LIFE

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF THE WILLIAM BENTON MUSEUM

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A history of The Benton's history is displayed alongside well-wishes from community members. The Benton recently turned 60's, and musueam staff are celebrating its impact on the UConn community.

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The William Benton Museum of Art, located at the University of Connecticut, will host a birthday party on Sunday, Sept. 27, from 2 to 4 p.m.. The event will be in honor of the museum's 60th anniversary and the conclusion of its online silent auction fundraiser.

Family-friendly arts and crafts, as well as cake and ice cream, will be available at the birthday party. The museum's three new exhibitions will also be open during the celebration.

Popular items, like paintings created by Jonathan XV, will be sold as part of the auction and will be available until the party's end.

Benton Curator of Education Matthew Marshall said that the auction takes place online to allow people to participate no matter where they are.

"We realized that there are so many people in the community — and alumni — all around the world that would really like to share in the celebration of the Benton and this milestone," Marshall said.

He also said that collaboration is a theme of the anniversary — between leaders of the museum, campus and community partners, residents of the area, faculty and students.

Collaboration across communities has been a value long present at the Benton.

Benton Curator and Academic Liaison Amanda Douberley described early contributors of the museum as "bridging art and science."

Figures like former UConn President Charles Lewis Beach, who served from 1908 to 1928, established a foundation in 1929 in honor of his late wife to continue collecting art at the former Connecticut Agricultural College. Beach also left his art collection to the museum at the time of his death in 1933, which became the substance for the original museum, according to the Benton.

Douberley said that before Beach served as president, he was an agriculture professor. Similarly, one of Benton's earliest collections, a series of prints and drawings by Käthe Kollwitz, was donated by geneticist and professor Walter Landauer in 1964.

Today, a similar trend continues at the Benton.

Professors from different UConn departments contributed to the new "Reframing America at 250" exhibition, writing labels for pieces. Last semester, digital media and design students led by Clarissa Ceglio, associate professor of digital humanities, created a form showcased on QR codes throughout the museum where users can share their Benton stories as part of the anniversary celebration.

Visitors also had the option to write and decorate physical birthday cards for the museum, which are on display near the East Gallery.

"You can read some of the other guests' reflections about their experience with the Benton, and kind of find common ground and be inspired," Marshall said.

Some cards mentioned the Benton's ability of "provoking thought" and "reflection," while others gave thanks "for sharing your many gifts with us."

Support for the museum is still present even almost two decades after threats to close it surfaced at the time of Michael J. Hoagn's presidency because of budget cuts, according to the Benton.

In 2009, bloggers like Stephen Wood, who was a UConn student many years prior and runs Connecticut MuseumQuest, took to his blog to share his thoughts.

He wrote that he was "sad" the Benton might close, but after an enjoyable experience, concluded, "I'm confident the Benton will survive."

Hundreds of other supporters already registered and have begun bidding on items in the silent auction fundraiser, which will support the future of the museum, Douberley said.

Douberley reflected on the word "gratitude" and its meaning for the Benton's anniversary.

She said the museum built the current "With Gratitude: Highlights from a Decade of Gifts" exhibition to thank everyone who has given their time, talent and art to the museum over the years.

"We're just so grateful for those donors that are highlighted there," Douberley said.