

Fast Facts



The Seattle Public Library

Ann Hamilton artwork at The Seattle Public Library's Central Library

www.spl.org

1000 Fourth Ave., Seattle, WA 98104

Internationally recognized conceptual artist Ann Hamilton designed the 7,200-square-foot floor for the Evelyn W. Foster Learning Center, which encompasses the Literacy, ESL/World Languages collection on the Fourth Avenue level.

The floor mimics the appearance of a raised bed of wooden type and is intended to immerse library visitors in the artwork much as readers are immersed in the material they read. Ohio native Hamilton intends her artwork to mark the current change from print culture to digital culture.

The tongue-and-groove maple floor appears as a sea of wooden type. Each length of board is routed with one or more lines of text.

The floor includes 556 lines of text, in reverse, in 11 languages and alphabets, and consists of the first sentences of books found in the collection. A notebook will be available in the section that lists the books Hamilton used to create the floor.

The languages are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese.

The type is set in reverse for two reasons: to reference how books are produced from typeface and to reference how we learn to read, from symbols that are at first unknown to us.

Library staff members and patrons selected the texts from which the passages were chosen. They exercised extreme care to respect various traditions and cultures, because in some places, it is disrespectful to walk on words, such as those from religious texts.

By creating the floor as a three-dimensional surface that must be discovered and can be read, experienced by foot, hand or eye, Hamilton intends to engage the reader in the tactile nature of reading.



The floor was placed on the Fourth Avenue level because that is where two-thirds of the library's patrons are expected to enter and the work really should be seen. It was also placed there so people who are not fluent in English can easily and quickly find the library services they need. The section is a place where people from all over the world find books in their first language or come to learn English as a second language.

Hamilton represented the United States in the 1999 Venice Biennale and her work has been displayed in museums in the United States, Holland, and France. She created a permanent public art installation using card catalog files at the San Francisco Central Library.

Learn more about Hamilton at http://www.skny.com/las-so-bin/artist_detail.lasso?-token.ID=40 .