The Typewriter and the Capitol Rotunda

By WALLIS WATKINS • JAN 27, 2016

In between the House and Senate chambers of the State Capitol sits Tim Youd, methodically pounding the keys of his Remington typewriter. It’s similar to the one Robert Penn Warren used to write “All the King’s Men,” which Youd, a visual and performance artist from Los Angeles, is re-typing.

"Which, if you know the story," says Youd, "contains a loosely fictionalized account of Governor Huey Long."

It’s part of his ‘100 Novels’ project, where he re-types an entire novel in a location that’s integral to the story. "Here I am in the State Capitol close to the end of a twenty-four to twenty-five day straight typing exercise to get through All the King's Men," he says.
This is the forty-fourth novel he's re-typed as part of the project and the fifth done in Louisiana since arriving in October. In the French Quarter, he re-typed John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces*. Under an oak tree in Point Coupee, he re-typed *The Autobiography of Ms. Jane Pittman*. Outside of a theater in New Orleans, Youd finished *The Moviegoer* by Walker Percy. And in Independence, he completed *Modern Baptist*, written by James Wilcox.

"When I re-type each novel, I type it all on one page with a second page behind it," he says. He's currently on page 530 of 'All the King's Men.' "529 pages into a 661 page novel, it is tattered and shredded, it’s black with ink from many, many passes through the typewriter. At the end, I take those two pages apart and I mount them side-by-side in a diptych form," Youd explains.

While the Legislature isn't in session, the sound of Youd's typewriter fills the empty Capitol Rotunda. But he has seen some Louisiana politics play out. Youd recalls his first day in the Rotunda. "I was here was the day there was the tussle over the Speaker in the House of Representatives. I didn't understand the magnitude of it. And then when I got back to the hotel and read about it, I was like, 'Wow! I was there. I was in the eye of the storm.' And then it was book-ended after with President Obama arriving," he says.

Youd will be at the capitol until Thursday. His finished piece will added to the four others he's completed in Louisiana, all on display at the New Orleans Museum of Art until February 21.