

Felicity - Platinum Queen, 2004 / 2022

by

Rob Munday



On 4th May 2022, royal artist and holographer Rob Munday unveiled a new portrait of Queen Elizabeth II during the opening of his solo exhibition at 45 Park Lane, The Dorchester, to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Felicity - Platinum Queen, by Rob Munday, 2004 / 2022

Felicity - the quality or state of being happy.

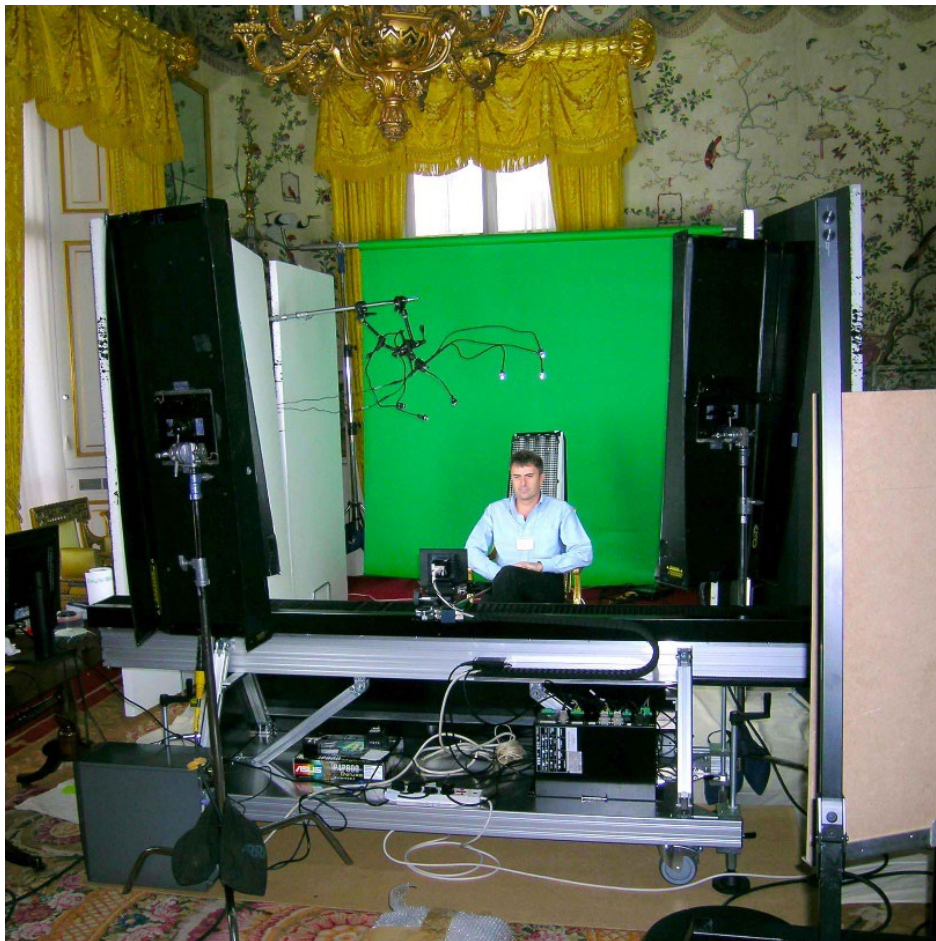
On the 4th of May 2022, to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum Jubilee, I unveiled a brand new and, until that moment, unseen portrait of the Queen. I named the portrait Felicity - Platinum Queen and dedicated it to the twenty years of friendship between the Queen and her closest aide, dresser, and friend, Angela Kelly.

The story behind the portrait

In August 2020, I was isolating at my home in SW France between two long and tedious COVID-19 lockdowns when I decided to reacquaint myself with the thirty-eight portraits, comprising some 8,200 images, that I had recorded almost seventeen years earlier at two royal sittings. The sittings in question were conducted in 2003 and 2004 as part of a project to shoot and create the first-ever officially commissioned 3D/holographic portrait of Queen Elizabeth II for the Jersey Heritage Trust, on behalf of the Bailiwick of Jersey, to commemorate the island's 800-year allegiance to the English throne.

Originally archived onto numerous recordable CDs, the images had been backed up to a large hard drive. After several minutes of searching the drive, I noticed a directory named 'Test Images' and wondered what lay within. I opened the directory to find the frames of a short video sequence that had never been seen by anyone before, not even by myself. I recalled shooting the test sequence while checking my exposure, focus, lighting, and composition just before the commencement of the official shoot at the second sitting in 2004.

I remembered that the Queen had been directed to sit in the chair that I had accurately positioned in front of the 3D camera system that I had designed and built specifically to create the portrait. This photograph shows me sitting in the chair within the temporary photography studio that I had built in the Yellow Drawing Room at Buckingham Palace, a process that took three days to complete before the sitting.



Rob Munday sitting on the Queen's chair in his temporary photography studio at Buckingham Palace, 2003.

After sitting in the chair, the Queen's closest aide, dresser, and long-term friend, Angela Kelly, came over to arrange the Queen's cloak whilst I checked my exposure, focus, lighting, and composition one last time. Angela and the Queen were in a jovial mood, and Angela whispered something amusing in the Queen's ear that made the Queen smile. Upon seeing this friendly and personal interaction, I hastily recorded a short 200-frame – 6.6-second video sequence and, in doing so, captured this unscripted moment of felicity. The official shoot then began in earnest, and the sequence was forgotten.

I began viewing the frames one by one, but most were disappointing, with the Queen looking down. Upon reaching the middle of the sequence, however, just three seconds into the video, I saw the Queen look up and smile and immediately recognised the potential for a unique portrait, one that was entirely different from any others that had been recorded or previously published. Selecting frame ninety-nine from the sequence, I creatively experimented with the image, removing all distracting background elements, including a part of Chris Levine's shirt and a section of Angela Kelly's hair, both of whom were standing behind the Queen at the time. I also chose to paint out the Queen's cloak. By focussing entirely on the Queen's face, framed solely by her Diadem crown and pearl necklace, the result was a brand-new and striking cameo-like portrait of the Queen that beautifully captured this felicitous moment.

In March of 2021, I considered publishing the portrait to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee the following year. An opportunity to do so presented itself a year later when, on the 23rd of February 2022, my agent, Lily Ackerman of Ackerman Studios, and I met with John Scanlon, the Manager of 45 Park Lane, The Dorchester, London, to discuss an upcoming solo exhibition of my work at this prestigious art venue. Upon showing the portrait to John and the other directors of the Dorchester Group, John excitedly proposed, and it was agreed, that the portrait would be unveiled to the press the day before the official opening of my exhibition, planned for the 5th of May 2022. During March and April of 2022, I created and framed platinum-palladium and 'direct to media' UV inkjet printed acrylic versions of the portrait. The former works were printed by the UK's foremost platinum-palladium printer, Max Caffell, of 31 Studio-The Platinum Printroom, Horsley, Gloucestershire, and framed by Mike Jeens-Williams, Arté Specialist Picture Framers of Rye, East Sussex, and the latter works were printed and framed by Genisis Imaging Limited, of Fulham, London.

Official portraits rarely show the Queen smiling, and it is even rarer to see such a natural and unposed moment of joyfulness. The twinkle in the Queen's eye, the almost quizzical look, shows the deep bond of trust that the Queen had with her long-term friend and dresser, Angela Kelly. Angela Kelly was a point of stability in the Queen's life, and so I decided to dedicate the portrait to her and her unique friendship with the Queen. Upon finding out, Angela wrote a personal letter of thanks to me from Buckingham Palace, stating that she was pleased and touched that I had dedicated my portrait to her.

On the 4th of May 2022, both versions of Felicity – Platinum Queen were duly unveiled to the world's press.

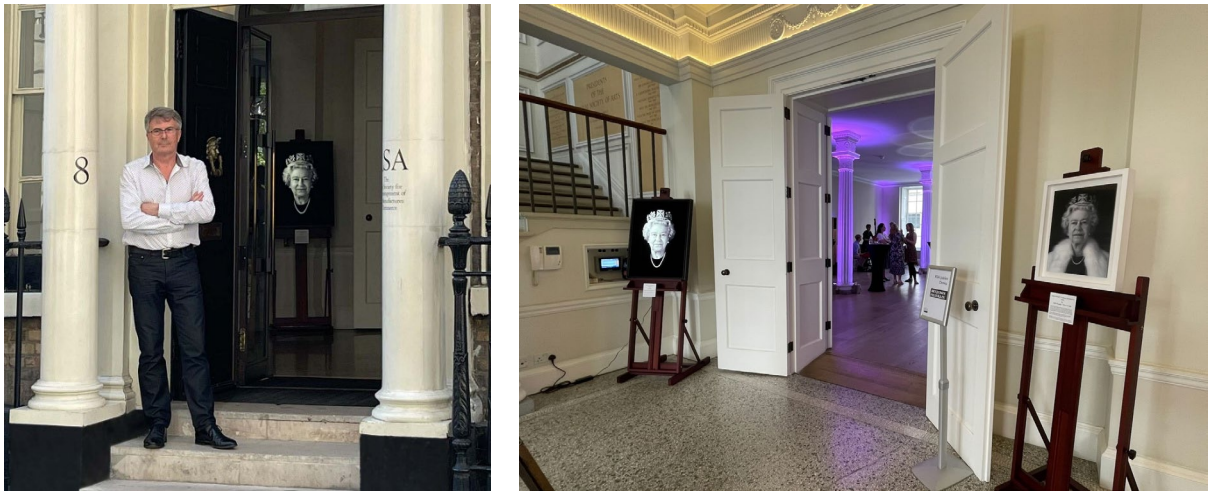


Rob Munday unveils Felicity – Platinum Queen at 45 Park Lane, The Dorchester, London, on the 4th of May 2022.

The portrait was received to huge acclaim, appearing in all six of the UK's national newspapers the next day, in over five hundred worldwide, and it was voted one of the top ten images published in the world that week in both the USA and Australia. I was also interviewed for CNN television.



Throughout the summer of 2022, The Royal Society for the Arts, whose patron was the Queen, celebrated the Queen's Platinum Jubilee by exhibiting my royal portraits, Felicity - Platinum Queen and Equanimity, in the foyer of their headquarters in London.



Rob Munday exhibits Felicity – Platinum Queen and Equanimity at the Royal Society for the Arts throughout the summer of 2022.

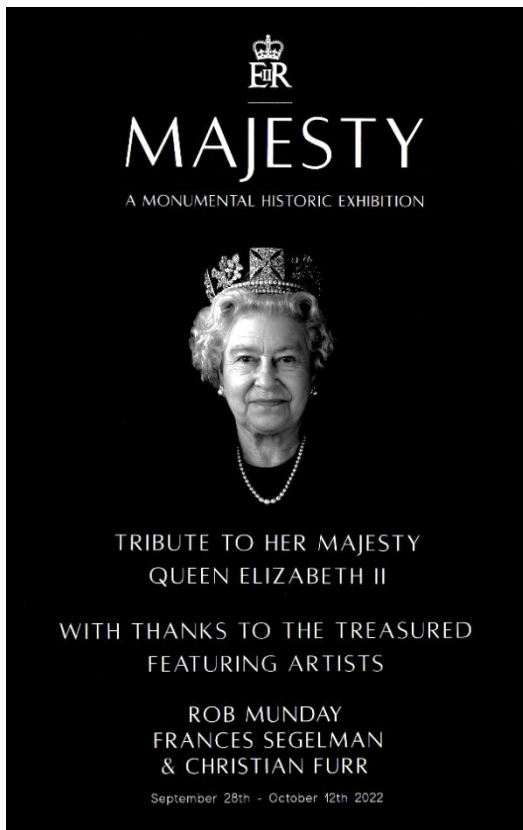
On the 2nd of June 2022, during Richmond's Platinum Jubilee beacon lighting ceremony, the Mayor of Richmond-upon-Thames, Councillor Julia Cambridge, paid tribute to my portrait. The mayor and other dignitaries addressed an audience of several hundred residents, sharing that I had lived and worked in Richmond for nearly forty years and had created my 3D portrait of the Queen – Equanimity - at my holography studio on Richmond Hill. Richmond's historical significance as a former centre of holography in the UK was also mentioned.



Rob Munday is invited to show his portraits Felicity – Platinum Queen and Equanimity at Richmond's Platinum Jubilee beacon lighting ceremony

Upon the Queen's passing, the portraits Felicity - Platinum Queen and Equanimity were displayed worldwide, resonating deeply with audiences across the globe. Numerous tributes, including an Instagram post by the rock band The Rolling Stones, featured Felicity – Platinum Queen, showcasing the Queen's enduring legacy and widespread impact.

On the 28th of September 2022, a major exhibition entitled Majesty opened at the Quantus Gallery, London as a tribute to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The exhibition featured the work of three royal artists: the sculptor Frances Segelman, the painter Christian Furr, and me. My portrait, Felicity - Platinum Queen, was chosen to represent the exhibition.



Majesty – The Quantus Gallery, London, 2022. Lower left: the royal artists Christian Furr, Frances Segelman, and Rob Munday.

For the November/December 2022 issue of their world-renowned journal, the Royal Photographic Society—whose patron, Queen Elizabeth II, served from 1952 to 2019, an extraordinary 67 years—collaborated with senior curator Dr. Sophie Gordon, former Head of Photographs at the Royal Collection, Royal Library, and Windsor Castle. Together, they selected my portrait, *Felicity - Platinum Queen*, to be included in their very special and only tribute to the Queen, entitled *Portrait of a Queen*, commemorating the Queen’s life.

It was a great privilege and an honour to have my portrait chosen and shown alongside just ten other portraits by only seven other artists, namely the renowned royal photographers Frederick Thurston, Rankin HonFRPS, Eve Arnold HonFRPS, Patrick Lichfield FRPS, Dorothy Wilding, Cecil Beaton HonFRPS, and Martin Parr HonFRPS.



Above
 'The Queen visiting the Drapers' Livery Hall, London, 2014', by Martin Parr HonFRPS/
 Magnum Photos


Below
 'Felicity: Platinum Queen, 2022'
 by Rob Munday



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Portrait of a Queen – The Royal Photographic Society

On the 18th of May 2024, I was also honoured to have a large-format platinum-palladium print of Felicity – Platinum Queen accepted by His Majesty King Charles III for inclusion into The Royal Collection at Windsor Castle.



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ROB MUNDAY (B. 1958)

Felicity - Platinum Queen, 2004/2022 2022

Platinum palladium print | 50.8 x 38.1 cm (image) | RCIN 2119714

One comment from thousands of compliments posted on social media, and which I feel sums up the portrait, was: 'Her facial expression shows a depth in her personality that reaches back to the days of her youth when the enormous weight of wearing the crown of England was not yet realised', P.A. McCandless. Another revealing remark, often used when commenting on the portrait, is simply 'The Queen looks normal!'.

Many have said that the portrait captures the essence of the Queen's personality perhaps like no other.

Technical notes: The image was shot in 2004 using a Dalsa machine vision camera, which, at this time, was one of the highest-resolution and fastest video cameras in the world. The camera was able to capture 30 frames per second with an image resolution of 1,200 x 1,600 pixels and output the frames in real time to a computer hard drive.

