

Lamanna family closes gallery

Move called loss to art community after search for successor fails

BY KATE TAYLOR
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TORONTO — The heirs of Carmen Lamanna cannot find anyone to fill the art dealer's shoes and will close his Toronto gallery, the family has announced. They had been searching for a new director for the business, one of the most respected commercial art galleries in Canada, since Lamanna's death in May.

"We regret to announce that the family has been unable to find someone to continue operations and as a result are forced to close the gallery," they said in a statement.

The art community reacted with sadness yesterday to the closing, saying there are already too few galleries in Canada.

"It's a tremendous loss to the community," said Annette Hurtig, director-curator of Art Metropole, an artist-run centre in the same building as the gallery.

"There's a dearth of that kind of commitment and effort on the behalf of contemporary artists."

The gallery's future was thrown into doubt when Lamanna died of cancer May 23 after a brief illness without having groomed a successor. His family entered into negotiations with several candidates, seeking a director who would have a financial stake in the gallery, if not buy it outright. But observers say the family required a larger investment than most of the possible candidates could raise.

"They were conservative, not wanting to take risks in the business sense — understandably given the weird economic times," remarked gallery artist Joanne Tod, one member of the high-profile stable now looking for new dealers. "It's a reflection of just how gloomy things are."

The art world rumour mill churned out a succession of possible names for the job.

Last summer, Art Gallery of Ontario contemporary curator Philip Monk was said to have declined the position. After some negotiations, Sue Watterson, former director of Art Metropole, also declined. She decided that, as the wife of AGO chief curator Roald Nasgaard, she would be perceived to have a conflict of interest.

Ron Martin, one of the gallery artists, also put his name forward, and more recently the family was negotiating with Russell Keziere, former publisher of the now-defunct Vanguard magazine.

In the end, it proved impossible during the depths of a recession to find a candidate who combined strong curatorial credentials with the financial backing the Lamanna family required.

The gallery has suspended its exhibition program but viewing can still be arranged by appointment. A final closing date has yet to be announced.