

SIP 'N SCULPT AT THE BENTON

a benton first thursday event

Walking into the Benton on an open mic night and a First Thursday Event is... a bit chaotic. Downstairs, the Beanery (the Benton's café) is absolutely teeming with activity. Many people sit listening to the performers, and others wait impatiently for their turn at the open mic. As I walk by, there's a small squabble between the next performing group about what exactly they will play. Next to the small stage is the even busier café counter serving up two-dollar Frapps (tonight's special). Almost every person in line is waiting to order the ice-cream-like coffee—including Brunna (our talented creative director) – only my lactose intolerance stops me from indulging too. The vibrancy of the event translates into an energy you can feel as you move throughout the room. Some of the chaos is contained to the first floor where you must leave your bags and food or drink (keeping sticky, Frappuccino fingers far from the Benton's robust art collection upstairs). Up here, the music isn't an eclectic, patch-work soundtrack of student performances, but the sound of a curated playlist and happy chatter. DJ Erin holds down the musical fort with "chill" vibes, as she describes her choices for the event. Aside from the music: arts and crafts, friends, and a puppy are my first impressions of the upstairs. An adorable golden retriever holds court with adoring fans in the gallery's front room. In the back room, playdough, model magic, and endless free stickers can be found on folding tables and chairs set up for the evening.



Written by Caroline Strapp Photos by Erin Wu Design by Mahelet Steinmetz

Served up on little, white paper plates are a variety of colorful sculpting materials for each attendee, handed out by friendly student volunteers. It's up to you to decide what you will create, and the students have taken this activity in every direction possible. Brunna and I start without creating anything specific—more stress relief via clay. Each student has been drawn to the event by something different. Harmony Nguyen said she “saw an Instagram flyer!” Others like Kaley Luk were drawn in by the notoriety of these Benton First Thursday events. This is not Luk's first time, she “personally [likes] all the little crafts they do here, last time was valentines.” Just like the first floor, the sculpt half of “Sip & Sculpt” is buzzing with groups of excited students. Some take an abstract approach to their creations (like me and Brunna), and some have fun playing with the tools the event hosts have left out for us. Still others create recognizable masterpieces from the playdough; Alex Domingo, for one, made a Spongebob Krabby patty look-alike, paired with a side of McDonald's french fries. The overall effect, as Phoebe Drupa commented, is soothing, like an “inner child type thing, doing crafts [as] adults.” It's this escape from responsibility and adulthood that draws students to the Benton's First nights. “Plus,” Drupa adds, “the free stickers and the dog” are icing on the cake of an already relaxing and refreshing evening.