

Yamamoto Keiko Rochaix

PRESS RELEASE

Breakdown

Yvonne Mabs Francis



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The Impossibility of Being in the Brain of Someone Living
2003, oil on canvas, 245cm x 170cm

5 June -6 August 2026

Private view and opening reception: 5 June 2022 6pm- 9pm

London Gallery Weekend 5 – 7 June

Yamamoto Keiko Rochaix is pleased to present Breakdown, the first solo exhibition in a London commercial gallery of the work of artist Yvonne Mabs Francis (1945 – 2025, lived and worked in Oxford), featuring paintings from her Breakdown series alongside a body of related drawings.

The vivid, saturated colour of the four works from her last major series of paintings are installed on the ground floor of the gallery. Dramatic in size, rich in symbolism, each work is a visual representation of Francis's mental breakdown, brought on following the death of her father in 1969. Admitted to a mental institution at that time, Francis did not start painting again until some 11 years later, with the Breakdown series started in 1999. Each title bears the hallmark of the mental hell of psychosis: "The Bodily Time Machine", "The Electric Bed", "The Impossibility of Being in the Brain of Someone Living", and "Breakdown", each presenting different stages of her mental instability. Through her paintings, Francis raises the hidden struggles of managing her mental health, using creativity to untangle her own obsessive thoughts and demons, living inside her head.

In the downstairs gallery are Francis's exquisite monochrome and coloured drawings, each a study of women captured in dreamlike, otherworldly and fantastic landscapes. Featuring recurring motifs, they illustrate the delicate, intricate and minute depiction of the natural environment through birds, flowers and fish floating across the images. These are intermingled with skulls and bonelike structures, multiple images of women's heads and babies curled in the foetal position, curved back, bowed head and limbs tucked tight into the torso. These strong female characters, beautifully dressed — a reference to her own business designing and making fashion clothing — also carry the symbols of restraint, shackled to bedlike structures, keys dangling from belts around the waist, and a dress echoing the shape of a bell jar.

Francis trained at the Slade School of Art in the 1960s and went on to lecture in Contemporary Art at Wolverhampton College of Art. In the summer of 1969, following the death of her father, she suffered a severe psychotic breakdown and admitted herself as a voluntary patient to the Warneford Hospital in Oxford, where she spent three months — much of it on a locked ward, undergoing deep sleep treatment and, ultimately, ECT. What struck her most during her recovery was the silence: no doctor ever spoke to her about what she was experiencing. Three decades later, in 1999, she began to paint her way back through that summer, determined to give form to an illness she felt neither professionals nor the wider public understood. The Breakdown paintings, and the drawings that accompany them, are the result of that long undertaking — an attempt, as she put it, to make the experience of psychosis visible, commonplace and survivable for those living through it. Showing this work in a London commercial gallery for the first time, in the year following the artist's death, marks an overdue recognition of a body of work whose subject remains as urgent today as when it was made.

Yvonne Mabs Francis (b. 1945, Oxford, d. 2025, Oxford)

Francis graduated from the Slade School of Art, London in 1968. Her work featured in the British Council 2025 UK/Poland festival exhibition, You're Not Alone: Women in Art 2025, B.A.D. Gallery Boscombe, Bournemouth and Muzeum Śląskie, Katowicach, Poland, curated by Carol Maund, Director, BEAF Arts, Bournemouth, UK. Francis's work featured in many group exhibitions in London and Oxford, notably What Goes On In The Mind, The Gallery Oxford Town Hall, 2016; The Mind Machine, Menier Gallery, London, 2016; Dare to Wear, St Pancras Crypt, London, 2010; The Jam Factory, AIMS group show, Oxford, 2009; Wild Old Women Wow!, Novas Gallery London, 2008; Oxford Open, Modern Art Oxford, 2008; Mexico Gallery, London, 2004; Young Contemporaries, London, John Moores, Liverpool, 1966-1968. Barbara Herbin's article on the artist appeared in Raw Vision, 2017.

"Breakdown" curated by Carol Maund, Director BEAF Arts.

The exhibition will be part of the London Gallery Weekend, 2026, 5-7 June.

The gallery opening hours during the London Gallery Weekend:

Friday 5 June : 11 am - 6pm
Saturday 6 June : 11 am - 6pm
Sunday 7 June : 12 noon - 5pm, guided tour from 2pm

The 7 June tour will be guided by Carol Maund, the curator of the show, and who has interviewed the artist on several occasions shortly before her untimely death. Tour will run approximately 45 minutes.

For further information, images or to arrange interviews please contact:
+44 (0)755 136 0056
press@yamamotokeiko.com

Title: Breakdown

Artist: Yvonne Mabs Francis

Address: 19 Goulston St, London, E1 7TP

Dates: 5 June - 6 August 2026

Private View: Wednesday 5 June 2026 6pm - 9pm

Opening Hours: Wednesday to Saturday, 12 noon – 6pm

Travel: Aldgate East, Aldgate, Liverpool Street

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