

Celebrating Our Centennial Art Installations at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology



Wall of Silhouettes mural by James Prosek

James Prosek's mural, composed of simple black silhouettes showing North and South American birds, spans the entire length of the north wall in the Lab's visitor center (120 by 40 feet). It features 170 individual birds of 140 species in 5 habitats: Atlantic seabird colony, Southeastern mangrove estuary, Northeastern forest, Northwestern desert, and South American rainforest. Prosek intentionally omitted an identification key to the numbered birds to encourage viewers to notice the details of each image.

Activity Connection:
Silhouette Scavenger Hunt

"I want visitors to look at the wall first and try to enjoy the diversity of shapes and forms of these creatures without needing to know what the name of the thing is, because knowing the name of something isn't necessarily knowing what it is," Prosek said. (A key to the bird silhouettes is available on the Birder's Wall bulletin board or at the front desk.)

Prosek spent more than a year designing the mural on a computer, then printed it out in sections on paper 50 times larger than the electronic layout. He taped each section to the wall over graphite paper and traced the birds to create outlines. Finally, he filled each bird outline with black paint. "It would have been very hard to do this 20 or 30 years ago without digital rendering and without all the access to images we have now," Prosek said. "I like the idea that the piece was designed on a computer and then hand painted. It's digital and then back to analog."

Prosek is widely known for his art, documentaries, and books about fish, most recently *Trout of the World: Revised and Updated* (2013) and *Eels* (2010). He is currently writing a book about how we name and order the natural world.



From So Simple a Beginning: Celebrating the Evolution and Diversity of Birds mural

by Jane Kim

Beneath artist Jane Kim's talented fingers an entire world is taking shape in the Lab's observatory.

Activity Connection:
Coming soon!

The Lab's newest art installation is a work in progress and is called "From So Simple a Beginning: Celebrating the Evolution and Diversity of Birds." When completed, visitors walking down the wooden stairs into the visitor center will also be moving forward in time. You'll take a visual journey through 375 million years, starting with ancient marine life and ending with a colorful celebration of more than 260 modern bird species, tracing evolution from fish through dinosaurs to birds.

The mural will include a huge world map showing a bird from each living or recently extinct bird family. All the birds are life-sized and placed near their family's geographic origins, so you'll see a six foot ostrich prancing across the continent of Africa, a hornbill in Australia, and a stork near the eastern border of India.

This beautiful mural will take more than a year to complete and will be the most comprehensive bird mural ever painted.



Sound Ring by Maya Lin

The Sound Ring is a 9-by-7-foot elegant oval made of sustainably harvested American walnut.

Stand next to it, close your eyes, and experience a feast for the ears. Hidden speakers project sounds of extinct and endangered species from across the globe, inviting us to reflect on the incredible diversity of life and what may be lost during our lifetime. The speakers are controlled with the provided iPad.

Activity Connection:
Coming soon!

“As an artist, I want to get people to think outside the box and give them hope that there is something they can do as individuals,” explained Lin. “The loss of species and habitats is all about land use and resource consumption. We have to make species protection through habitat conservation a huge priority because what we’re doing right now is spending our kids’ and our grandkids’ future.” The Ring is one element in Lin’s “What is Missing?” memorial—a series of sculptures and multimedia works focused on the environment. Lin’s design of the Sound Ring is a gift to the Lab, acknowledging its contributions to the conservation of species and habitats around the world.

The Sound Ring was designed by the Maya Lin Studio and fabricated at the Walla Walla Foundry in Missouri. Arup Associates created the sound design. The recordings come from the Cornell Lab’s Macaulay Library, the largest collection of natural sound recordings in the world.



Elegy by Anita Welych

To memorialize the unfathomable loss of the Passenger Pigeon, 16 bas-relief plaques of Passenger Pigeons were cast in clay and placed on trees in Sapsucker Woods.

Clay harmonizes subtly and unobtrusively in the natural environment. The plaques are installed throughout the southern part of the Wilson Trail in Sapsucker Woods, repopulating an area that was once surely inhabited by Passenger Pigeons. As you chance upon one, then another pigeon while walking the trails, you will have a physical reminder to ponder the loss of nature—and the nature of loss.

Anita asks, “Is the loss of something unknown still perceivable? Is loss still tragic even if we have never met a Passenger Pigeon, Great Auk, Eskimo Curlew, Heath Hen, or Bachman’s Warbler? As we face the increasing threats of global environmental degradation, my work serves as either an elegy—or a call to action.”

Anita Welych was born in Syracuse, NY, and has studied at Cornell University. She won a Fulbright Grant to study in Bogota Columbia where she lived for 5-1/2 years, teaching art and exhibiting actively. She currently teaches painting at Cazenovia College.

Activity Connection:
Find all 16 sculptures (hints on map)