



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Painter Jill McVarish and writer Chris Minnick own The Secret Gallery.

The Secret Gallery finds its footing during pandemic

BY CAITLIN SEYFRIED

Off 10th Street in Astoria heading toward the Riverwalk, large signs invite visitors into The Secret Gallery.

Painter Jill McVarish and writer Chris Minnick co-own the not-so-clandestine gallery. They officially opened the gallery in 2019, and have since hosted themed shows that bring works from different artists together to tell stories.

Before reaching the art on display, the building and gallery space itself are eye-catching.

"You can see how the room used to be totally neglected," McVarish said.

Before she started the collaborative space with Minnick, she used the space as a back gallery. McVarish and Minnick saw potential in the rustic, quirky space.

"In the beginning there was no vision. It was just that this space is so cool," McVarish said. "We said, 'Let's figure out how to make it work.'"

"She's the curator with the artistic vision, and I back it up with creative writing," Minnick added.

In the larger space, the duo has been able to host multiple artists at a time, representing variations of a theme for each show. The gallery's current show, "Sins of the Father," features art that "runs in the family," with works from fathers alongside their children's pieces.

McVarish's father and three sisters are featured in the show.

"To be able to work with them on a real thing was super cool. All three of them came on our podcast and our interviewer, Phillip, had a conversation with them about

what influence my dad had on them when they were growing up. It was amazing," McVarish said. "My dad died 10 years ago but he would have loved it."

Other artists in the show are Richard and Stirling Gorsuch; Price and Brandon Policky; Thomas and Rueben Rude; and Michael and Elena Orwick. The show runs until Nov. 14 and will be followed by the gallery's next show, titled "What would Hieronymus do?"

Creating during COVID-19

At first, McVarish and Minnick hoped the gallery would be used as rentable space for events. They hosted the Astoria Freak Show and a benefit for Clatsop Animal Assistance.

"We were trying to give people the idea that you could use the room for events but

If You Go

The Secret Gallery

Open Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

160 10th St., Astoria

thesecret.gallery/

503-836-3374

it never took off," McVarish said. "Then COVID hit and the last thing you want is a room to gather. It was really kind of lucky that it didn't work out."

Minnick and McVarish had already faced a major challenge with the gallery by the time

See Page 9