

Art

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Hume

We're losing two anchors to Toronto's art scene

Carmen Lamanna's death couldn't have come at a worse time for the Toronto art market — or his artists.

Already reeling from the devastating effects of the recession, the art world has lost one of the few dealers who ran an institutional gallery. He sold to private collectors but a significant proportion of his sales were to the public galleries and museums.

These days they're not buying much, of course. Cultural institutions are doing their best to keep their doors open and their staff paid. Acquisition budgets, abysmally low under the best of circumstances, are under pressure now to be used to cover operating costs.

One wouldn't want to be an Ian Carr-Harris right now, for example. Even with the loyal support of Philip Monk, the Art Gallery of Ontario's curator of contemporary Canadian art, it's unlikely Canada's driest conceptualist (shaken, not stirred) will find much action elsewhere.

On the other hand, the Joanne Tods, Rae Johnsons, John Browns and Shirley Wiitasalos will find any number of dealers after their goodies.

The Lamanna family has said it hopes to continue the gallery, but it's hard to see how that could be accomplished. Though Carmen had assistants, no one was groomed to take over.

To make matters worse, Lamanna had some strange ways of dealing with his artists. In his eulogy at Carmen's funeral service on Monday, the same Carr-Harris told a story about how Lamanna sold a major piece of his but failed to pay the artist his share. Carr-Harris finally asked for the money, only to find out that Lamanna needed it more.

Carr-Harris was apparently happy to swallow the loss, but others won't be. Don't be surprised if a spate of law suits are launched by disgruntled artists during the next few months.

Av Isaacs had previously announced he'll close his gallery at the end of June. While many of his artists have already found alternate representation, the city won't be the same without a figure of Isaacs's stature around.

Isaacs and Lamanna were the dealers who anchored the art scene for the last 26 years; the former focusing on the romantic and the expressionist, the latter on the cerebral and conceptualist.

The good news is that the AGO additions are well under way and due to be completed in the fall of 1992. The gallery's grand reopening should be just the thing to pick up the art world's flagging spirits.

For Monk, it could be an opportunity to celebrate contemporary art. But knowing him, the occasion will be allowed to pass unnoticed.