

CRISTIN TIERNEY



Tim Youd Will Retype William Gass' Mammoth 'The Tunnel' On Livestream

By SARAH FENSKE • APRIL 27, 2020



Artist Tim Youd retypes William Burroughs' "Naked Lunch" at the author's gravesite in St. Louis' Bellefontaine Cemetery in 2018.

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Tim Youd is an artist, but his medium may surprise you. Youd types. The Los Angeles resident uses old-fashioned typewriters to painstakingly retype classic works. He originally set out to complete 100 novels in 10 years, typing them in unusual places including cemeteries, churches and writers' residences. In March, he finished his 66th.

In 2018, Youd presented “St. Louis Retyped” at the Contemporary Art Museum, typing works by T.S. Eliot, William S. Burroughs, Stanley Elkin and Marianne Moore at meaningful spots around town. That included CAM itself, as museum-goers looked on.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, Youd’s new project will have fewer in-person spectators, but it doesn’t lack ambition. Again tackling a St. Louis author and again in collaboration with CAM, Youd will retype William Gass’ 652-page “The Tunnel” — using and reusing a single sheet — in his garage. It will be Youd’s longest typing performance to date; he believes it could take a month to complete.

On Monday’s *St. Louis on the Air*, Youd explained that he grew intrigued by the idea of typing “The Tunnel” after viewing the author’s manuscripts during his 2018 St. Louis visit. Gass was a professor at Washington University, and the papers are housed in the Washington University Libraries Special Collections.

“I said to myself, ‘Wow, I really need to type this. This is massive, and it’s interesting,’” Youd recalls. “I had wished at that point that ... it was on my schedule, and I knew I had to get back to it.”

Youd said the novel, while long, offers many rewards. “If you are a reader who values reading at the level of the sentence, and the level of the word, then Gass surprises on every page,” he said.

Youd said the book seems uniquely fit for being retyped in a garage during a pandemic.

“During the course of the quarantine, I was thinking, ‘What could I do? Is there a performance that would fit this particular moment?’ I came upon ‘The Tunnel’ and I thought: ‘This is the ideal quarantine novel. It’s not literally

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about a quarantine, but it is in effect about a man who's trapped in his own mind and his own circumstances, and he's trying to get out of it.”

And, he added, “It felt like a weighty book for this weighty moment, and I'd done my work with CAM St. Louis already, so it felt like a natural extension to do something virtually with them.”

To watch Youd at work, listeners are encouraged to visit tunnelretyped.com. The videostream will be live from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. CDT each day.