Kerouac's Iconic Scroll On the Road To Barber Exhibition

Posted on Tuesday 21st October 2008

The world-famous, continuous typescript scroll of Jack Kerouac's seminal novel On the Road is to go on display outside of North America for the first time at an exhibition at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, in December.

Marking the 50th anniversary of the publication of the novel in the United Kingdom, Jack Kerouac: Back 'On the Road' opens on Wednesday 3 December and continues until 28 January 2009. It is curated by Professor Richard Ellis, of the University's Department of American and Canadian Studies, in collaboration with its Research and Cultural Collections.

As well as displaying the iconic scroll, partially unfurled to reveal 22 feet of its text in a glass case custom-built for the Birmingham show, the exhibition will feature a selection of maps, photographs, album covers and memorabilia that explore the novel's genesis and its times.

In April 1951, Kerouac sat down at his portable typewriter to begin the work that was to become the bible of the post-war Beat Generation – one of the working titles of the novel. To avoid the rush of his inspiration being interrupted by constantly having to insert new sheets of paper, Kerouac typed on eight twelve-foot long reels of Teletype paper, taped together to form a single scroll 127 feet long. The novel was completed after twenty days of continuous typing, sustained, allegedly, by no other drug than the caffeine in numerous cups of coffee.

Almost entirely autobiographical, and based on his own travels across America, On the Road tells the story of Kerouac and his friends and acquaintances, including Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Neal Cassady, over a period of approximately three years. In the published version their identities are disguised by pseudonyms, but in the scroll their real names are used. Written as one continuous paragraph, it portrays their fascination with Jazz, the American landscape, women and sexuality, and is the archetypal 'road-trip' tale.

One of the most valuable literary manuscripts in existence, the scroll was bought for $2.43 million in 2001 by Jim Irsay, owner of American Football team the Indianapolis Colts. However, Irsay agreed that it should undertake a public tour of museums and libraries across the United States, and since 2004 it has attracted record audiences at venues including New York Public Library, the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, Indianapolis Museum of Art and latterly Columbia College Chicago Center for Book & Paper Arts, attracting such celebrity fans as Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. The Barber Institute is the first European venue for the scroll.

Professor Ellis said: 'The scroll has iconic cultural status, and it is a major coup for the University of Birmingham that we have managed to secure its first-ever appearance outside of North America here at the Barber Institute.'

Ann Sumner, Director of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, said: 'A literary subject of this nature is a complete departure for the Barber, which is more accustomed to staging Fine Art exhibitions. We are delighted to be collaborating on, and hosting, this fascinating and unconventional show.'

The exhibition, which is supported financially by the University of Birmingham, its US Alumni Fund and by Waterstones, is accompanied by catalogue, a two-day academic conference, and other public events including gallery talks, poetry readings and workshops.

For further details of the conference and events, visit **www.kerouac.bham.ac.uk (http://www.kerouac.bham.ac.uk/)** and the Barber **website (http://www.barber.org.uk/)** .

• For further information and images, or to arrange interviews with Professor Ellis, contact the Barber Institute's Press and Marketing Officer Andrew Davies on 0121 414 2946/07701 084526 or **andrewdavies@barber.org.uk. (mailto:andrewdavies@barber.org.uk.)**

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