



ARTS

Artist's Literary Pilgrimage Brings '100 Novels Project' To The Triad

by David Ford Nov 17, 2017



Artist Tim Youd busy at work retyping John Ehle's *The Land Breakers* in the ZSR Library entrance on the campus of Wake Forest University. DAVID FORD/WFDD

For the past four years, artist Tim Youd has traveled to cities throughout the world carrying famous novels, and the typewriters used to create them. Once there, he finds a public space that speaks to the author or the text, and begins to type. Youd's finished work is currently on display at Wake Forest University. Since early November, Youd has been busy typing a performance of *The Land Breakers* by Thomas Wolfe Prize-winning author and North Carolina native John Ehle.

On the walls of Hanes Art Gallery, two sheets of paper are neatly framed in black. One is ink soaked - an entire 500-page novel within its borders. It's completely blackened by the overlapping letters of a typewriter. The second sheet is battered and frayed as well, revealing thousands of distinct keystroke impressions left by the machine's constant hammering.

More than a dozen of these are mounted there as part of Youd's *100 Novels Project*. But for the artist, the fascination has always been about the journey that began four years ago while reading.

You'd spoke with WFDD's David Ford about the many life lessons he's learned along the way.

Interview Highlights

How did this idea come to you initially?

I had this palpable urge to crush the book, like with my hands or with a steamroller, or somehow get all the words in the book onto one page—plus a ghost image—and that led me to think about doing exactly that, superimposing all the words. That led me to the idea, well, how was I going to do it?

On the early evolution of the *100 Novels Project*.

After four or five in the studio doing it, I concluded that there could be a performance to this. I'm a bit diffident by nature and wasn't sure I wanted to do that, but I was compelled. I married it with an interest of mine in literary pilgrimage. I thought, if I'm using the make and model typewriter that the author used, what if I situate myself in a place that's related to the author or to the author's life, or somehow charged with some kind of significance related to that novel that I'm working on?

On the artistic rewards from this project:

I've come to understand the project as being one of an exercise in good reading. I'm really trying to focus on the work that's in front of me and come to terms with the novel that I am reading. I've read every novel that I type at least once before. So, it's something that I want to spend time with to understand the best I can.

What do you say to the people who question the legitimacy of this unique art form?

I get a variety of responses and I've opened myself up to that. Not every response is positive or reverent, but nor would I want it to be. Part of it for me is engaging in whatever level that somebody wants to engage. In that context I've had similar questions, and sometimes they are just trying to be a wise guy, or sometimes they sort of say, 'Hey, you know, maybe I'm being a wise guy, but I'm actually asking a question that I want to know the answer to on a deeper level,' and then we can have some kind of conversation. So, that's cool.

Artist Tim Youd is currently devouring John Ehle's *The Land Breakers*. This weekend, you'll find him intently reading while busily typing away on Wake Forest University's Reynolda campus. But, as always, he's game for a good conversation if you are.