

Sue Callanan Here, Now. An artist attuned to what remains, what shifts, and what quietly holds.



Photo by Stephen McLaughlan

Entering the space

There is a particular kind of quiet that exists in certain buildings: not silence, but accumulation. A sense that time has not been erased, only layered. At Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, housed within a century-old Art Deco structure opposite St Paul's Cathedral, that quiet is immediately present. The curved beams, the worn surfaces, the refusal of the space to be polished into neutrality, all of it, remains intact.

It is into this environment that **Sue Callanan** places *HERE NOW*, though “places” still feels too fixed. The work does not sit inside the gallery so much as it enters into negotiation with it.

Nothing feels imposed. Instead, there is a subtle recalibration as though the room itself has shifted register.

You become aware of it gradually, not only visually but physically.

As if the space were no longer empty, but quietly occupied.

In *HERE, NOW*, material leads. Gesture, weight, and placement speak before language - before meaning settles.

Material, before meaning

Callanan does not work from a fixed allegiance to medium. There is no signature material that defines the work in advance. Instead, there is a logic that unfolds in reverse: the idea, or perhaps more accurately the impulse, emerges first, and only then does the material arrive to meet it.

This matters because it refuses any hierarchy between concept and object. Materials are not there to illustrate an idea already resolved; they are part of the thinking itself.

In *HERE NOW*, industrial and bodily associations move quietly alongside one another. A suspended hook traces a slow arc through space, moving with a measured, almost hesitant rhythm. Nearby, forms positioned at the height of the body meet the viewer not as objects to be observed, but as presences to be encountered.

Latex carries a faint, unsettling echo of skin; felt absorbs light in a way that feels both protective and withholding. Steel appears, but never asserts dominance.

Nothing declares itself fully. And yet nothing feels inert.

Even the most minimal elements seem to hold a **kind of posture**, a stance in relation to the room and to us.

A slow negotiation - weight, balance, gravity.

The body understands first

It becomes clear, after a short time, that the work is not asking to be decoded. There is no immediate conceptual key that unlocks it. Instead, the experience begins elsewhere in the body.

A slight tightening in the chest as the hook swings and pauses.

A recognition, almost instinctive, of softness where hardness was expected.

A moment of stillness as something shifts, though it is difficult to say exactly what.

These are not neutral encounters.

Crossed flags carry a tension that reads like gesture; as if something has been signalled, interrupted, or held mid-action. The paired broom heads lean toward one another with a strange familiarity, like figures caught in a quiet exchange. The vertical latex forms sit at a height that feels uncannily human not abstract, but relational.

You do not stand back to analyse it; you register it.

The work meets the body with something that feels like another body not literally present, but implied through weight, placement, and proximity.

A practice shaped by another life

To understand the weight of this restraint, it is important to look at where the work comes from. Callanan did not begin her life in art. Her early years were spent in social work, including time within psychiatric institutions, working alongside people whose lives had been shaped by systems of care, containment, and often long-term isolation.

That experience does not appear in the work as narrative or illustration. It is not referenced directly. But it is present in a more fundamental way in the way the work attends to presence itself. It refuses to force resolution, instead attending to what is not immediately visible.

An attentiveness to how bodies occupy space.

How they lean, withdraw, signal, and hold.

How much is communicated without language.

The sculptures seem to carry this knowledge.

Not as figures, but as **stand-in objects** that hold the trace of human behaviour without ever resolving into representation.

Essentially, Callanan brought with her a way of seeing that had already been shaped by lived experience, by observation, by proximity to lives that do not fit easily into linear narratives.

The work carries that knowledge quietly.

Beginning later, working deeper

There is something significant in the timing of that beginning. In a culture that often privileges early talent, early recognition, and early trajectory, Callanan's path suggests another possibility: that art can emerge not as an extension of education, but as a response to life itself.

To begin later is not to begin behind. It is to begin with weight. With a sense of what matters and what does not. With less interest in performance, and more interest in process. With a willingness to sit inside uncertainty, rather than resolve it too quickly. That patience is evident here.

Nothing is over-explained. Nothing is forced into clarity.

The work trusts meaning to emerge, or not, in its own time.

Red textile forms and marked surfaces shift gently in the gallery space, activating the relationship between object and environment.

The space as collaborator

What becomes increasingly evident is that the exhibition is not composed of discrete works, but of relationships. Between materials, certainly, but also between the work and the architecture, the interior and the exterior, the static and the moving.

A video work, drawn from a moment observed through the gallery window, a crane basket crossing a blue sky before descending into a construction site below introduces a temporal layer that echoes the physical forms within the space. Red flags intersect, suggesting both signal and interruption. A large felt surface anchors the room, absorbing light and attention alike.

None of these elements operate independently.

They form a field. And within that field, something subtle happens - the objects begin to feel less like things, and more like presences in relation to one another.

Not quite human, but not entirely separate from us either.

Staying with the work

There is a temptation, in contemporary viewing habits, to move quickly, to scan, to interpret, to move on. *HERE NOW* resists that rhythm. It asks, quietly but firmly, for time.

Not extended time, necessarily. But attentive time. The kind of time in which something subtle can register. In which a shift in perception can occur without announcement. In which the viewer begins to notice not just what they are looking at but how they are positioned within it.

It is in that space that the work begins to open.

HERE NOW

The title is direct, almost disarmingly so.

HERE NOW.

Two words that offer no explanation, no framework, no overt instruction.

And yet, within the experience of the work, they begin to expand.

To be here in a body, in a space, in relation to other forms that seem, in their own way, to be present.

To be now in a moment that feels suspended, as though something is about to happen, or has just happened.

It is a modest proposition, and a demanding one.

To remain. To notice.

To sit with the strange familiarity of objects that feel almost but not quite alive.

Afterwards

There is a point, often unnoticed, when the viewer leaves the exhibition and steps back into the city.

The noise returns. The pace resumes. The familiar structures of attention reassert themselves. And yet, something lingers. Not an image, exactly. Not a clear idea. More a shift in perception.

A heightened awareness of posture, of proximity, of the quiet ways in which bodies human or otherwise hold space.

And perhaps that is where the work continues. Not in what it shows. But in what it leaves behind. A subtle recalibration.

A sense that even in the absence of the human figure the body is still present.

Continued reflections

“It is subtle, but it remains. And perhaps that is where the work continues—beyond the gallery, in the viewer’s act of making meaning. In that older sense of authorship yielding to reading, the work is completed not by the maker’s intention, but by the encounter itself.” – Kelli

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