

Salvation Mountain
Niland, California

Leonard Knight (born 1931) spent five years in Nebraska sewing together a hot air balloon with the words "God Is Love" emblazoned on it. The balloon grew so big (three hundred feet high) that he was never able to get it off the ground. In 1986 he drove to the Mojave Desert in his dump-truck with a house built on back, tried flying the balloon there, failed again and gave up. He decided to build a monument to God on a desert ridge instead. Carving and moulding the surface, and using thousands of gallons of donated paint, he covered hundreds of feet of the ridge with evangelical messages and decorations. "God is Love flourished amidst fields of flowers and cascading waterfalls. After three years' work the mountain collapsed, but instead of quitting, Knight learned from his mistakes, switched from using heavy concrete to lighter adobe to shape the mountain, and started over again. In 1994 local officials declared the mountain "a toxic nightmare" and tried to tear it down. Knight fought back, and with the help of friends and admirers disproved the government's claims. Today, Salvation Mountain stands bigger than ever and Knight continues working on it, welcoming visitors by the hundreds from around the world.