



Table Turning

Plain English Version

General Information

Table Turning is a solo exhibition by **Susan MacWilliam**.

The exhibition runs **Thursday, 20 November 2025 – Saturday, 21 February 2026**.

Theme

Susan MacWilliam has been making artworks for over 30 years. Her work explores ideas that **science does not fully accept**, such as seeing the future, reading minds, and talking to spirits. She investigates these ideas through archives, scientific tools, and interviews with experts.

In 1997, MacWilliam saw a documentary on television about spiritualist mediums. She was intrigued by the look and performance of the **spirit sessions**. Her first video work, *The Last Person* (1998), tells the story of Helen Duncan, a Scottish medium, who was the last person sent to jail under an old British law about witchcraft.

Psychic Experiments

The exhibition title, *Table Turning*, comes from a popular practice in the late 1800s. People would sit around a table that moved, lifted, or spun. This was seen as proof of **psychic powers**.

Dr. T. G. and Lillian Hamilton conducted **psychic experiments** in the early 20th century. They used a special room designed to attract spirits in their home in Canada. Photographs from their experiments became well-known in paranormal studies.

MacWilliam explored the psychic experiments in a film shown at the 2009 Venice Biennale. For ***Séance Room, 1931*** (2025), she has hand-stitched the Hamiltons' room plan into fabric.

Reading and Women's Independence

In the late 19th century, many mediums were women, while most of the people investigating them were men. Working as a medium could give women **power and money**, though in a way that people saw as mysterious or magical.

Books and reading are important in MacWilliam's work. She sees books as tools that connect minds, like telepathy. Reading gave women **knowledge and freedom**, helping them understand and explore the world. In the exhibition, there are images of books, hands, and reading.



The vitrine sculpture ***The Three Arts Club with Fifty-Six Telepaths*** (2025) shows five women reading together. The artwork is about women's independence. It is named after a club that helped women study music, drama, and painting. MacWilliam's great-aunt stayed at this club in London in the 1920s.

The exhibition also displays part of MacWilliam's ***Telepaths*** collection, a series of photographs and postcards of women reading, along with old books about psychic research.

Artistic Process

The gallery space at Ormston House has inspired new sculptures. The large columns in the room have led MacWilliam to make small models of **hands holding books**. The sculptural form of these works references cemetery sculptures she saw in Paris and her early works, like her 1997 exhibition *Curtains* in Dublin.

The exhibition was made using **careful, manual techniques** such as cutting, stitching, shaping, and molding paper, felt, and clay. For MacWilliam, making art is like a séance, because both bring unseen ideas into the physical world.

Susan MacWilliam Biography

Susan MacWilliam was born in Belfast in 1969. She lives and works between Belfast and Dublin. She teaches Fine Art at the National College of Art and Design. In 2009, she represented Northern Ireland at the Venice Biennale. Her touring show *Modern Experiments* traveled across Ireland in 2016 and 2017.

She is currently showing her work in two exhibitions: *Ghosts* at Kunstmuseum Basel (until March 2026), and *The Medium is the Message* at The College of Psychic Studies, London (until January 2026). She is represented by CONNERSMITH gallery.

Funding

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