

# Bittersweet: Canberra oldest art gallery set to close



By [Sally Pryor](#)

October 12 2024

[canberratimes.com.au](http://canberratimes.com.au)

Martin Beaver once said - on record - that [you'd be crazy](#) to open a commercial art gallery in these trying times.

That was eight years ago, and Beaver, the co-owner of Canberra's longest-running gallery of the same name, had no idea just how much more trying things were going to get.

In fact, Canberra's oldest and longest-running gallery thrived during COVID, what with so many people stuck at home and pondering art.

Meanwhile, other private galleries have come and gone, artists have continued to create, and the Beavers have cultivated their stable of around 50 artists, staging around 20 exhibitions a year, by painters, printmakers, sculptors, glass artists and ceramic artists.

Now, nearly 50 years since the gallery opened, Beaver Galleries is set to close for good.



Susie and Martin Beaver call time on their eponymous gallery. Picture by Keegan Carroll

But Martin and Susie Beaver are adamant that their departure will not be closing a door, but rather setting the scene for new players in the market.

"When you close, you're not just closing, you're not just kind of slamming the door shut," Martin Beaver said.

"It means there's opportunities for other people to step into that space, and hopefully that's what will happen ...

"It's just more a sense of freshness, and probably, let's face it, yes, another generation."

In fact, just this month, a new private gallery, Civic Art Bureau, opened in the city centre.



Mixed-media works now on display at Beaver Galleries

Meanwhile, Grainger Gallery, [which opened](#) at Dairy Road in 2021, is thriving, and stalwart Aarwun Gallery at Gold Creek shows no signs of slowing down.

The commercial art landscape has shifted constantly over the years, although some things haven't changed. Canberrans have plenty of money, taste and cultural nous, yet most prefer to buy their art in Sydney or Melbourne.

It's a strange phenomenon of cultural cringe that no one has ever been able to fathom; the Beavers have even sold works by Canberra artists to Canberrans at Sydney art fairs.

But all established artists have at least one gallery representing them, and many have two or three, in a market that is entirely unregulated, and trust is paramount - between gallery owners and artists, clients and dealers.

And for many, an art gallery is a strange and unfamiliar place.

"Coming into the art market is often, let's face it, kind of strange unless you've got some background or training or you've got a particular vision of what you want to do," Martin says. "It's actually pretty confusing, and the landscape is unusual for people."

But Susie says in many ways, Beaver's point of difference has been to have the opposite effect.

"We have a lot of interstate clients who come here, and I think that they love the model of what this gallery has had," she says.

"It's diverse, but it's really personal. We've had emails from people saying, 'You helped me have the confidence to buy my first work, and now I feel comfortable'. Because some galleries interstate are really impersonal, and they make you feel like a dummy.



Mixed-media works now on display at Beaver Galleries. Picture supplied

"But I think that this gallery has had such a personal approach that makes people feel like they can ask questions when they're not informed, and then they learn about art."

It was Martin's parents, Ron and Betty Beaver, who established Beaver Galleries in 1975. Like many Canberra galleries, it began in the back of their suburban house in the inner south, before moving to custom-built premises in Deakin 10 years later.

When they decided to retire, Martin and wife Susie bought the business, and have run it from the same Deakin building since 1992.

After Beaver closes, the building will be converted into a childcare, and the Beavers? Well, they can now go and do whatever they want, almost for the first time in their adult lives.

"When we bought the gallery, our daughter, our first child, was three months old, and I was 32," Susie says. "And now she's 32, so it's half of my life."

And the pair are adamant that it's best to finish up while they are still loving their work.

"We've been saying to people, I think it's really important we finish when we still love what we do," she says. "And you don't want it to not show in your business either. I think if you come in and look around now, it still is as beautiful at what as it was and has always been. And I think that's because we love what we do."

For Martin, there's a tinge of regret mixed in as well, to close a chapter that's been almost 50 years in the writing. "It's very bittersweet," he says.

- Beaver Galleries closes on November 30. Until then, there are works by various artists on show, and another exhibition scheduled for October. [beavergalleries.com.au](http://beavergalleries.com.au)