

## *LEW wood floor*

Designed and built during a time of enormous technological development, the form and facilities of The Seattle Public Library reflect the ways in which digital technologies are changing a reader's relationship to a page of text, to the book as object, to the book as purveyor of information, and to the library as an institution and system of access to print culture. This project, the 7,200 square foot wood floor in the LEW Collection (Literacy, ESL - English as a second language, and Word Languages), seeks to mark this moment of technological transition by embedding the membrane of the library's surface work, that in texture and form remembers and evokes a tactile experience of book production and reading.

The wood floor consists of 556 lines of maple floorboard routed to make a walkable surface of relief letter forms. Like a bed of movable metal or wood type laid in preparation for printing, the letter forms in the floor are inverted. While this inversion makes an overt reference to a historical printing technique, its orientation, which creates the experience of reading backwards, also demonstrates the experience of learning to read as a process wherein abstract symbols become, in time, transparent and meaningful words and sentences. As a continuous tactile field, the floor of text contains running lines from the eleven languages which currently form the largest and most frequently used areas of the LEW Collection: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. These lines are a collection of 1,543 "first sentences" gathered by patrons and librarians from books in the Seattle Public Library Fiction and LEW Collection. Fiction and non-fiction, poetry, and musical lyrics are the dominant textual sources. First lines may not be the most notable line of a book, but after the cover, they are a universal portal to an immersion in a book's interior world. Thus the floor as an oceanic physical surround amplifies the immersive experience of reading a page to become an architectural field for the ongoing experience and activities of the library patron.