



AS IT IS

Marble of Michelangelo's Dreams Still Being Mined Today

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In 1517, the great Italian artist Michelangelo climbed Mount Altissimo in Tuscany. There, he found the **marble** of his dreams.

Michelangelo thought the marble might even be better than that from nearby Carrara – the place where he got marble for some of his most famous statues.

"There is enough here (Mount Altissimo) to **extract** until Judgment Day," he wrote. The term "Judgment Day" comes from the Christian belief about the end of the world.

Michelangelo created a path that would help workers transport the marble from Altissimo to the city of Florence. The plan was to use the marble to improve the look of the Church of San Lorenzo.

After several years of work, Pope Leo took away Michelangelo's permission to work on the project. The church still does not have a beautiful **façade** at the front.

In the three centuries following Michelangelo's time, the Altissimo **quarries** were ignored and later rediscovered.

In the 19th century, the leaders of Russia chose Altissimo marble for Saint Isaac's Cathedral in Saint Petersburg. More recently, Altissimo marble was used in the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi. The mosque opened in 2007.

Today, the **quarries** on Altimisso are very active. The Reuters news agency says modern stone cutting and removal methods have produced a look similar to some Cubism paintings.

Before the marble is removed, expert stone workers hang on ropes from the sides of the nearly 1,600-meter-high mountain. They use iron bars to dig at its sides. They try to remove **loose** rock that could fall and hurt other workers.

Franco Lerotti is the director of extraction work at the quarry. He notes that the tools used to take marble from the quarry have changed much over time. In the past, miners used simple hand tools. "Now we have diamond-tipped wires and saws and heavy earth-moving equipment," he said.

Over the years, artists such as Auguste Rodin, Henry Moore, Joan Miro and Isamu Noguchi have used Altissimo marble for their works.

Michelangelo would be pleased.

I'm John Russell.

Alessandro Bianchi reported on this story for the Reuters news agency. John Russell adapted his report for Learning English. George Grow was the editor.

Words in the Story

marble – *n.* a kind of stone that is often polished and used in buildings and statues

extract – *v.* to remove (something) by pulling it out or cutting it out

façade – *n.* the front of a building

quarry – *n.* a place where large amounts of stone are dug out of the ground

loose – *adj.* not connected securely