

Tim Youd: 100 Novels Project

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(Photo: Jan Austin/For The Salinas Californian)

If you're strolling through the National Steinbeck Center this week, you may hear a sound that will instantly transport you back in time, especially if you grew up in the pre-computer era and learned to type on a manual typewriter.

Internationally-known performance artist Tim Youd has set himself up in the back of Rocinante, the truck driven across the United States by author and Salinas native, John Steinbeck in 1960. On his 10,000 mile journey with his standard poodle, Charley, Steinbeck wrote the book "Travels With Charley."

Visitors to the Steinbeck Center have been watching and interacting with Youd as he retypes Steinbeck's

treasured book as part of his ongoing 100 Novels project. Over a ten-year period, Youd will be retyping 100 novels. His final day at the Center is Tuesday, June 30.

The Los Angeles-based artist launched his 100 Novels project in 2013.

Presented as live performances, Youd retypes each novel on the same make and model typewriter that the author originally used. He selects a location relevant to the novel. Each book is retyped on a single sheet of paper, with a second sheet behind it for support. The end result is two pages containing a dense accumulation of ink and indentation. Echoing two pages of a book, the entire novel, illegible, is present in a simple diptych form, as an enduring work of art resulting from the performance.

The Monterey Museum of Art, in partnership with the National Steinbeck Center, the Henry Miller Memorial Library, and The Barnyard Shopping Village, is hosting Youd's project from June 22 through August 6.

During his time here, Youd has been retyping four novels live at various locations on the Monterey Peninsula. These will be the 36th through 39th novels in his 100 Novels project.

"What he does is really very innovative," said Charlotte Eyerman, executive director of Monterey Museum of Art. "He is a visual artist, so he brings this performance element, but the artwork that he produces is the result of the typing. He types the entire novel on a single sheet of paper with one sheet behind it for support. What is created is a diptych. It's a work of art on two sheets of paper. It's not a conventional drawing; he's making art with the typewriter ribbon. He tracks down the original typewriter used by the author. This is historical, it's literary and it relates to the long history of manuscript creation. The art is both the performance and the product that emerges from that process."

"My visual art has had to do with text and literature for at least a decade prior to starting this series," said Youd. "When you're looking at a book, you're looking at a rectangle of white enclosing a smaller rectangle of the black print and that mirror image on the opposing page. I thought about how I could heighten that quality and that led me to think about putting all the words on one page as a way to emphasize that quality. The top sheet will become blacker and blacker and the ink will bleed through the top sheet onto the under-sheet. When I'm done typing, I mount the two sheets side by side in a diptych form, which is a formal representation of the pages of the book, so that becomes the formal piece of art."

Youd welcomes questions and dialogues with visitors while he types.

He is using a Hermes Baby typewriter at the Steinbeck Center in Salinas just like the one Steinbeck took on his journey.

It's interesting to note that the Hermes typewriter has a different key placement than what most of us are used to. Instead of the letters QWERTY across the top row, the letters are QWERTZ.

"This is the first time I've used this type of machine," said Youd.

For the most part, Youd is able to find working typewriters on Ebay and has them serviced at a shop in Los Angeles where he makes his home. He spent several months searching for this Hermes and says that ribbons are still available.

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This novel is 275 pages. Youd anticipates that the paper will begin to tear somewhere around page 200.

"I let it tear for as long as I can and still get it through the typewriter," he said. "Then I have to patch it a bit. I patch from the back to support it. Depending on the length of the novel and the specifics of the typewriter, some need less patching than others."

Youd averages five to six pages an hour, completing about 35 pages daily.