

coronavirus restrictions were issued in March.

“Shortly after we opened this as a gallery, they closed 10th Street” because of construction, McVarish said.

The team spent a year trying to operate as a gallery without reliable foot traffic. Adapting to the street closure helped McVarish and Minnick gain skills they’ve used during the coronavirus pandemic, like using the internet to connect with customers.

“Chris started getting us more online presence and selling through international collecting sites,” McVarish said.

As artists, both McVarish and Minnick said the pandemic has allowed them more time to focus on their work. For McVarish, the pandemic has had some influence on the themes of her work. She has a show at RiverSea Gallery in November with painter Dave Bens titled “Cat-tastrophe.”

McVarish’s paintings feature cats with different wallpaper backgrounds. Each wallpaper design, “represents a year and the crazy styles that humans had, while the cats are just cats,” McVarish said.

She added that the “weird apocalyptic surrealism” of the pandemic has found its way into her work but hasn’t changed her steady creative process or style.

McVarish and Minnick said they felt fortunate, in some ways, to be a small gallery right now.

“The whole art world’s changed,” McVarish said. “All the old systems are blown up. Maybe it’s a good time for a small gallery, because the whole playing



Photos by Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

**ABOVE AND RIGHT: Art inside The Secret Gallery. LEFT: Jill McVarish and Chris Minnick stand inside The Secret Gallery.**

field just got blown up.”  
Minnick added, “You can be a couple of weirdos in a weird little town.”

