

## Interviews

Interview for SMB Daily News, New York, July 2023.



*Rob Munday with his portrait Felicity – Platinum Queen, 2022.*

### **Can you tell us a little about yourself and your background?**

I grew up on the East Norfolk coast in the UK. There was a white sandy beach, which stretched for miles, and the North Sea on one side of our house, and the Norfolk Broads, an area of rivers and lakes surrounded by reed beds and windmills, on the other, and so I grew up surrounded by nature. I marvelled at the glorious sunsets and the intense lightning storms over the sea, and collected everything from butterflies to animal skeletons. I kept as many animals in my small garden and conservatory as my mother would allow, and I wanted nothing more than to be a zookeeper. I was always curious about the natural world, and from the age of seven, drew and painted it with a passion.

### **How did you first get into art?**

Recognising that my enthusiasm for the natural world was only matched by my obsession with painting and drawing, my mother enrolled me, at the age of 10, in a local oil painting class. I attended every Saturday afternoon and painted lots of pictures of animals and landscapes.

At school, however, one was expected to become either an artist or a scientist, and certainly not both. After leaving, and confused as to which I wanted to be, I went to art college for a year, then studied science and mathematics for three years, and then finally returned to art college to gain a BA(Hons.) degree in the new disciplines of computer graphics and video, alongside the more traditional ones of photography and illustration. It was the first and only degree in the UK to combine art, science, and technology. Then, in 1981, whilst still at college, I discovered holography. It was a revelation, the perfect combination of art and science, and the perfect way to visually convey, record, and investigate the natural world. I taught myself how to make holograms and became one of the UK's first generation of holographers. My good fortune wasn't just an interest in these seemingly opposing subjects but also the timing. I graduated just as

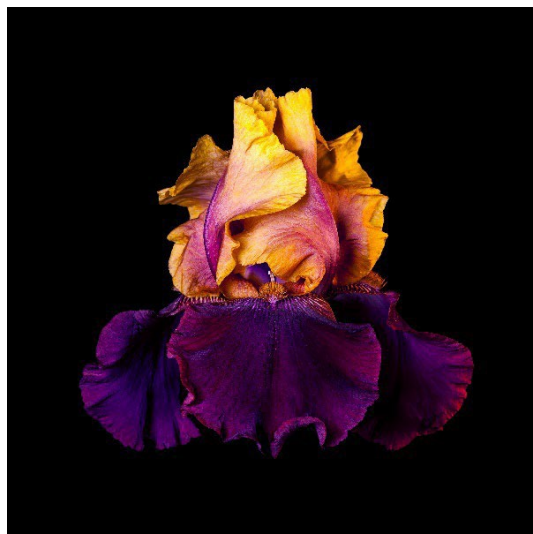
holography broke free of the scientific laboratory and became a new and exciting creative medium, and, in 1985, I was offered a position at the Royal College of Art to help establish the first post-graduate degree in creative holography. We often referred to this time as the 'Fox Talbot' days of holography. Almost everything we did was for the first time, and it was quite easy to make and invent new things. We felt like explorers discovering a new world. Around every corner lay a host of new creative possibilities.

### **What kind of art do you create, and what mediums do you prefer to work with?**

For 40 years now, I have referred to myself as a creative holographer, although my work now extends to other three-dimensional imaging mediums, such as lenticular imaging. What is common between them is that they all seek to replicate, to a greater or lesser degree, 3D reality as we see it.

Importantly, the mediums of holography and lenticular imaging themselves inspire much philosophical thought and, as such, are as important to my artwork as the images that they portray. For example, holograms perfectly capture and replay the fields of electro-magnetic energy, i.e., the light, that emanates from reality as we know it, and thus the light-sculpture that is formed is as optically real as reality itself. In a sense, holograms decohere the quantum fields at a moment of time to provide a version of reality that is neither real nor unreal. Given that all matter is made of quantum energy fields, some leading theoretical physicists have postulated that the entire universe may well be a hologram. By comparison, the 3D image seen when looking at a lenticular image, or indeed when viewing a 3D film in a cinema, doesn't physically exist, but is constructed entirely by our mind. These latter images should perhaps be more aptly described as 'mind sculptures'.

### **How would you describe your unique artistic style?**



*Angelina Jolie, 2017, and Naturalium – Bearded iris, 2017*

I think my style comes from both the uniqueness of the medium and the way that I represent the subject matter. Whilst it has been frowned upon for many years in creative holography circles, most of my images, portraits, etc. are intentionally rendered in a simple fashion, with the entity floating in free space on a black background. For me, this better encapsulates the essence and structure of the objects being recorded and conveys the notion that all entities are coalescences of energy fields.

Can you share a piece of your work that you're particularly proud of and tell us the story behind it?



*Equanimity, 2004, and Equanimity on TIME Magazine, 2012.*

I must choose my most famous work, my portrait of the late Queen Elizabeth II.

In 2003, I was approached to create the first-ever officially commissioned 3D/holographic portrait of Her Majesty the Queen for The Jersey Heritage Trust to commemorate the Island of Jersey's 800-year allegiance to the English throne. The project was conducted as a collaboration with my former agent, a designer and now an artist, Chris Levine, who obtained the commission after showing the client my holographic portraits.

Before the commission, I was the only holographic portrait artist working in the UK and had already come close to shooting several members of the Royal family. The Queen had also previously unveiled two of my holographic works and received one as a gift, and so when the opportunity arose, it felt like it was destiny. More surprising was the fact that the Jersey Heritage Trust / The States of Jersey agreed to commission a holographic portrait in the first place. It was a great risk on their part, but one that has certainly paid off.

I agreed to shoot and create the portrait only six weeks before the first sitting and, in that short time, needed to design, build, program, and test a completely new 3D camera system, as well as set up my studio in Buckingham Palace. It was an intense period. When the day of the shoot finally arrived, I just got on with the job. It was only afterwards that I realised the enormity of the project. This was not only the first-ever holographic portrait of any member of the Royal family, but a holographic portrait of one of the most famous and photographed people in history.

Whilst the commission called for a stately and elegant portrait, my objective was to create a starkly realistic portrait, in a manner never-before-seen in Royal portraiture, and in the style of my other holographic portraits. I chose a simple composition, with the Queen facing forwards in front of a plain black background, to emphasise her presence and life-force such that, when looking into her eyes, viewers would have an intimate feeling of meeting and of knowing her. I also wished to create a work that would preserve this essence of entity for posterity. I think I achieved these ambitions.

The portrait has since been described as one of the most iconic portraits of the Queen ever made and was used extensively to commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee and subsequently her death. The portrait was also voted by visitors to the National Portrait Gallery in London as their favourite portrait, and it adorned the front cover of Time Magazine, the world's first postage stamp to contain a hologram of a Head of State, and the world's first £100 banknote. It will inevitably come to define my work in holographic

portraiture.

### **How do you find inspiration for your work?**

Simply awe for the natural world, its beauty, and its structure. At the age of 65, I am now blessed to live in the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains in SW France, surrounded by nature, and I am still in awe of the sunsets and lightning storms, now over the mountains rather than the sea.

As an example, my most recent work, entitled Entropy's Dance, was inspired by noticing that some parrot tulip petals, which had fallen and were drying in the mid-morning sun and had taken on a more vivid colour and an accentuated three-dimensional form, resembled flamenco dancers. It was as if the entities themselves were giving up their essence in one last dance with the universe. Entropy's Dance is currently on show at Art Angels gallery in West Hollywood, LA.



*Entropy's Dance – Duet, 2022, and Entropy's Dance – séptimo, 2022.*

### **What makes your art stand out in the industry?**

The uniqueness of the medium itself helps the work to stand out. All artworks have a technical element, e.g., the choice of a particular paint for its colour and vibrancy, or polished steel for its reflectance and ability to meld sculptures into their environment. Forty years ago, I chose the new medium of holography because, for me, it was the most fundamental of mediums, harnessing the most basic laws of the universe to record all aspects of light energy, and thus the ultimate medium with which to explore the nature of reality. The medium, however, remains expensive, highly technical, and, even after 40 years, is rare to find.

### **How do you connect with your audience or collectors?**

I am very lucky that I have an amazing PR agent, one of the best in the UK, and a fantastic range of galleries and representatives throughout the world who are willing to show my work.

### **What has been your biggest challenge as an artist, and how did you overcome it?**

My biggest challenge, working as a holographic or light artist, has been the supply of materials. Until 2019, only one company in the world made the lenticular lenses needed to create the highest-quality 3D lenticular

artworks. After 2019, the company in question, based in North Carolina, USA, closed its doors, and so there was none! It was like waking up one day as a painter to find that nobody sold paint or canvases anymore.

My solution was to research the highly technical and expensive process of making lenticular lenses and to make my own, perhaps the only artist in recent times to do so. It has taken me three years, working with companies around the world, to reach the point where top-quality lenses are once again available.

**What are your future plans or goals for your art?**

I shall continue to make my art whilst further enhancing, through technical developments, the creative possibilities of these mediums. If all I can do is inspire others to appreciate the 'small blue dot' and all that it contains, that will be more than enough.