our planet. Through the paintings and their orientation toward Mount Merino, a forested hill within Olana’s viewshed which was protected from development in 2008, Wege invites the viewers to reflect on the interactions between humans and the natural world.

“The experience of painting Frederic Church’s Niagara helped me to see Church as a problem solver in his own right,” said artist Diana Wege. “Church found solutions and acted on them, whether through choosing colors and forms in his painting, deciding to rewild Olana’s landscape with native species, or helping to preserve Niagara’s profound force and beauty from exploitation. *Sacred Site* is where we can come together at this critical time to solve problems for the future health of our planet and generations to come.”

“We are excited to present Diana Wege’s iconic Niagara paintings out in Olana’s landscape,” said Mark Prezorski, The Olana Partnership’s Senior Vice President and Landscape Curator. “These works will help us to tell many stories at Olana this season, including Frederic Church’s advocacy for public parks, as well as more recent efforts to protect Olana’s integral viewshed.”

Sacred Site coincides with The Olana Partnership’s celebration through programming and projects of Frederic Church’s contribution to the formation of our country’s public parks as a lead advocate to create the first State Park in the U.S. at Niagara, and as the landscape architect of Olana, a New York State Historic Site and National Historic Landmark. This year is also Frederick Law Olmsted’s 200th birthday. Olmsted was a vital cohort in preserving Niagara Falls as an international public park and the designer of Central Park, of which Church was a commissioner.

“Visitors and program participants will get the chance to experience the relative scale of Church’s landscapes and explore how artists like Church and Wege are inspired by the natural world,” said Carolyn Keogh, The Olana Partnership’s Director of Education and Public Programs. “This project provides an anchor to discuss ideas around Church’s process, his involvement in the creation of the Niagara Reservation, and the ways we interact with our natural environments.”

When Frederic Church unveiled his first major painting of Niagara Falls in 1857 (*Niagara*, National Gallery of Art), he defied period claims that the subject was so overwhelming that no painting could do it justice. Church’s groundbreaking panoramic view over the precipice of the Falls astonished period audiences; one reviewer famously described it as “Niagara, with the roar left out!” This *Niagara* earned Church critical acclaim across both the United States and Great Britain, launching an international reputation and financial success that few could rival. Church, not satisfied with just one famed canvas of the iconic Falls, returned to the subject in major paintings twice more, producing *Under Niagara* of 1862--presently unlocated, with a chromolithograph and study in the Olana collection--and 1867’s *Niagara Falls, from the American Side* that is the focus of this installation.

“*Sacred Site* is fascinating evidence of the afterlives of Church’s work in contemporary art, and also a rare chance for our audiences to encounter the full immersive impact of Church’s monumental oil on canvas practice in the Olana landscape he designed,” said William L. Coleman Director of Collections and Exhibitions of The Olana Partnership

Sacred Site is free to view at Olana State Historic Site every day from 8 AM until sunset until October 31, 2022. While on view at Olana, *Sacred Site* will also be a component of The Olana Partnership’s public programs—included in the “Environmentalists on Olana series to connect Frederic Church to climate change and New York State’s waterways, in an artmaking tour for older adults, and through a webinar that will focus on the role Niagara played in the history of abolitionists and black artists. To learn more about *Sacred Site* by Diana Wege, visit Olana.org/sacredsitesite.

Special thanks to the staff of The Olana Partnership, the New York State Bureau of Historic Sites, the New York State Parks Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation – Taconic Region.

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About Olana State Historic Site and The Olana Partnership: *Olana is the greatest masterwork of Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900), the preeminent American artist of the mid-19th century and the most important artist’s home, studio, and designed landscape in the United States. Church designed Olana as a holistic environment integrating his advanced ideas about art, architecture, landscape design, and environmental conservation. Olana’s 250-acre artist-designed landscape with five miles of carriage roads and a Persian-inspired house at its summit embraces unrivaled panoramic views of the Hudson Valley and Catskill Mountains and welcomes more than 170,000 visitors annually. The landscape is open for guided touring, and reservations are highly recommended. The landscape is open daily 8 AM-sunset.*

Olana State Historic Site, administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, is a designated National Historic Landmark and one of the most visited sites in the state. The Olana Partnership, a private not-for-profit education corporation, works cooperatively with New York State to support the restoration, conservation, and interpretation of Olana. The Olana Partnership operates Olana State Historic Site in a cooperative agreement with New York State Parks.