

Artist Statement “Dame Helen Mirren”

Like the great Ulysses, I too, heard the Song of the Siren. At the direction of Circe, Ulysses ordered his men to chain him to the mast of his ship so he could hear the seductive Sirens, while his crew, with wax in their ears and unable to hear, rowed straight and true. He eventually manages to make his way back to Ithaca. Unlike Ulysses, my artistic odyssey was suddenly and irreversibly, blown off course...

I was nearly done with a study of a white chicken, just to keep my hand loose. Very straightforward. A simple exercise. And then, as I watched, a perfect storm of the arts: poetry, drama, comedy, and painting converged one night, and as fate would have it, changed my creative and artistic endeavors forever.

Enter stage left on the set of “The Late Show With Stephen Colbert”, the regal Dame Helen Mirren, wearing a long, high-necked black dress with a lace collar. She settles in her chair next to Stephen. They discuss things that make them cry. He hands her a paper and says, ‘Parts of this poem make me cry. This is “Ulysses” by Alfred Lord Tennyson.’

Then I hear my Siren Song, the mellifluous voice of Dame Helen Mirren as she reads the poem that makes Stephen Colbert cry. I too, weep. If you have read this far, please do yourself a favor and Youtube it. When she finishes reading, I think, ‘This woman deserves a chicken.’

I go back to my humble white chicken and paint a ring of black feathers around her neck with a lace collar overlay. I rework the chicken’s face, making it wiser and more expressive. And there it is, my homage to the incomparable Dame Helen Mirren, and the poem that makes me weep.

This painting is the first in my series, “KLUCKED!”, which either pays tribute or trolls pop culture icons reimagined as ornamental chickens. The series includes the entire Kardashian family, as well as such notables as RBG, and Gaga. It is a cheeky play with low brow pop surrealism using classical painting techniques and formal portraiture compositions.

The “KLUCKED!” series, inspired by Tennyson’s “Ulysses” and Dame Helen Mirren, marks a departure in my artistic direction from which there is no return. I have since moved to creating assemblages with social justice or political subject matter. I use repurposed and recycled materials with parts that can be moved by the viewer to engage him or her to experience the piece in a visceral way. I credit the theme of Tennyson’s “Ulysses”, of striving to find the new and embracing the struggle; as read by Dame Helen Mirren, in spurring me to find my point of view as an artist, always moving forward, learning from the failures, embracing new mediums, and new concepts.