

*Joseph Builds Basilica in Lourdes*, by Seth Kiehl

Art selection and comment by [Lil Copan](#). in the [June 10, 2015](#) issue



© 2013 SETH KIEHL

(inset: a photo of Ave Maria Grotto)

Over 40 years, Brother Joseph Zoettl built a curious treasure of miniature structures on four acres of land at St. Bernard Abbey in Cullman, Alabama. The mini-edifices in Ave Maria Grotto include representations of the Colosseum in Rome, St. Peter's Basilica, Lourdes, the Tower of Babel, Noah's Ark, the Alamo, and the Leaning Tower of Pisa. The grotto is a study in faithful work, imagination, and repurposed materials—cold cream jars, broken pottery, an old bird cage, seashells, marbles, and colored glass. The life and craft of Brother Joseph are explored in *Brother Joseph and the Grotto*, a Red Clay Pictures documentary written and directed by Cliff Vaughn, which is part of the Smithsonian Institution's "Museum on Main Street" traveling exhibition. Graphic designer Seth Kiehl created illustrative elements for the film.