

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 18 DECEMBER 2025



ROYAL WATERCOLOUR SOCIETY

GALLERY

PRESS IMAGES – [HERE](#)

MARY LINCOLN & FRIDA KAHLO

U N F R A M E D



*Mary Lincoln and Frida Kahlo
love flowers
in time, they became them.*



in nature, everything is possible

L- Title: *Mary Lincoln and Frida Kahlo Love Flowers in Time, They Became Them.*, 2025, watercolour on paper, 22.5x15 in.

R- Title: *In Nature, Everything Is Possible [10 Sleeping]*, 2011, watercolour on paper, 22.5x22.5 in.

BY JOHN RANSOM PHILLIPS
ROYAL WATERCOLOUR SOCIETY GALLERY
31 JANUARY – 21 FEBRUARY 2026
PRESS PRIVATE VIEW - 30 JANUARY 4-5PM

In this new exhibition, American artist [John Ransom Phillips](#) makes his UK debut by bringing together two extraordinary figures — Mary Lincoln and Frida Kahlo—in a dialogue across time, geography and circumstance into a shared presence. Though separated by century and culture, both women confronted lives marked by love, loss, illness, and public scrutiny. Their stories, reimagined through Phillips' expressive paintings, reveal the shared struggle between visibility and vulnerability, presenting both women “unframed”—liberated from the histories and images imposed upon them.

The collection of over 20 watercolours with only a few oils painted over 15 years, is organised around the metaphor of framing and unframing. This meditative encounter combines image and text and can be read in the larger legacy of Symbolism. Phillips' works have a dream-like quality where forms morph and melt into one another.

Phillips' choice to work primarily in watercolour is deliberate and profound. He demonstrates that its fluidity, transparency, and unpredictability make it uniquely suited to exploring the dissolution of boundaries—the overlap of self and other, the way trauma dissolves into memory, into dream. The element of chance—the way water carries pigment beyond the artist's full control—becomes a metaphor for the experience of both Mary and Frida: how much of life exceeds our command, and how much we must surrender to forces beyond ourselves.

Exhibition Curator Lina Zikas says: “John Ransom Phillips doesn’t retell the stories we’ve been told about Mary Lincoln and Frida Kahlo. He unmakes them. His paintings strip away the narrative dust—the pity, the diagnosis, the footnotes—and ask us to see what remains: two women who refused to be contained by the frames others built around them. In their private rebellions—spiritualism, paint, words—they constructed worlds only they could inhabit. Phillips honours this act of resistance by painting not their suffering, but their defiance.”

Phillips comments: “Mary Lincoln and Frida Kahlo both lived with unbearable pain. In one life, pain remained private and had no outlet. History named this insanity. In the other, pain became the subject of artistic expression, and history celebrated it. That difference sits at the centre of this exhibition.”

This exhibition opens in tandem with Phillips' original stage work, *Mrs. President*, at Charing Cross Theatre, just a few moments from the gallery which runs from January 23 to March 8 2026, extending Mary Lincoln's journey across visual art and performance.

Phillips has exhibited in the United States, Europe, Asia and Latin America, with works held in public and private collections. His multidisciplinary practice spans painting, film, theatre, and literature, exploring the private depths of public lives.

The exhibition is curated by Lina Zikas and produced by Art Pond Foundation.

More about Mrs. President

Keala Settle, known for her iconic role as Lettie Lutz, the bearded lady, in 2017's award-winning film of the musical *The Greatest Showman*, plays the lead role of Mary Lincoln in *Mrs. President*. Marking a real departure for the actor, this gripping psychological drama uncovers the turbulent inner world and the passions and ambitions of America's First Lady. For further information and booking details - <https://charingcrosstheatre.co.uk/theatre/mrs-president-2026>

– ENDS –

LISTINGS INFORMATION

FREE ADMISSION

Title: Mary Lincoln & Frida Kahlo U N F R A M E D

Where: RWS Gallery, Whitcomb Street, London

Dates: 31 January – 16 February 2026

Opening times: Tuesday – Saturday, 11am - 5pm

Link: <https://www.royalwatercoloursociety.co.uk/exhibitions/102-mary-lincoln-frida-kahlo-unframed/overview/>

Gallery contact number: 020 8050 9425 info@royalwatercoloursociety.com

Social media: Instagram @johnransomphillips.art

**For an invitation to the Press Private View, press tickets to see *Mrs. President* and any media enquiries please contact Diana Whitehead,
Fourth Wall PR at: diana@fourthwallpr.co.uk Mob: 07939 149887**

NOTES TO EDITORS

ABOUT JOHN RANSOM PHILLIPS

John Ransom Phillips lives and works in New York, with formative periods spent in Belgium, Egypt, Italy, and Judea. A California native, he earned his BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute and his PhD from the University of Chicago, where he later taught the history of culture. He has also held teaching positions at the University of California, Berkeley, and Reed College in Portland. Over decades of painting, writing, and performance, Phillips has developed a practice grounded in spiritual inquiry and self-reflection. Working across painting, film, theatre, and prose, he explores how the past lives within us — how the emotional and imaginative residues of history shape our identities and desires today. Phillips's work does not merely engage history; it reanimates it. Drawing on figures from Pinturicchio and Civil War photographer Mathew Brady to Jiang Qing, wife of Chairman Mao, he paints and writes their interior worlds — their dreams, vulnerabilities, and private longings. Through these imagined encounters, he examines the continuity between historical memory and lived emotion, revealing how history is not fixed but felt, relived, and transformed through art. Guided by his own sense of spiritual lineage and connection to past lives, Phillips uses his work to map the invisible currents between image, memory, and human longing. He is the author of nine books, including *Ransoming Mathew Brady*, *Bed as Autobiography*, and *Sleeping Presidents* (2021). His paintings have been exhibited internationally, most recently in *Lives of Artists* at the Boca Raton Museum of Art and with BlackBook Presents, New York. His theatre works include *Eve & Adam*, *Fatherless Sons*, and *Mrs. President*.

ABOUT LINA ZIKAS

Lina Zikas is an independent curator and art historian based in Washington, D.C. and New York City, specializing in contemporary artistic practice across multiple mediums. She holds a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in Art History and has devoted over two decades to studying John Ransom Phillips's multidisciplinary work, developing rare expertise in his integration of painting, writing, and performance. Ms. Zikas is currently authoring the catalogue raisonné of John Ransom Phillips' oeuvre—a comprehensive scholarly documentation of the artist's complete body of work spanning four decades. Her curatorial projects reflect a deep commitment to contextualizing contemporary art within broader historical and cultural narratives. Notable exhibitions include *Lives of Artists* by John Ransom Phillips for Blackbook Presents in New York City. She also co-curated the permanent exhibition of the Plaster Cast Collection from the Metropolitan Museum of Art at George Mason University and co-authored publication *Engines of Education: Essays on the George Mason University Plaster Cast Collection* (2021). Ms. Zikas is known for her scholarly rigor, collaborative approach, and ability to foster critical dialogue that makes complex artistic ideas accessible to diverse audiences.

ABOUT ART POND FOUNDATION

Art Pond Foundation, located in the heart of New York City, is a dynamic catalyst for innovative artistry and emerging creative expression. Dedicated to fostering boundary-defying artists, we champion bold voices that blur the lines between mediums—whether through writing, painting, theatre, film, or hybrid forms. By supporting those who challenge conventions and reshape cultural narratives, we cultivate a vibrant, cross-disciplinary community where groundbreaking ideas flourish and the future of art takes shape.

ABOUT THE ROYAL WATERCOLOUR SOCIETY

The Royal Watercolour Society (RWS) is the oldest and most prestigious watercolour society in the world. Past Members include Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, E.R. Hughes, William Hunt, and John Singer Sargent. The origins of the Royal Watercolour Society can be traced back to the formation of the Society of Painters in Water Colours in 1804. Born out of a sense of grievance by a number of

such artists who practised in watercolour and felt that they were discriminated against by the Royal Academy, the only professional artistic body of the day. On Friday 30 November 1804 the first meeting of 'The Society Associated for the purpose of Establishing an Annual Exhibition of Paintings in Water Colours' was held at The Stratford Coffee House on Oxford Street, London. Founder Members include Samuel Shelley, William Frederick Wells, William Sawrey Gilpin and brothers, John and Cornelius Varley. In 1881 Queen Victoria granted the Society a Royal Charter, and agreed to sign the certificates that each RWS Member receives on election to the Society. This tradition continues to the present day. King Charles III became Patron of the Royal Watercolour Society on 3rd May 2024. Today, the RWS is an artist-led Society made up of an elected Membership who are amongst the finest practitioners in contemporary water-based painting. Artists work in a variety of water media including gouache, acrylic, pen & ink, pigment, collage, mixed media as well as traditional watercolour. The aim of the Society is to promote, by example and education, the understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of these exciting media. The Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours is a registered charity in England and Wales No. 258348.

ABOUT RWS GALLERY

RWS Gallery is a brand new exhibition and event space in Central London, moments from The National Gallery. The space, designed by the late Chris Wilkinson RA and his award-winning firm, WilkinsonEyre, epitomises the perfect balance between old and new, with the Grade-II Listed frontage in stark contrast to the clean and airy finish of the internal gallery spaces. Since its founding in the early 19th Century, the RWS has been based in a number of London locations including Conduit Street in the West End, Pall Mall East, and since 1980 at Bankside Gallery next to Tate Modern. <https://www.royalwatercoloursociety.co.uk/exhibitions/>