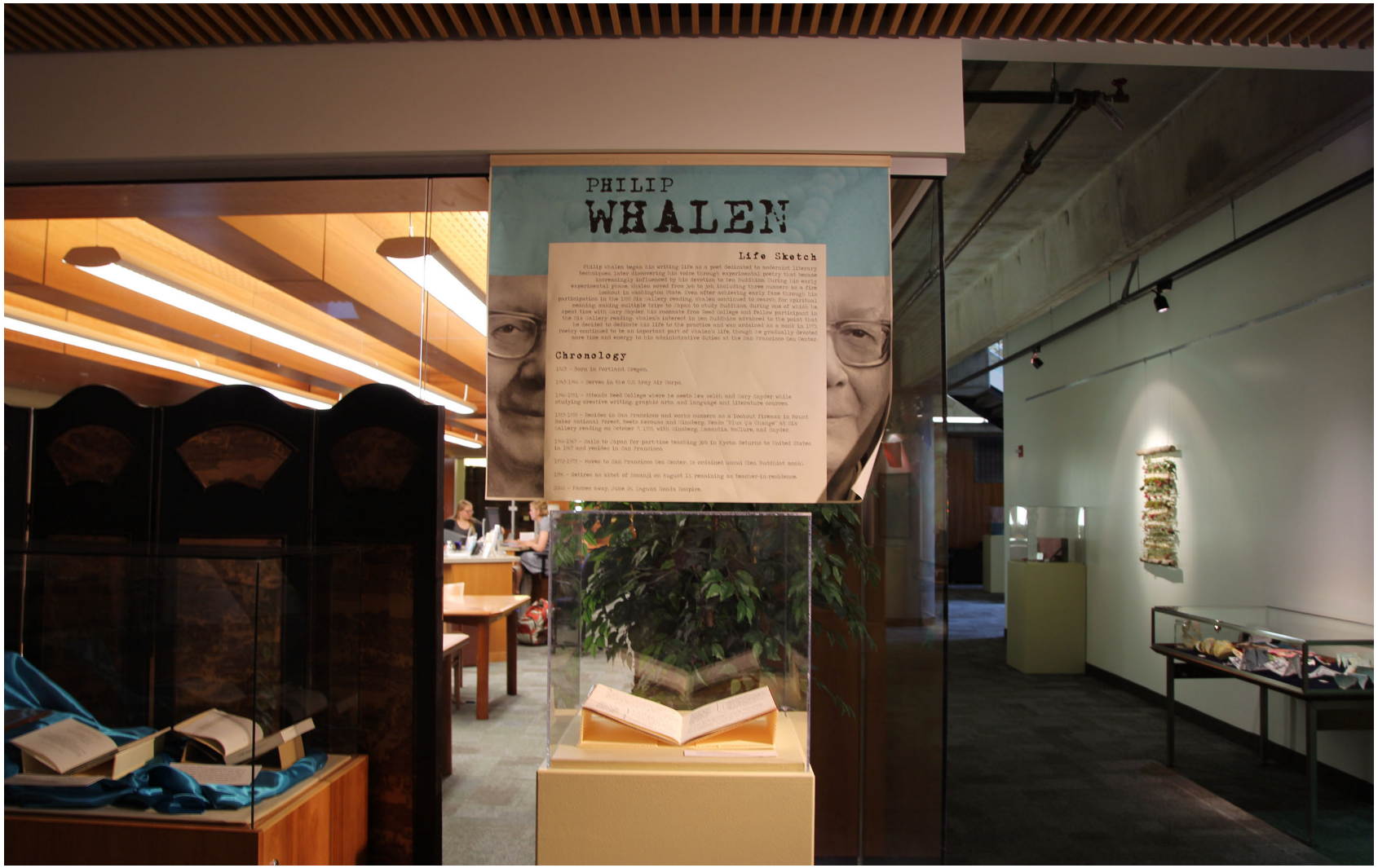
PHILIP
WHALEN
Life Sketch
Philip Whalen began his writing life as a poet dedicated to modernist literary techniques, later discovering his voice through experimental poetry that became increasingly influenced by his devotion to Zen Buddhism. During his early experimental phase, Whalen moved from job to job, including three summers as a fire lookout in Washington State. Even after achieving early fame through his participation in the 1955 Six Gallery reading, Whalen continued to search for spiritual meaning, making multiple trips to Japan to study Buddhism, during one of which he spent time with Gary Snyder, his roommate from Reed College and fellow participant in the Six Gallery reading. Whalen's interest in Zen Buddhism advanced to the point that he decided to dedicate his life to the practice and was ordained as a monk in 1973. Poetry continued to be an important part of Whalen's life, though he gradually devoted more time and energy to his administrative duties at the San Francisco Zen Center.
Chronology
1923 – Born in Portland, Oregon.
1943-1946 – Serves in the U.S. Army Air Corps.
1946-1951 – Attends Reed College where he meets Lew Welch and Gary Snyder while studying creative writing, graphic arts, and language and literature courses.
1953-1955 – Resides in San Francisco and works summers as a lookout fireman in Mount Baker National Forest. Meets Kerouac and Ginsberg. Reads "Plus Ça Change" at Six Gallery reading on October 7, 1955, with Ginsberg, Lamantia, McClure, and Snyder.
1956-1967 – Sails to Japan for part-time teaching job in Kyoto. Returns to United States in 1967 and resides in San Francisco.
1972-1973 – Moves to San Francisco Zen Center. Is ordained unsui (Zen Buddhist monk).
1996 – Retires as abbot of Issanji on August 13, remaining as teacher-in-residence.
2002 – Passes away, June 26, Laguna Honda Hospice.