

Performing Charles Bukowski's 'Post Office' on a typewriter

JUL 17, 2013 By Avishay Artsy

Los Angeles artist Tim Youd will be in the parking lot of the Downtown Terminal Annex Post Office for the next 10 days. It's where Charles Bukowski worked for 12 years and where his first novel, "Post Office," is set. Youd will be typing out the novel on a single sheet of paper.



Tim Youd types out Kurt Vonnegut's "Jailbird" on a Smith Corona Coronamatic 2200.

Tim Youd's Hollywood studio – actually, it's more of a storage space – is filled with typewriters. He's got a vintage Underwood Champion, the same model Charles Bukowski used to type "Post Office."

"You kinda get in touch, in a different way, with the underlying work when you burrow into the specifics and you're retyping every word, and you're working on the same typewriter, and in a location that's germane to the underlying work," Youd said.

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In *Post Office*, published in 1971, Bukowski describes the mind-numbing drudgery of menial labor and overbearing supervisors, and his attempt to escape it through drink and women. Youd will be re-typing it in front of the post office, free and open to the public, as a sort of performance installation, meets grand literary homage, meets exercise in masochism.

“If I’m typing around four or five pages an hour, and [Henry Miller’s] “Tropic of Capricorn” took me 60-plus hours or whatever it was, you go through your ebbs and flows, you know, you’re into it, and you’re like, ‘oh, this is kind of agonizing, this is hurting my back, this is hurting my neck.’ I mean, you go through a process,” Youd said.



Tim Youd typed Charles Bukowski’s “Women” on this sheet of paper. The topsheet is on the left, the undersheet on the right.

That process is captured on paper in a unique way. When Youd gets to the bottom of a page, he sticks the same page *back* in the typewriter. So he’s typing the whole book on the same single sheet of paper. He also tapes a second page underneath it.

Youd has these “typewriter portraits” framed side by side – the cover sheet with an inky black rectangle, each line typed over hundreds of times, totally illegible. And a second page, marked by a few words and phrases that have pierced through the top sheet.



Tim Youd holds two of his cardboard replica typewriters.

Besides collecting all these typewriters. on eBay or at an office repair store on the Westside, Youd also creates replicas of typewriters – out of cardboard. He’s made a number of them. Hunter S. Thompson’s IBM Selectric 2, used to type “Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.” Vonnegut’s bright-blue Smith Corona Coronamatic 2200, which Youd will use to type “Breakfast of Champions” at the Vonnegut Memorial Library in Indianapolis.

Youd wants to give other books the same treatment. He’ll type Thomas Pynchon’s “Gravity’s Rainbow” in Manhattan Beach, where it was written. And Santa Ana, where Philip K. Dick wrote “A Scanner Darkly.”

As for what Bukowski would think of the project, Youd says, “I mean, if I gave him a six-pack of beer, maybe he would’ve been happier. That might have been permission enough.”

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The Terminal Annex post office in downtown LA, where Charles Bukowski worked as a mail carrier for a dozen years, and the setting for his debut novel, "Post Office."

Indeed, Youd's own intoxication with books comes from a lifelong love of the printed word.

"You know, everybody goes through their ups and downs and personal professional successes and failures," Youd said. "And reading has always been there for me. Because it's an escape. And art is an escape, or an entry into a different world anyway."

It's a world Youd wants to keep his fingers in for a while to come.