There’s something about typewriters, especially old, well-used ones. The clicking of the finger-burnished keys, the crisp inky smacks against the paper, the dings and slides and zips, the whole jazzy, efficient rhythm. The
evocative contours and design panache of the machines themselves, sculptural and cinematic, which conjure up archetypes of literary stars and struggling, solitary geniuses with cigarettes and disheveled hair. Its accoutrements have charm too, like reams of clean white paper, shredded indigo ribbons, and sleek, if hefty, carrying cases. The vintage typewriter as an object and a symbol is eccentrically magical, impossibly analog, and frequently fetishized.

Tim Youd retyping William Faulkner's "The Sound and the Fury" at Faulkner's home in Oxford, Mississippi, June 2014

And as artist Tim Youd knows very well, beyond the aesthetic appeal of the object, the engaged physical enactment of typing also has its own charms. The ritualistic qualities and the mythological aura of the “great author at work” archetype lend the use of a typewriter a natural performative aspect. Because of the qualities of its objecthood, the choice of using an old typewriter carries with it its own set of meanings and is anchored to time and
place, and history, in a way a laptop is not. When augmented by the conceptual and empathetic situational logistics of a site-specific pilgrimage such as Youd regularly undertakes, it makes a witty, emotional impression.

Tim Youd Retyping John Kennedy Toole's A Confederacy of Dunces, Faulkner House Books, French Quarter, New Orleans, LA; October 2015

Using the same make and model typewriters as the carefully chosen authors whose ghosts he chases, and traveling either to the sites where their great books were written or else the places where the stories are set, Youd has been retyping literature all over the world for several years, in actions that are both performative and generative. Encompassing both ephemeral spectacle and the creation of enduring works of visual art, the results are both intensely site-specific artifacts and transcendent, original, unique works of art whose very form and material tells both the old story of the story and the new story of the artist.
Tim Youd: Hemingway’s "Farewell To Arms" retyped at Grans Hotel des Iles Borromees Italy on a Corona No. 3

Youd types each novel on a single sheet of paper, continually reloaded until the entire novel has been retyped. Over the course of several hundred pages of text, the paper soaks up the ink and disintegrates under its weight and wetness, while a backing sheet becomes embossed and splashed with pigment transfer. The finished work is a framed diptych of the two pages, which remains recognizable as a book, as an artifact, and as paper and ink -- an extreme palimpsest in which story dwells but cannot be read.

Tim Youd at Vassar College, 2018
As the latest subset of his long-term project, 100 Novels, Youd spent the summer of 2018 in the verdant, humid, impossibly picturesque landscape of the Hudson River Valley in upstate New York, typing. Including these new iterations, he’s now up to nearly 60 retyped classics. His subjects stretch from Ernest Hemingway to Hunter S. Thompson, Virginia Woolf, Jack Kerouac, and now, several authors famous for their New York states of mind such as Mary McCarthy, John Cheever, Carson McCullers, and soon, Elizabeth Bishop. McCarthy and Bishop bracket the series, being both Vassar College alumna, and as the art gallery at Vassar College is hosting an exhibition of works made during the cycle. Youd began with McCarthy and will end with Bishop, retyping her poems inside the gallery during the opening reception.

Tim Youd’s unique intersection of time-collapsing historical homage with a durational performance art simultaneously comprises not only its own spectacle but also the direct presentation of the creative process. The delicate, yet slightly violent form of the pages is both rather moving emotionally and rigorous conceptually. Made all in the same way, no two are ever quite the same. The darkly romantic, entropic beauty of the works of art offer
commentary on narrative, authorship, materiality, and the very definition of what a drawing can be.

Tim Youd: 57 of 100 Remington No. 3 Typewriters

The Hudson Valley Cycle included the following texts and performances: “The Group” by Mary McCarthy at Vassar College; “The Falconer” by John Cheever a Sing Sing Correctional Facility decommissioned guard tower, Ossining and at John Cheever’s home, Ossining; “Jack” by A.M. Homes at the Bronxville Campus of Sarah Lawrence College; “The Member of the Wedding” by Carson McCullers at the Carson McCullers House, Nyack; “Light Years” by James Salter at the Thomas Cole National Historic Site, Catskill; “Ironweed” (screenplay) by William Kennedy at street cafés in Hudson; “Ironweed” (the book part one) at the Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany and part two at Art Omi Fields Sculpture Park, Ghent; and finally, during the opening reception at Vassar, Youd will type poems by Elizabeth Bishop (Class of 1934) inside the gallery.
The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center is free and open to the public Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, 10am–5pm; Thursday, 10–9pm; and Sunday, 1–5pm. WM

Tim Youd's Handtyped Postcards for The Hudson Valley Retyped