

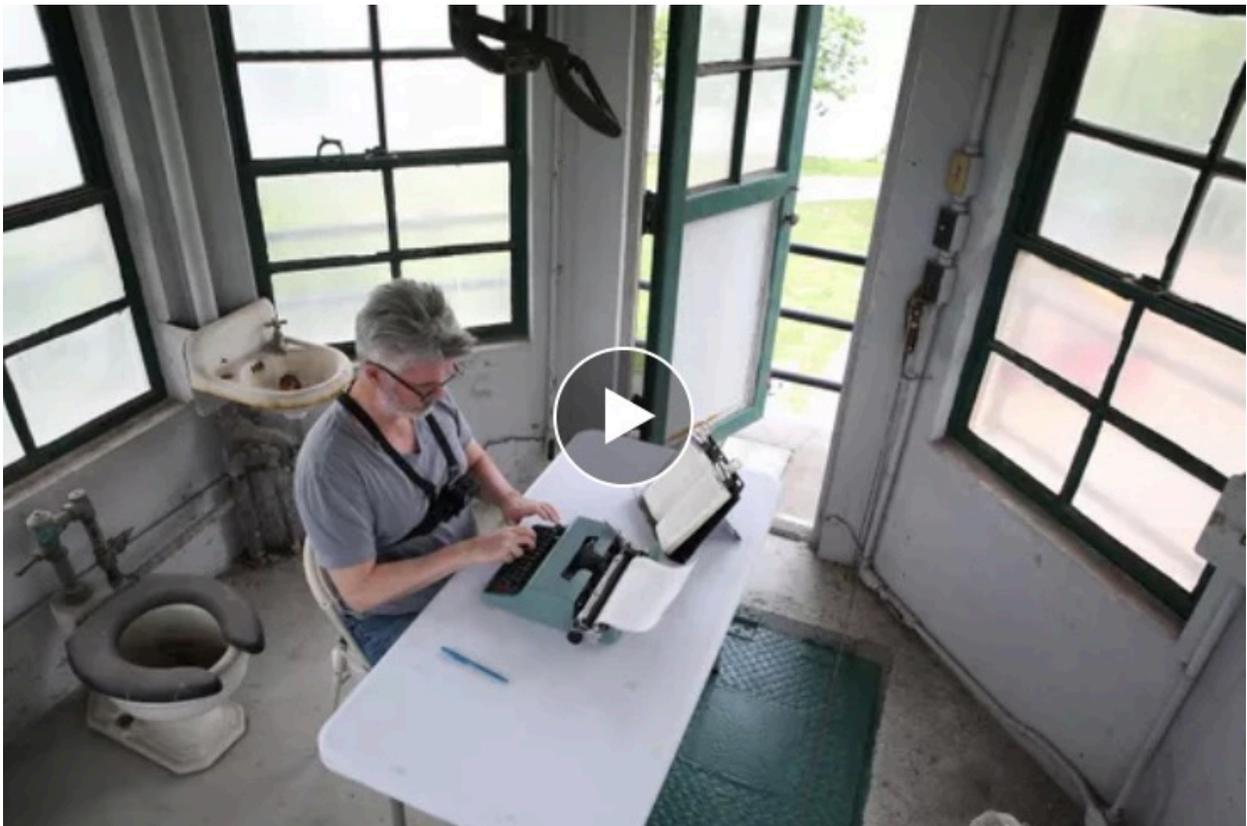
CRISTIN TIERNEY



Artist retypes novels as performance art, this time Cheever's 'Falconer' at Sing Sing

Jordan Fenster, The Journal News

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Tim Youd re-types a novel about Sing Sing Prison while in one of the old guard towers June 9, 2018. The Journal News

The end result is not distinguishable as a novel.

The final product is two pages, side by side, one black from hundreds of pages worth of words layered on top of each other, the other spotted and ink-stained where the letters bled through.

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Artist Tim Youd found himself this weekend inside a decommissioned prison guard tower in Ossining, retyping John Cheever's "Falconer" on an Olivetti Lettera 32 typewriter.

"Which was Cheever's typewriter make and model when he was living in Ossining and writing 'Falconer,'" Youd said.

This is the sixth year Youd has retyped important novels on period-appropriate typewriters in relevant locations. "Falconer," for example, takes place at Sing Sing.

In 2015, he retyped Jack Kerouac's "Big Sur," all 241 pages of it, on an Underwood portable at Bixby Bridge in Big Sur, California.



A detail of Tim Youd's "Retyping: Patricia Highsmith: Those Who Walk Away" (Photo: Vassar College)

The 332 pages of Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms" were typed on a Corona at the Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum in Arkansas and at the Grand Hotel des Iles Borromees in Stresa, Italy.

Youd gets through about 30 pages during the course of a six-hour day, working from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. with some breaks.

"I don't touch type," he said. "I hunt and peck but I'm a pretty good hunt-and-pecker at this point."

He expects to be finished with the 225 pages of Cheever's "Falconer" by Sunday afternoon, all typed at Ossining's Louis Engel Waterfront Park, the site of an abandoned Sing Sing guard tower.

All told, Youd's goal is to retype 100 novels, in their entirety, each on a single page with a piece of paper behind it to catch the bleed-through. It was supposed to take a decade.

CRISTIN TIERNEY

“The reality is, it’s going to turn into a 15-year project,” he said.

Once completed, the two resulting pages are framed, side by side. Youd calls each finished work a “diptych,” belying the “devotional” nature of his art.



Tim Youd looks out from one of the old guard towers at Sing Sing Prison in Ossining June 9, 2018. (Photo: Frank Becerra Jr./The Journal News)

“It’s a black rectangle, therefore illegible. There’s nothing to read once I’m done,” he said. “It’s an abstract drawing.”

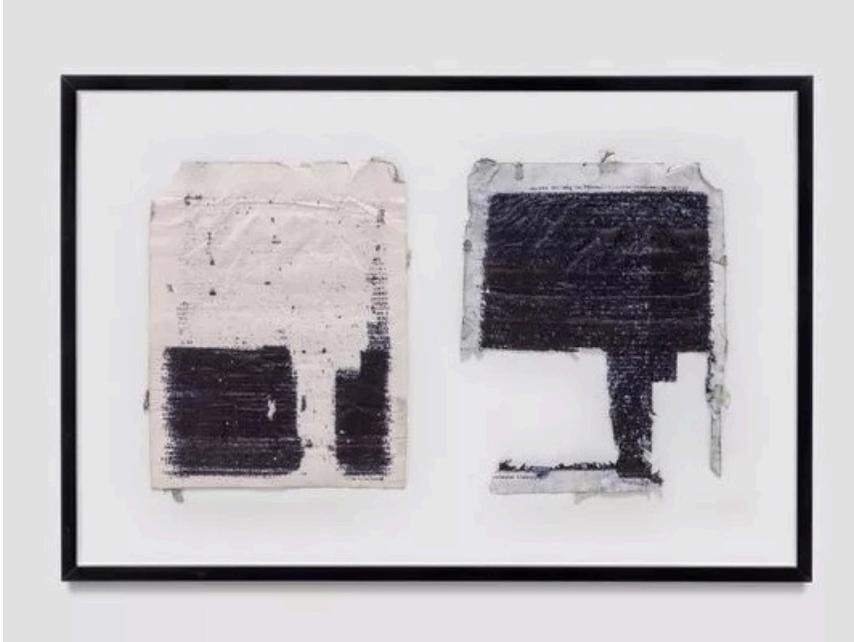
The act of each retyping itself is public. “It’s definitely performance,” he said, though he’s reluctant to guide viewers to any particular meaning. “I’m a little hesitant to prescribe anything.”

Before becoming a full-time artist, Youd worked on Wall Street and in Los Angeles as a film producer, careers that left him unfulfilled.

“By the time I was 30, I realized it wasn’t going to make me super happy,” he said. “I wasn’t very happy with who I was.”

But through it all, there was the written word. Youd’s other artworks are also typewriter inspired, sculptures of gigantic typewriters, or classic machines that extend out of frames into three-dimensional space.

CRISTIN TIERNEY



Tim Youd's retyped version of Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms," 332 pages typed on a Corona No. 3. (Photo: Joshua White/JWPicture/Vassar College)

"I've always read, that's been my go-to, the thing that kept me engaged in life," Youd said. "The project itself is really an attempt to be a good reader. I'm really trying to very closely understand the words, the style and the meaning."

After more than 50 books retyped, Youd refuses to say which typewriter is his favorite, though he has nice things to say about Royals, the Hermes Rocket and Olympias, which he called "the pinnacle of engineering."

Each model has its own flavor, which makes each diptych unique. He said the Olivetti on which he's retyping "Falconer" will result in "a much more delicate finish."

"It's like, 'Which is your favorite kid,' it's that kind of a question," he said.