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WEBSTER-KIRKWOOD SOUTH COUNTY
TIMES TIMES WEST END
WORD
CITY LIVING FROM THE ARCH TO THE INNERBELT

Artist Tim Youd Retypes St. Louis

by Dickson Beall



Artist Tim Youd retypes Marianne Moore at First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood. | photo by Ursula Ruhl

March 07, 2018

Tim Youd is a visual and performing artist who lives in Los Angeles and retypes the creative works of authors from all over the place. While in St. Louis, he is focused on authors with St. Louis connections — T.S. Eliot, Stanley Elkin, Marianne Moore and William S. Burroughs.

You'd's unique performance art opened in the Front Room of the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) Jan. 19, as he retyped "Collected Poems by T.S. Eliot" using the same kind of typewriter Eliot used — a Smith Corona Silent "flat top."

It is You'd's practice to work at specific sites that were part of the author's history. So, for example, he moved his performance from CAM to Washington University's campus to type Stanley Elkin's "The Franchiser" on an Adler Satellite typewriter.

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Youd has retyped in many unusual locations. Currently at First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood retyping Marianne Moore, he once retyped in a pickup truck parked in the lot of a post office, as well as at the home of William Faulkner in Oxford and at Virginia Wolfe's home in Sussex, England.

Trained to draw, paint and sculpt, Youd uses the medium of typewriter keys and ink to make marks on paper. Two sheets of paper are taped together to make a two-page "sandwich." This double sheet is run through the typewriter, over and over again, as the artist continues retyping the words of the entire novel on this one sheet.

The keys eviscerate the pulp of the paper. The top sheet fractures with ink, puckering and sending some ink to bleed through. The pages become ripped and torn. What is left after the numerous retypings is a document of the artist's performance. After completely condensing the novel in this manner, Youd separates the two pages and frames them as a diptych, and the gallery wall displays this relic of his performance.

This formal piece of art — paper that has become so worked that it has a distinctive texture almost akin to an archeological ruin — is a record, not only of the novel itself, but also of the artist's experience in reading and processing the material as he types.

The project has been transformative for Youd. Immersing himself in this idiosyncratic and literary pilgrimage has become, for him, all about how he can be a better reader, each time he sits down at a typewriter to do a performance. He understands that many readers experience moments of what may seem out-of-body experiences. Youd believes he's tapped into that out-of-body experience on an ongoing basis.

Considering it an experience similar to devotion — almost a religious ecstasy — Youd pursues his performance with focus and with engagement, trying to better understand the voice of each particular author. After about six years of this practice, Youd has completed over 50 novels — halfway to finishing his "100 Novels" project. Recently, he has added poems to the project, typing poems in red rather than black ink.

As the diptychs are completed, they go on view in CAM's Front Room gallery, along with typewriter drawings — superimposed outlines of the same model typewriters he used in each performance. The project is organized for CAM St. Louis by Lisa Melandri, executive director.

Clicking away in various St. Louis locations, Youd's retyping of previous generations of authors makes more than a ripple in time. Using a cell phone and Facebook Live, the artist transmits sounds from his performative space to the CAM gallery space, further enriching that location where his diptychs and previous generations of work are on view.