Cordley Hall
LIFE with LIFE
Ann Hamilton 2024 A site-responsive work in two parts
Stamped concrete paver, enamel panel
6,000 square feet
Commissioned by Oregon State University
Cordley Hall, Oregon State University, 2701 SW Campus Way, Corvallis, OR 97331

Abstract Description:
Exterior: The courtyard at Oregon State University's Cordley Hall consists of a series of stamped concrete pavers, embossed with a single letter of "LUCA", the DNA sequence of the last universal common ancestor, a code contained in the genetic material of all living organisms. The pavers were installed according to the stamped letter, color, and direction of each paver, meticulously, over the 6,000 square-foot courtyard, creating long strings of snaking DNA code. The red pavers form a pattern of larger letters with a text inspired by biologist William Emerson Ritter.
Interior: A multi-panel baked enamel mural depicting a native shorebird, a non-native plant, and a local topographic contour map, wall mounted with aluminum brackets located in the South Lobby of Cordley Hall. The 8 panels measure 37" x 94" each, the full piece measures over 24 feet (296").

Artist's statement

The architectural joint newly forged between Integrative Biology and Botany and Plant Pathology by the renovation of Cordley Hall links and fosters conversation between disciplines and people. *LIFE with LIFE,* a site responsive work in two parts, was likewise formed in and supported by many similar conversations and crossings. It began with living organisms; in the world we can see and taste, that we smell and know through the immediacy of our senses, and the world we come to see and understand through the inquiry that scientific methods reveal. The project is the imaginative landscape between the two, between abstraction and figuration, between words and symbols, parts and wholes, systems and species, art and science and the narratives each contribute to our understanding of a world where all living things are connected to each other.

For students, the song of a bird, the movement of a beetle, the root structure or leaf configuration of a plant may have triggered the curiosity that brings them to study in the biology building. Once there, and inside the south lobby, a gathering spot for students off a central pedestrian campus axis, a multi-panel mural holds the image of a bird, a topographic contour map, and a leaf specimen—an invitation into the life and habitat that is Cordley Hall. It is a simple three-part image depicting the not-so-simple crossing of environment and species: a native shorebird, the Greater Yellowlegs *(Tringa melanoleuca)*, and a non-native invasive plant, the Velvetleaf *(Abutilon theophrasti)* from the Oregon State University Herbarium collection. A single image holds the complex webs of native and non-native, local and invasive, host and visitor—the evolution of biological systems and human action which are never as simple as they might at first appear.

Visible through the lobby window is the enclosed exterior courtyard ringed on all sides by the windows of Cordley's labs and classrooms. There, in contrast to the figurative images inside, an alphabetic field of grey, black, and red concrete pavers fills the courtyard floor with alphabetic texts in both miniature and gigantic scale. Each concrete paver is stamped with one of the letters in a DNA or RNA sequence: A (adenine), C (cytosine), G (guanine), T (thymine), or N (an unspecified nucleotide). The letters are arranged to match the sequence of nucleotides in the Large Subunit Ribosomal RNA gene, which is vital for building proteins and the cell's information processing architecture necessary to produce

the machinery of the cell. Inherited from our Last Universal Common Ancestor (LUCA), this gene is present in all living things.

While the text of this genetic code unspools and repeats, paver by paver and letter by letter, another text is legible in the arrangement of the red pavers spelling out a text inspired by biologist William Emerson Ritter, one of the first biologist to recognize and describe the field of biology as a system of relations. Visible from the ground and from each of the windows surrounding the courtyard, these 3 1/2 foot naming words are constituted by and cross the string of genetic code while also holding the work's poem. They read:

THE OCEAN
THE BLUE SKY
THE APPROACHING NIGHT AND THE NIGHT
THE MILKY WAY STARS
AND THE MORNING SUN
THE WILD BIRDS
THE PLANTS AND ANIMALS
PATTERN LIFE WITH LIFE
THE FISH AND FLOWERS
THE FORESTS
THE FUNGI AND THE INSECTS

In the side-by-side and woven crossings of *LIFE with LIFE,* the wonder of observation and description that brings the invisible into visibility is the heart of this project and the work performed every day inside Cordley Hall. While the project may have a fixed form, its influence and conversations continue. My view when walking the world is both widened and focused by the experience. As an artist I love how a project takes me out of my own world—my own vocabulary—to find form and conversation in another, for in the end it is the people who make the project.

It took me a long time, many side paths, and several dead ends to find a form for this project, for the paths of making, like all research, can be circuitous. Many faculty welcomed me into their labs and patiently addressed and inspired my many questions. There were many gifts and miracles of finding that made it possible. I would like to thank a few of those central to the project. Public Art & Artist Programs Coordinator Ryan Burghardt; Project Manager Dustin Sievers; my AMAZING "what-if" team of students and faculty: Olivia Burleigh, David Maddison, Maria Jose Romero Jimenez, Jazzlee Crowley, Joey Spatafora, Sam Leiboff, and Carolina Piña Páez; Dawn Armatys and the architectural team Hennebary Eddy Architects, The Landscape team Charles Bruck and Doug Reimer; Craig McGlynn, Nathan Wright and Landon Pegg at Western Interlock, and Alex Peters and the installers at Sequoia Stonescapes.