

Interview with Tim Youd



Tim Youd is an artist who works in various forms. In recent times he's mined the works of Philip Roth for inspiration, so we decided to investigate a little further. The following is the result of a series of emails between Richard Sheehan and Tim.

TY: Here is my story.

I've lived and worked in Los Angeles for twenty years, having grown up in Massachusetts originally. I didn't go to art school. In fact, my undergraduate degree is in Economics, from the College of the Holy Cross. With that in hand, I went to work on Wall Street for a couple of years, before moving to LA to make movies. In addition to working on may art, during my time in LA, I've produced a few short films and two feature films.

Generally speaking, most of my art has to do with the vagina. To quote Louis-Ferdinand Celine, "There are always, at all ages, discoveries to be made in the vagina." It is that same text, from *Journey to the End of the Night*, that in 2008 I appropriated for a series of paintings. Utilizing text was something of a departure for me, allowing me to move away from the figurative work I had been doing, without retreating to some form of abstraction.

After I completed the Celine series, I whispered to myself that maybe working with a quote was a one time thing, not wanting to become formulaic. But then I happened to be reading *Portnoy's Complaint* and came across the line, "They all have cunts! Right under their dresses! Cunts – for fucking!" and immediately knew that I had to use it. As I got into it, I found myself taking a slightly different graphical approach than I did with the Celine work. These drawings were more three dimensional, which led me to also create a series of sculptures featuring that same quote. They are really signs, more than sculptures...which I think fits the quote. It's an announcement, befitting of a sign.

From Roth, I then moved to Henry Miller and developed some large scale motorized constructions, consistent I think with Miller's Coney Island of the Mind carnival aesthetic.

(Right: *Untitled*, Tim Youd)

PRS: The vagina theme: what made you decide on this as a theme? Did you begin with Celine and the quote, or were you working on your art with this theme and then came across Celine's writing?

TY: The Vagina theme: I spent my 20s not being an artist, and instead trying to be a media titan. But when I came back to art in my early 30s, I took a few life drawing classes. Like Portnoy, the bulb went off. There were cunts everywhere, and all of them needed to be drawn. So 15 years later, I'm still at it.





Immediately prior to working with the Celine quote I was working on a series of paintings that were ultimately included in the feature film *Garden Party*. These are figurative paintings, portraying fleeting sexual encounters. While not exclusively about the vagina, in most every instance the vagina is the focal point of the image. When I was working on what would turn out to be the last painting in that series, I happened to be reading *Journey to the End of the Night* while sitting in my studio. That's when I came across the quote "Indeed, there are always, at all ages, discoveries to be made in the vagina." I jumped up out of my chair, tacked some paper to the wall, and started in on the Celine series.

(Left: *Untitled*, Tim Youd)

Just to digress a bit, I came to be reading *Journey to the End of the Night* because it was recommended to me by Mat Gleason, the long time publisher of *Coagula Art Journal*. Mat and I were talking about John Fante, and Mat said something along the lines of "Hey, you want to read something really dark, try Celine." So I did. Mat was the first person besides my wife to see the work. And he curated it into a show he was putting together.

PRS: What was the route from Celine to Roth? Had you read any Roth before this?

TY: Celine to Roth was a pretty straight shot. I think I had read *Goodbye Columbus* and *The Breast* in my twenties. It was while I was painting the Celine series or thereabout that I rediscovered Roth. I was at LAX waiting to get on a plane to Hawaii to catch up with my wife and son, who were already there. A few minutes before boarding I realized I had left whatever book I was reading at home, so I went into the airport bookstore. I just so happened that *Everyman* had just been published. I had to pick between that and Danielle Steel. I finished *Everyman* on the flight and made a note to read more of his work, which led me maybe a year or two later to *Portnoy's Complaint*. Since then I've read quite a few. *The Ghost Writer*, *Zuckerman Unbound*, *The Counterlife*, *American Pastoral*, *The Professor of Desire*, *The Dying Animal* and *Indignation*. And I re-read *The Breast*, which is right there with *Portnoy's Complaint* and *The Dying Animal* as my favorite. I've got four or five more sitting on the shelf, ready to go. He's like an old friend now. Whenever I can't decide what to read next, I pick up a Roth novel. One may be better than the other, but I haven't been let down yet.

(Right: *Untitled*, Tim Youd)





(Left: *Untitled*, Tim Youd)

RS: Did you create the paintings or the sculptures first, or was it more random than that?

TY: In the Roth series, I started out with the works on paper. They were a bit different from the Celine series in that the Roth works on paper had a three dimensional element lurking there from the beginning. I really think that it was a reaction to the text. The Portnoy quote is really an announcement, something that belongs on a sign. It was a natural progression from the images of the signs to the signs themselves.

PRS: Where did the ideas for the paintings coming from, how did you decide on the structure of the painting?

TY: I do think that's wrapped up in my reaction to the text and my insistence that I don't just repeat myself. That's to say, it wouldn't do to treat the Roth quote the same as I treated the Celine quote. In fact, if I ever came back to another Roth quote – I think there is a line that goes something like “whatever I say you are just going to keep talking about my cunt” or something like that, which is pretty

tempting – I would only do it if I saw a way into it that wasn't just a repeat of what I had already done.

PRS: Do you think you'll be doing any more Roth pieces, and do you have any more authors you'll be using as inspiration for new pieces?

TY: I wouldn't count Roth out, although I don't have a specific piece in mind just now.

In the Henry Miller show that is up now, I also have some work that utilizes a stanza from Edward Lear's Owl & the Pussycat: O lovely pussy! Oh pussy my love, what a beautiful pussy you are, you are, you are. What a beautiful pussy you are!

And I have been working on a series of vibrating sculptures that include quotes from Miller, Lear, Samuel Beckett, DH Lawrence and Charles Bukowski. They aren't quite working the way I want yet, however.

(Right: *Blue Stripes*, Tim Youd)



To find out more about Tim's work, visit his website at: <http://timyoud.com/>

Also, view the 13-minute documentary about Tim, 'Going Down' at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?>