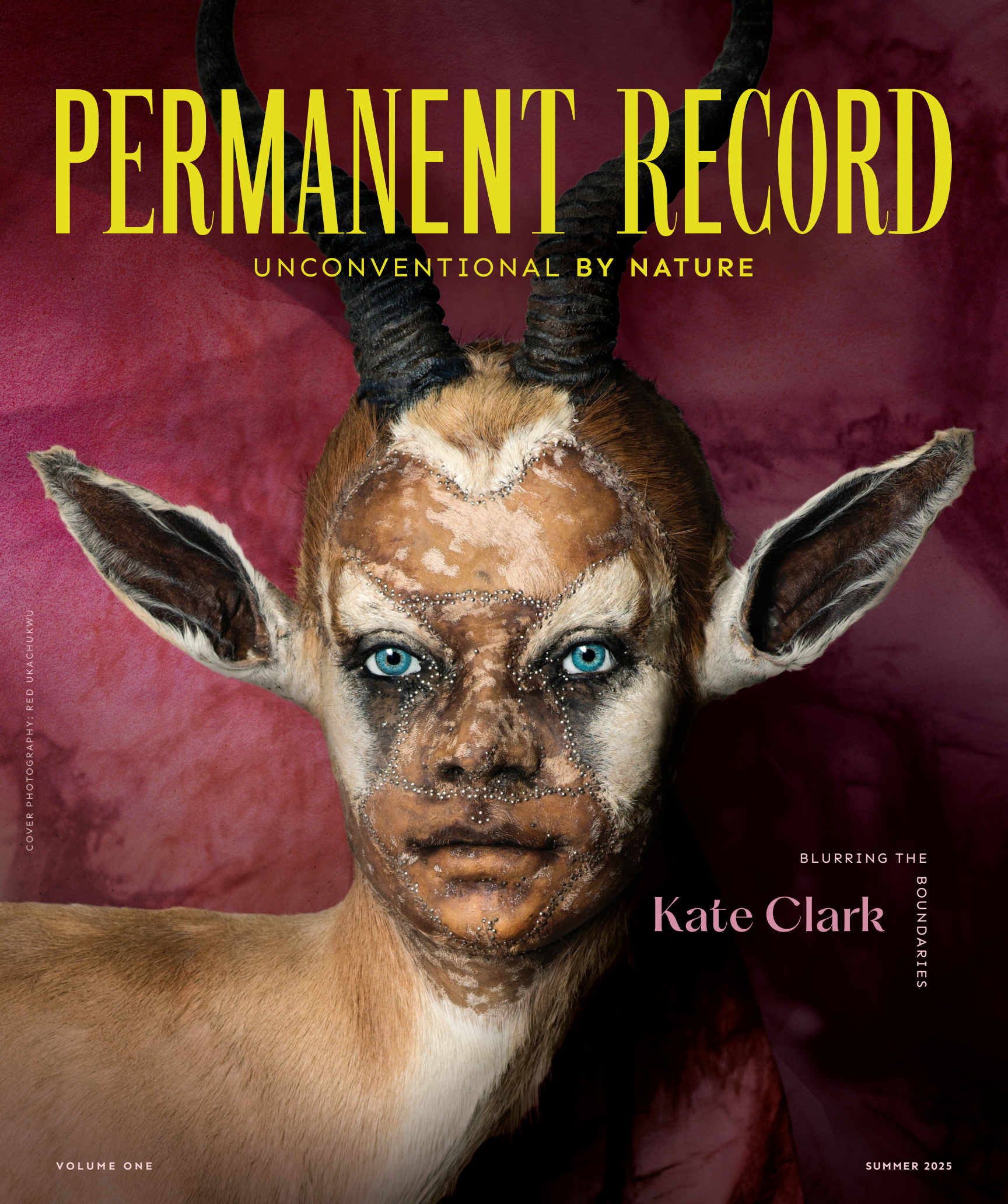
PERMANENT RECORD

UNCONVENTIONAL **BY NATURE**



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BLURRING THE

Kate Clark

BOUNDARIES

VOLUME ONE

SUMMER 2025

PHOTOGRAPHY: RACHEL JENSEN

Purpose

At *Permanent Record*, we celebrate the solemn beauty and allure of alternative culture, embracing the unconventional with both passion and respect. Our magazine isn't truly "about" anything in particular, but we do believe there is a through line that is tangible, albeit slightly elusive. We delve into the dark and shadowy worlds of body modification, peculiar taxidermy, paranormal investigations, gothic horror, bizarre oddities, outsider art, unusual vocations, death positivity and other denizens of the remote recesses of human culture and imagination—the kind of stuff polite society turns away from and only whispers about. Welcome to a realm where curiosity is contagious. Welcome to *Permanent Record*.



A Letter From the Publisher



TO OUR READERS

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Permanent Record* magazine. While our hope is that the stories and images you will encounter on the pages that follow will speak for themselves, I think it makes sense to take a moment to understand how we got here in the first place. In other words, certain questions may come to mind at the outset, such as "Why a print magazine?" and "Why is it called *Permanent Record*?" And, perhaps most importantly, "What is the 'big idea' that ties all of our content together?"

Let's start with the easy ones. There is no doubt that we live in a digital age, and the concept of launching a print magazine seems like an anachronism out of touch and arguably out of place in the current media landscape. In a relatively short period of time, social media companies and other digital platforms have established themselves as the primary publishers and distributors of content on a global scale. In doing so, these platforms have risen to count themselves among the largest companies in the world, all in a category that did not exist just a couple of short decades ago. The dopaminergic rush of joy that we experience as we scroll through our social media feeds, auto-populated by some of the most sophisticated AI-driven content curation algorithms on the planet, is no accident.



On the contrary, it is carefully and meticulously engineered to drive addictive behavior. We all have likely experienced both the fascination and the horror of these quasi-omniscient formulas modifying our feeds in near-real time when we focus on an image for just a fraction of a second longer than the norm, or when we have a casual conversation that we believed to be held in private; then, almost as if by divine providence, hundreds of related images or videos line up in an invisible queue waiting for their turn to be "experienced." In this way, modern media has adapted to and driven our tastes in a manner that is engineered to align not only to our explicitly stated preferences, but also to our unconscious desires.

Absent some catastrophic event, there is likely no way to turn back the clock of technology's ascendance. So, the real question is not whether the traditional form factors, such as books and magazines, can win the competition for our attention, but whether they can peacefully coexist and find a place to be appreciated and nurtured. Can they still be relevant to the communities and cultures that we create around shared interests and affinities? In part, the launch of ***Permanent Record*** is an attempt to answer that question.

As a lifelong entrepreneur, I have always had an appreciation for the unconventional. My earliest memories of childhood include taking the *Guinness Book of World Records* to bed with me as I explored and memorized the limits of human ingenuity and accomplishment. It's fair to say that I was equally fascinated by the wonders of the natural world—for instance, the weight of the largest recorded pumpkin or the height of the smallest antelope. In a vacuum of context, these isolated facts amount to little more than amusing curiosities. In a broader sense, though, they cut at the core of what is possible for us to achieve, comprehend, produce and experience, as well as what lies outside of those established boundaries.

In this digital era with its notoriously short spans of attention, there should be a space where the curious can come together to explore these boundaries using a medium that encourages sustained contemplation instead of the pervasive scrolling and reflexive swiping that has become the dominant paradigm for consuming content. At ***Permanent Record***, we are trying to create that space with a wink and nod to all of the now-grown-up kids who habitually rejected convention and frequented the principal's office during their formative years … we suspect most of you ended up just fine.

Respectfully,



J.D. POWE, FOUNDER & PUBLISHER

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THINKING INK
ROCHESTER, NY
TOM VALVASSORI

INK AND INTRIGUE:

A TATTOO ARTIST'S SYMBIOTIC FASCINATION WITH TAXIDERMY

By J. Gerard Legagneur Jr.

In the often-intertwining world of tattoos and taxidermy, one name stands out with a blend of artistry and curiosity—Tom Valvassori. Affectionately referred to as "the Gooch" at his tattoo shop, Tom embodies the Zen-like state that can be realized by seamlessly balancing dual passions: his pursuit of excellence as a tattoo artist and his compulsion for collecting unusual taxidermy.



“They’ll come and go with people and friends and family, and this will stay with them ’til the end of time.”

FROM PENCIL TO NEEDLE: THE GENESIS OF A TATTOO ARTIST

Like many of the passionate pursuits that reach their full zenith in adulthood, the roots of Valvassori’s tattooing obsession can be traced back to his childhood.

“I was drawing at a very young age and I didn’t have anybody around me besides my brother that drew. We had nobody in our family who was an artist, so we kind of just pushed each other … as far back as I can remember, I was drawing [as a way to compete],” he recounts.

Having begun to cultivate his natural talent for drawing in his formative years, Valvassori remembers being surrounded by the influence of his father and his father’s friends at the time, all of whom were adorned with minimalistic tattoos.

“They weren’t bikers or anything like that. They were just normal guys who worked normal jobs but had tattoos … mostly from the military,” he recalls.

This early exposure to body art, combined with his natural inclination towards drawing, laid the foundation for Valvassori’s future.

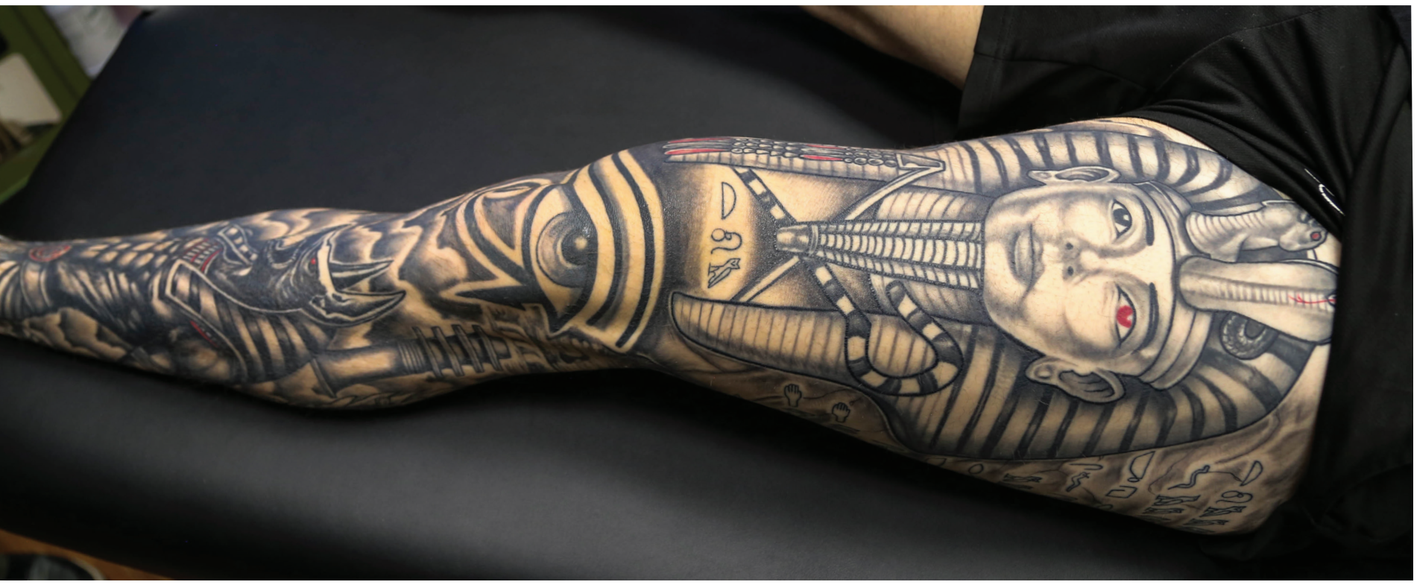
As a young 18-year-old artist, he found himself sketching designs for his peers, who would then get them inked at local tattoo shops. Valvassori’s talent didn’t go unnoticed.

“One day after about 23 of these kids got tattooed … I went to the shop with one of them and they said, ‘Wow, you’re this kid who’s been sending us all this work, and your artwork is really nice. Do you want a job?’ It was just so organic and so real,” he shares.

This spontaneous entry into the world of tattooing was marked by a deep appreciation for the permanence of his art.

“I could put this [design] on somebody, and they will wear that more than they’ll wear their sneakers—more than they’ll wear their shirts. They’ll come and go with people and friends and family, and this will stay with them ’til the end of time,” Valvassori muses.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GARRICK YUE



DELIVERING DESIRES

Tom's experiences as a tattoo artist have been nothing short of profound, often intertwined with the personal stories of his clients. One such story that stands out is of a young girl who wanted her boyfriend's name tattooed on her forearm in Old English letters.

"It was her 18th birthday. She wanted her boyfriend's name in Old English letters, which are really large, intricate and really dark black—lots of black, uncoverable black," he explains.

Despite being advised against it by other artists, Tom took on the task without hesitation. After completing the tattoo, the girl revealed that her boyfriend had died in a car accident two weeks prior.

"From that point on, I kind of thought, listen, I'm not here to judge people. Whatever they want is what they want," he says, highlighting the importance of trust and respect between the artist and the client.

THE ART OF PRESERVATION: ENTER TAXIDERMY

Alongside his journey in tattooing, Valvassori harbored a fascination for taxidermy—a discipline he respects for its artistic merits and attention to detail.

"You start to look at it as an art form as opposed to 'look at that dead [stuffed] animal over there,'" he notes.

Tom's collection began with a mink he bought at the age of 15 and has since grown to include a variety of animals, from multiple hyenas (admittedly, his favorite species) to giraffes. For Tom, the connection between tattooing and taxidermy lies in the appreciation for artistry and preservation.

"I always thought that if somebody could put a skin over a mannequin and make it look like it was alive, that's … an art form I would love to be a part of," he explains. As a serious collector, Tom has certainly found a way to scratch that itch without actually being a taxidermist himself.





A HEARTWARMING ACT: THE MAKE-A-WISH TATTOO

Among the many tattoos Valvassori has done, one holds a special place in his heart—a Make-A-Wish tattoo for a young girl with stage four cancer. Despite the legal restrictions in New York (where Valvassori lives) requiring individuals to be 18 years old for a tattoo, he embraced her final entreaty.

"The smile on this little girl's face—it'll follow me for the rest of my life—just knowing how happy she was," Valvassori remembers.

This little girl became an angel just four days after getting the tattoo. However, despite her courageous embrace of the inevitable, she expressed genuine, innocent joy when her skin finally became ornamented with the manifestation of her dying wish.

Valvassori reflected (with an emotional tinge in his cadence), "It was honestly one of the most amazing, fulfilling tattoos I've ever done."

Valvassori has seamlessly integrated the worlds of tattooing and taxidermy into his life, finding beauty and meaning in both.



WHAT LIES AHEAD?

Valvassori has seamlessly integrated the worlds of tattooing and taxidermy into his life, finding beauty and meaning in both. His home is a testament to this, with rooms filled with rare and impressive taxidermy specimens, each telling a story of its own, including a bathroom dedicated entirely to fish.

"I have a list of a few things that I still need for my collection. And I'll be honest with you, once I get those couple [of] things, I don't know … the game might be over for me," he admits with a noticeable hint of forlorn resignation. Valvassori went on to express that, at some point, the amount of space it would take to continue to harbor additional treasures may become untenable.

A BEAUTIFUL TAKEAWAY

Valvassori's journey is a reminder that creativity often emanates from a deeply soulful place where natural artistic abilities are cultivated over many years of dedicated practice. For Tom, tattooing and taxidermy are connected in that both art forms celebrate a kind of authenticity, either of personal self-expression or a steadfast adherence to nature's grand design.

As he continues to ink stories on skin and marvel at the majestic inhabitants of his menagerie frozen in time, one thing is clear—his artistic works and his animal specimens will endure, leaving an indelible mark on those who encounter them.

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Located in Poughkeepsie, New York, Curio Cabinet is the Hudson Valley's premier oddities shop. With a focus on "science, history and mystery," the collective hosts a variety of curated vendors and artists. Inhouse services include a goth florist and a custom jeweler who specializes in memorial jewelry. Workshops, classes and events are hosted monthly.

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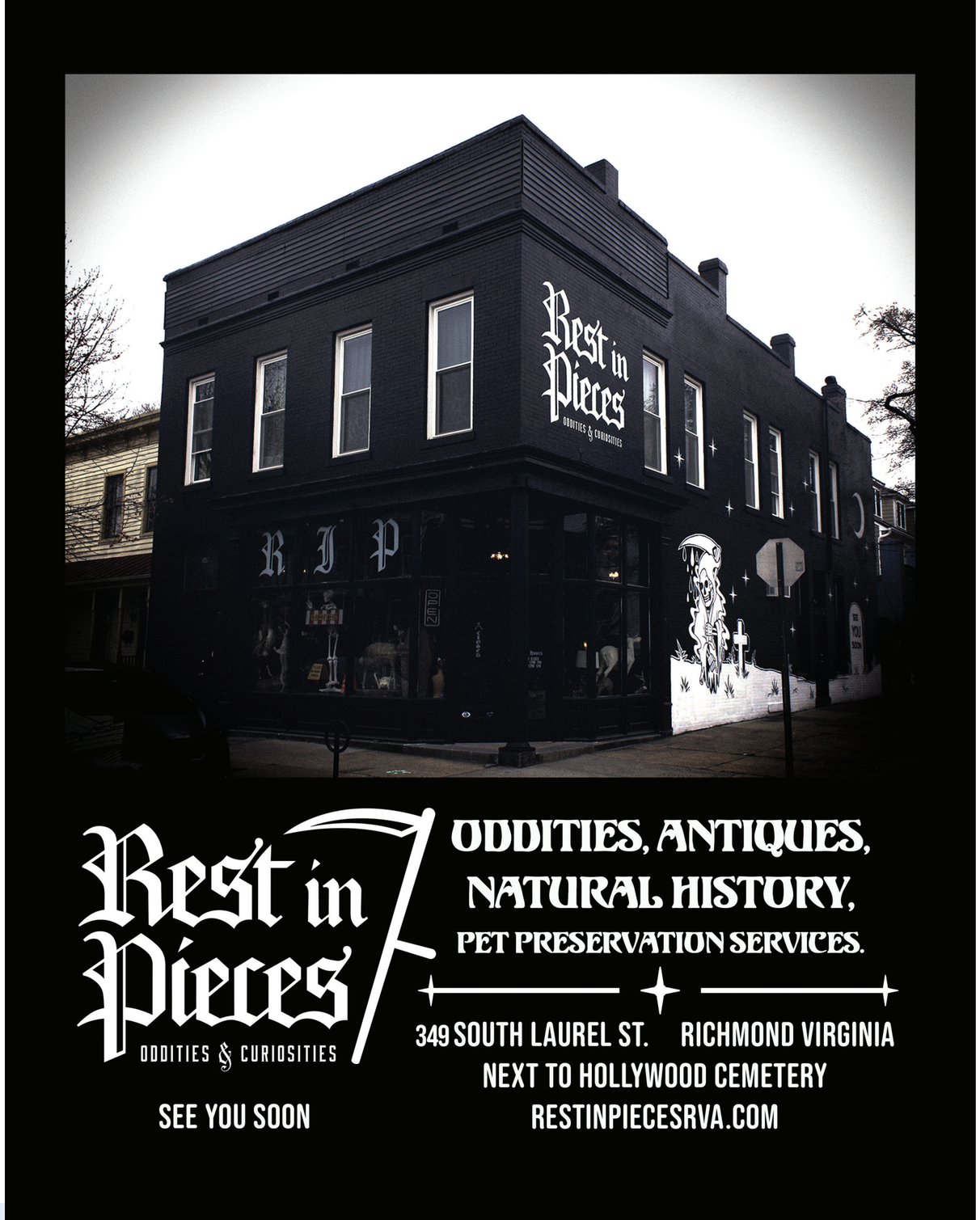

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COLLECTOR'S CABINET
MORRISTOWN, NJ DR. DOUGLAS ARBITTIER

FROM LANCETS TO LINCOLN:

THE MUSINGS OF AN OBSESSIVE ANTIQUE MEDICAL DEVICE COLLECTOR

By Sebastien Bernard

A PASSION IGNITED BY A CHILDHOOD GIFT

In the world of collecting, few individuals can rival the passion and expertise of Dr. Douglas Arbittier, a former anesthesiologist and current medical historian and healthcare executive with a collection of over *3,000* antique medical and surgical instruments. From spring lancets to ornate leech jars, his collection brings to life the intricate (and occasionally bizarre) histories of an array of medical procedures, as well as the raw realities of pre-modern medicine.

MEDICALANTIQUES.COM

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN STERLING RUTH STUDIO



Arbittier traces the origins of his fascination with medical history to his childhood. While he had long aspired to become a doctor, his passion for collecting began unexpectedly when his mother spontaneously purchased a 1930s pediatric examination chair for him at a garage sale for only *five dollars*.

"[That chair is] now piece number one in my collection and the greatest piece of pride that I have, since it came from my wonderful mom—it has tremendous sentimental value," declares Arbittier. "I wouldn't sell it for a million dollars."

This early experience ignited a lifelong passion for uncovering the stories behind medical artifacts.

"Life without rabbit holes would be boring," Arbittier remarks, reflecting on his love for historical research.

The internet has been a boon for his pursuits, allowing him to access scanned medical catalogs, journals and articles. This research not only enriches his collection but also provides valuable context for understanding the evolution of the medical practice.

Arbittier's creation of the museum was a labor of love that grew into a hub for enthusiasts and scholars alike.



THE BIRTH OF A MUSEUM: A SANCTUARY FOR MEDICAL HISTORY

What began as a personal collection displayed in his home quickly outgrew its initial confines. Recognizing the need for a dedicated space following years of meticulous collecting and curating, Arbittier transformed a historic building into The Arbittier Museum of Medical History in 2010, located in York, Pennsylvania. For the sake of clarity, the museum wasn't open to the general public, but Dr. Arbittier would enthusiastically host private tours for charity and frequently open it up to medical personnel, friends, family and others. (Arbittier eventually closed the museum and moved his collection to New Jersey after relocating there himself in 2021.)

Arbittier's creation of the museum was a labor of love that grew into a hub for enthusiasts and scholars alike. As displayed on its website, this two-story gallery blended old-world charm with modern preservation techniques. The museum featured carefully arranged exhibits, from gleaming surgical sets to somber artifacts like bloodletting instruments, each accompanied by detailed explanations of their historical significance. The museum gained recognition as one of the foremost institutions of its kind. Visitors from around the globe—ranging from experts in the field to history buffs—flocked to see his unparalleled collection. Arbittier would remain deeply involved, hosting tours and continuing to expand the museum's offerings through acquisitions and collaborations with other institutions.



"[It was kind of like] my ultimate man cave where I would just invite people into the cave when I wanted to—it's just instead of playing pool and watching football, we would tour around and look at medical stuff," Arbittier reminisces.

Following the transfer of his artifacts to New Jersey, Arbittier's fervor for sharing them with the world compelled him to continue featuring his historical treasures on the museum's website. However, he remains hopeful that he can locally re-establish a similar museum for his collection in the future.

"Well, North Jersey [has] a little higher cost of living than South Central Pennsylvania," Arbittier states with a chuckle. "So, unless there is a very large donation to the museum, which I'm not counting on, I don't think that'll happen. Although, one day, I do hope for it to be in a public location through a foundation where it can be shared with anyone who wants to come and visit. I think it would be of great interest."

> "[It was kind of like] my ultimate man cave."

AN EXTENSIVE, FASCINATING COLLECTION

One of the most captivating aspects of Arbittier's collection is its sheer breadth, encompassing everything from Civil War-era surgical sets to decorative apothecary jars. His interest in bloodletting led him to acquire scarificators (spring-loaded devices with multiple blades designed to make precise cuts), as well as fleams and leech jars.

"You always want to be efficient with your bloodletting," he jokes, his humor underscoring the stark contrast between the elegance of the tools and their grim purpose.

Arbittier's collection also includes unique and historically significant items, such as artifacts tied to Abraham Lincoln's assassination. Among them are opera glasses once owned by Mary Todd Lincoln, found in the Presidential Box at Ford's Theatre, and documents from Dr. Charles Leale, the surgeon who first treated Lincoln after he was shot.

"Every object has a story," Arbittier says, recounting how he tracked down Leale's descendants to acquire additional items for his collection.

These artifacts form a display he describes as one of the most significant in his collecion.



LINCOLN'S LEGACY AND CIVIL WAR STORIES

In addition to his collection's Lincoln-related items, it also features those that have equally intriguing connections to the Civil War. Arbittier has surgical sets and presentation pieces that belonged to key figures from the era, and some of these items are tied to pivotal battles that took place during the war. His focus on preserving the personal stories of the physicians who used these instruments adds a human element to the cold steel of the tools.

Not all of Arbittier's acquisitions have been straightforward. He recounted his seven-year pursuit of a rare 1795 tobacco enema set—a device once believed to resuscitate drowning victims. The peculiar instrument, complete with bellows and attachments, is a reminder of the experimental (and often erroneous) nature of early medicine.

"That's where the phrase 'blowing smoke up your butt' comes from," he quips, adding levity to a tale of medical history gone awry.



FROM ARTIFACTS TO INSPIRATION: MEDICINE'S LIVING HISTORY

Beyond the role of a collector, Arbittier has become an ambassador for the intersection of history, medicine and storytelling. His work extends far beyond acquiring rare and fascinating items; he is equally dedicated to ensuring these artifacts resonate with a wider audience.

In collaboration with filmmakers and television producers, Arbittier breathes life into history. On the set of *The Pale Blue Eye* (starring Academy Award-winner Christian Bale), he served as a historical consultant, ensuring that the depiction of 19th-century medical practices was both accurate and evocative. His collaboration with Bale exemplifies his attention to detail and his passion for blending historical integrity with creative expression.

Television appearances, such as his guest spot on *Pawn Stars*, have allowed him to reach an even broader audience. His ability to contextualize artifacts, like an intricate Civil War-era amputation kit, makes history accessible and engaging. His fame reached an unexpected pinnacle when his name was featured as a trivia "answer" on *Jeopardy!*—a moment of recognition that remains a deep source of pride.

In collaboration with filmmakers and television producers, Arbittier breathes life into history.





A COMMITMENT TO EDUCATION AND SHARING

For Arbittier, the beauty of his collection lies not just in the artistry of the objects, but also in the stories they tell. Arbittier insists his collection is more than just a repository of unusual objects—it is a tool for education and inspiration. Through public lectures, private tours and his involvement in museum exhibits, Arbittier emphasizes the importance of accessibility. He believes these items should not languish in storage, but should instead inspire the next generation of historians, medical professionals and innovators.

Whether hosting private tours, showcasing his cherished pieces virtually or delving into the historical significance of a newly acquired item, Arbittier approaches his work with equal parts enthusiasm and reverence. His collection is not only a testament to medical history but also to the enduring power of curiosity and pursuing one's passion.



NICK'S PICKS

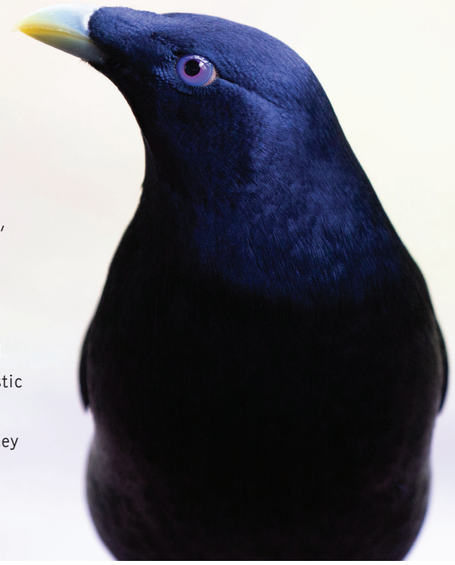
TOP FIVE MOST ROMANTIC ANIMALS

By Nick Cestone

I'm Nick, a devoted bone enthusiast and lifelong student of natural history. When the *Permanent Record* team asked me to pen a column for the first issue of their magazine, I faced quite the conundrum—nature provides such a bounty of bewildering themes to explore, finding the clarity of mind to select a single area of focus was no small challenge. However, as we are now deep into Spring, conventionally celebrated in popular culture as "mating season" for many types of animals, I found myself thinking about how love is expressed by non-human species.

Like many people, I find the overt commercialism and schlock factor of the more iconic expressions of human romance to be nothing short of odious. But I got to thinking about the concept of ritualistic behavior as it relates to sexual selection (as one does). Canonical examples abound in human culture; we are indoctrinated from an early age to believe that giving gifts of flowers and candy, particularly on notable occasions like Valentine's Day, anniversaries and even birthdays, is the best way to demonstrate our singular devotion to an actual or would-be significant other. But, in many ways, examples of lovestruck devotion in the animal world are far more dramatic and profound. If you doubt it, consider these curious courtship rituals:

1 SATIN BOWERBIRD



Endemic to Eastern Australia, the male satin bowerbird displays one of the most complex courtship behaviors of any bird. Males collect sticks and form unique structures called "bowers" that they adorn with vibrant blue and yellow objects. Due to the general absence of the color blue in nature, items disposed of by humans, including pens, straws and clothespins, are prized by these collectors for their builds. The materialistic females visit the bowers, where males greet them with exhilarated dancing displays in hopes that they can distract her for long enough to copulate.



2 GIRAFFES

Unlike other animals, giraffes don't build elaborate structures, produce mating vocalizations or perform courtship displays. Instead, the secret to how male giraffes (called "bulls") discern whether a female giraffe (called a "cow") is ready to mate lies within the female's urine. Bulls will sniff the genitalia of the cow, which stimulates her to urinate. He will smell and taste the urine and display a behavior called "the flehmen response" where he curls his upper lip, bares his teeth and breathes heavily through his mouth. *(I know ladies, we've all been there.)* This transfer of pheromones to the vomeronasal organ will tell the male giraffe whether or not the female giraffe is in estrus or ready to mate.



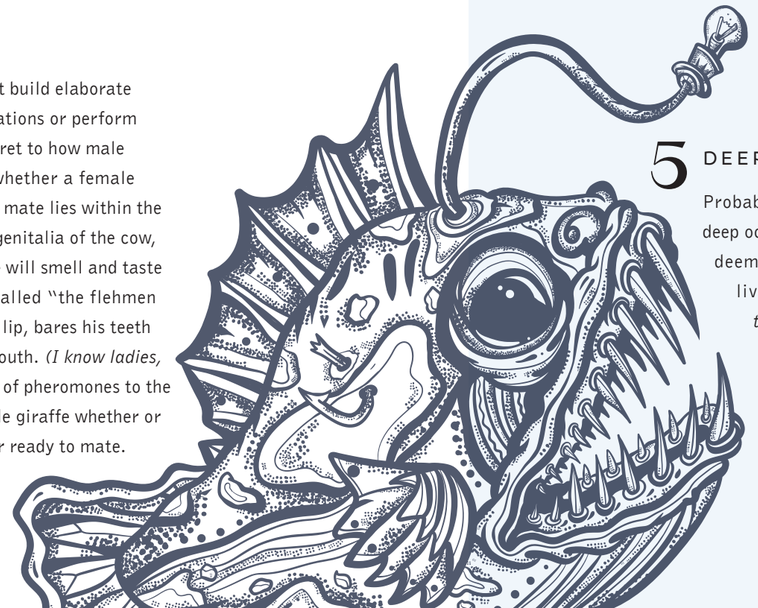
3 WHITE-SPOTTED PUFFERFISH

Found in the coastal waters off Japan, the male, white-spotted pufferfish is often seen hard at work building his elaborate display during spawning season. The fish builds a perfect geometric circle with a diameter of up to eight feet. Hills, valleys and other structures abound throughout his architectural masterpiece. He works up to 24 hours a day for over a week to complete nature's true mandala. Males with the most impressive creations are more likely to attract females, who are more critical in their appraisals of talent than the neighborhood's most Karen-y Karen.

4 BLACK WIDOW SPIDER

Spinning its way into the mix of unique animal courtship is the black widow spider. Found across North America, this infamous arachnid has fatal mating behavior. The much smaller male will seek out the ever-larger female to mate with. After mating is complete, males have been observed "somersaulting" into the fangs of the female. She then consumes him, ensuring that she now has a nutritious meal to fortify the growth of their unborn children. Say it with me now … *awwwww.*





5 DEEP-SEA ANGLERFISH

Probably one of the most bizarre reproductive strategies belongs to the deep-sea anglerfish. The deep ocean is so vast, finding a mate can be a daunting proposition, so Mother Nature apparently deemed it more opportune for these aquatic couples to become conjoined for the rest of their lives. Exemplifying sexual parasitism, the male anglerfish, *which can be half a million times less than the weight of a female (!!!),* latches onto the female, allowing their tissues to fuse. After they "come together," the two fish share circulatory systems, and the male's body "melts" into the female; in other words, he starts to lose his eyes and nonessential internal organs, for he only serves one purpose now: to fertilize her ova. Hmmm … we can file that one under "Hun, you seriously shouldn't have."

Flowers and candy, silly humans? Is that the best you can do?
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MEMENTO MORI

THE ART OF CONTEMPLATING DEATH TO LIVE A BETTER LIFE

By Joanna Ebenstein

A *memento mori*—Latin for "remember you will die"—is a practice, object or artwork created to remind us that we will die, and that our death could come at any moment. By evoking a visceral awareness of the brevity of our lives, it was meant to help us remember to make choices in line with our true values. This use of *memento mori*, which seems so counterintuitive today, is a practice that was found in cultures all around the world and for many millennia; it even lives on today.

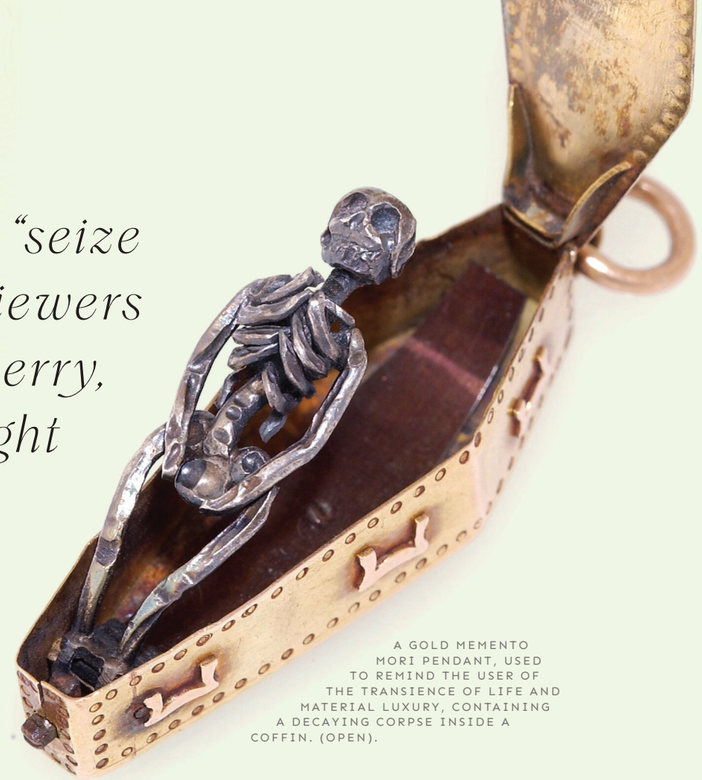


From *MEMENTO MORI*: The Art of Contemplating Death to Live a Better Life by Joanna Ebenstein, published by Avery, an imprint of Penguin Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House, LLC. Copyright © 2024 by Joanna Ebenstein.

VANITAS STILL LIFE
HERMAN HENSTENBURGH DUTCH
N.D.

LIFE AND DEATH

carpe diem—meaning "seize the day"—reminding viewers to eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow they might be gone.



A GOLD MEMENTO MORI PENDANT, USED TO REMIND THE USER OF THE TRANSIENCE OF LIFE AND MATERIAL LUXURY, CONTAINING A DECAYING CORPSE INSIDE A COFFIN. (OPEN).

Memento mori were a part of life in ancient Egypt, where dried skeletons were sometimes paraded into a feast at its height to remind the revelers of the brevity of life. They were also frequently encountered in ancient Rome, where it was common to see skeleton mosaics on the floors of dining rooms and drinking halls. And, if you attended a feast, you might be gifted with a tiny bronze skeleton called a *larva convivialis*, or banquet ghost. In both cases, these *memento mori* were meant to express the well-known Latin adage *carpe diem*—meaning "seize the day"—reminding viewers to eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow they might be gone.

Socrates, the ancient Greek founder of the Western philosophical tradition, asserted that a *memento mori*–like contemplation of death was at the core of the practice of philosophy. "The one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner," Plato records him as saying, "is to practice for dying and death."[1] Similarly, the Stoics, a philosophical school in ancient Greece and Rome, believed that one must contemplate one's own death as a means toward living more fully and authentically. Seneca, a prominent Stoic philosopher, urged his readers to rehearse and prepare for death as a means of diminishing their fear.

Memento mori also play an important part in Buddhist practice. In the Buddha's own time, there was a practice called the Nine Cemetery Contemplations, in which practitioners were encouraged to visit the charnel grounds—where bodies were left, aboveground, to be eaten by vultures or to decompose—in order to meditate on corpses in different states of decomposition. This was meant to help people overcome fear of death and release attachment to the body. This tradition even extends to artwork, in the Japanese tradition of kusōzu, which are paintings that artfully depict these nine stages of a decaying corpse. Even today, it is not uncommon to find a human skeleton in places devoted to Buddhist meditation.

[1]TIM CONNOLLY, "PLATO: PHAEDO," INTERNET ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY, IEP.UTM.EDU/PHAEDO/.



^ TWO ALLEGORICAL FIGURES: A SKELETON HOLDING A SCYTHE AND A BALL OF FIRE STANDS NEXT TO A FEMALE FIGURE LITHOGRAPH.



ROSARY GERMAN CA. 1500–1525

Christianity also makes use of the *memento mori*. In this tradition, it is meant to remind one to live a pious life, to resist earthly pleasures and temptations so that one will be ready to meet—and be judged by—God. Much as in the Buddhist tradition, Christians were, at one time, encouraged to meditate upon the dying and decomposing human body. Death was also, in the medieval era, brought to mind by the daily recitation of prayers called the Office of the Dead, which were supposed to prepare one's soul for death and the Last Judgment. And, of course, every year on Ash Wednesday, devotees go to church, where the priest renders a cross in ash on their foreheads, a visceral reminder that from dust we are formed, and to dust we shall return.

In the Christian tradition, *memento mori* could also take the form of jewelry, including skull rings—often distributed as funeral souvenirs—and intricately carved rosary beads. *Memento mori* imagery was also commonly used in watches and clocks, playing on the close association between the ideas of time and death. Gravestone art regularly featured winged skulls or skulls and crossbones, and some grave markers—such as the lavishly carved tomb sculptures known as transi—

even depicted the deceased in the form of a decaying cadaver.

There were also a number of fine art genres that brought *memento mori* imagery into everyday life. One of these was the vanitas (literally "vanity") oil paintings, which featured imagery such as skulls and snuffed-out candles, symbolizing a life cut short. These were hung in the home to encourage the viewer to focus on the eternal, rather than the momentary pleasures of life on earth. Another popular genre was the triumph of death, in which an anthropomorphized figure of death plows down everything in its path, giving vision to the idea of death as an arbitrary and unstoppable destructive force. There is also the danse macabre, or "dance of death." Popular at a time when the black plague was decimating Europe, these works also feature an anthropomorphized figure of death, this time merrily leading people of every age and social station—from queen to pauper to child—in a dance to the grave. This allegory points to the fact that death makes no distinctions; to death, we are all equal.

< A VANITAS TABLEAU OF A LIFE-SIZED HEAD, ON ONE SIDE RESEMBLING QUEEN ELIZABETH I, THE OTHER HALF A SKULL WITH ATTENDANT INSECTS AND REPTILES, MADE FROM WAX.



A SKELETON IN FINE ATTIRE.
LITHOGRAPH

Memento mori could even take the form of actual human remains. To this end, wealthy gentlemen often displayed a human skull in their library or cabinet of curiosities as a poignant reminder of the brevity of life. And cemeteries—in a time before permanent interment—would dig up defleshed skeletons and exhibit the bones, frequently in artistic arrangements, to remind the visitor of their own death.

A contemporary manifestation of *memento mori* can be found today in New Orleans's Mardi Gras, as part of the festivities of the Black Masking Indian krewe. Their annual procession begins at dawn when the so-called Skull and Bones Gang—dressed as skeletons—knock on the doors of neighborhood homes to remind them of the transience of life and invite them to join the festivities.

Far from morbid, contemplating death in this way is the best method I've found for revealing, with clarity, what it is we really value.

In a similar vein, Tibetan Buddhist festivals often incorporate so-called cham dances. These are devotional performances that often feature costumed skeletons intended to remind revelers of the presence of death.

A fun and surprising modern manifestation of *memento mori* is a smartphone app called WeCroak. The app—inspired by a Bhutanese proverb asserting that the key to happiness is contemplating death five times daily—sends you several thoughtful quotations related to mortality throughout the day. In the words of the app's official text: "Contemplating mortality helps spur needed change, accept what we must, let go of things that don't matter and honor things that do."

Far from morbid, contemplating death in this way is the best method I've found for revealing, with clarity, what it is we really value. I have also found no better tool for inspiring us with the will and courage to make the changes necessary to live a life that is true to ourselves and in accord with our real values; one that will, or so we can hope, leave us with the fewest deathbed regrets.

Joanna Ebenstein is the founder and creative director of Morbid Anatomy, an educational and cultural institution dedicated to exploring the mysteries of existence, mortality and the human condition through an interdisciplinary lens. An internationally recognized death expert, she is the author of several books, including *Memento Mori: The Art of Contemplating Death to Live a Better Life; Anatomica: The Exquisite and Unsettling Art of Human Anatomy; Death: A Graveside Companion* and *The Anatomical Venus: Wax, God, Death & the Ecstatic*. She is also an award-winning curator, photographer and graphic designer, and the teacher of the many times sold-out class Make Your Own *Memento Mori*: Befriending Death with Art, History and the Imagination. The descendant of Holocaust survivors, she traces her lineage back to Judah Loew ben Bezalel, credited with creating the Golem in 16th-century Prague.

A YOUNG WOMAN HOLDING A SKULL IN HER HANDS; REPRESENTING LIFE AND DEATH. COLOUR LITHOGRAPH.

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2025 HIGHLIGHTS

APRIL

- **Grand Tour Napoli:** A Divine Comedy in Naples, Italy with Artist Chiara Ambrosio
- **Grand Tour Catemaco, Veracruz:** Cradle of Sorcery and Civilization with Historian Salvador Olguín

MAY

- **Memento Mori NYC Weekend** Symposium at The Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, Morbid Anatomy Library and Green-Wood Cemetery
- **Morbid Anatomy Spring Benefit:** The Animalia Edition, at a premier private taxidermy collection, NY

JUNE

- **Retreat to Lily Dale, NY** - Healing, Nature and Spirit in an epicenter for mediumship since 1879

JULY

- **Online Class - Memento Mori:** The Art of Contemplating Death to Live a Better Life with Morbid Anatomy Founder and Creative Director Joanna Ebenstein

FALL

- **Grand Tour Mexico** Annual Day of the Dead - Mérida, Mexico

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SIX-FIGURE SIDE HUSTLE

DALLAS, TX

POTATO PARCEL

People make money in a thousand different ways, but at *Permanent Record*, we like to shine a light on those intrepid entrepreneurs who earn their coin with starkly unique ideas, many of which begin as recreational hobbies, artistic pursuits or informal thought experiments. In this column, we celebrate these masters of the side-hustle who have made serious paper by proving all the haters wrong.



"simple but brilliant business ideas."

SPUD LIFE

By Lucia Brawley

In the grand, starchy annals of human history, no root vegetable has matched the notoriety of the humble potato. It has fed empires, triggered famines and been batted about as a political football in the infamous "French Fry" to "Freedom Fry" rechristening of 2003. But in 2015, something extraordinary happened: a potato went postal. The brazen 24-year-old Alex Craig founded Potato Parcel. Within months, his post-graduation side hustle began pulling in an eye-popping $10,000 per month.

For the uninitiated, Potato Parcel provides a service that allows you to send messages written in marker on a real potato to anyone in the world. No message is too absurd.

A FULLY BAKED SENSATION

Craig's business took off with such viral speed that it didn't take long before Potato Parcel caught the attention of the producers of *Shark Tank*. On the show, Craig and his potato-peddling business partner Riad Bekhit faced skeptical "sharks," who seemed torn between laughing and lamenting the state of modern commerce. However, fortune favors the bold. Craig and Bekhit emerged victorious. Kevin O'Leary (a.k.a. "Mr. Wonderful") saw profit potential in the potato and decided to invest $50,000 in exchange for 10% equity in Craig's company.

Since then, Potato Parcel's trajectory has been nothing short of spud-tacular. It's been featured on *The List*, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *Good Morning America* and an astonishing number of viral internet compilations. Print media got in on the action too, with Potato Parcel gracing the pages of *Forbes*, *Entrepreneur*, *Business Insider*, *MarketWatch* and *Inc.*, which declared it a case study in "simple but brilliant business ideas." While most of us stare at our grocery carts and see dinner potential, Alex Craig stared at a sack of potatoes and saw destiny.

A SMORGASBORD OF SPIN-OFFS



If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Potato Parcel is the *Venus de Milo* of edible arrangements. Subsequent to its emergence, companies peddling messages on bananas, eggplants, coconuts and even tortillas became a thing. Meanwhile, in Australia, the concept took on a surprising political edge when activists began mailing message-stamped potatoes to lawmakers as part of a marriage equality protest. Nothing says "we're serious about human rights" like a desk full of angry spuds.

THE CONTEMPORARY POTATO PARCEL PORTFOLIO

Eight years since its inception, Potato Parcel is still making bank for its lean team. According to PitchBook, the company has no more than three employees, each enjoying their hefty share of $7 million in annual recurring revenue. No longer a simple text-on-tater service, the company's offerings have expanded to include:

- **Custom Text Potatoes:** Classic, timeless and perfect for confusing your enemies or delighting your friends.
- **Photo Potatoes:** Upload an image, and they'll print it on a tater, bringing uncanny realism to the already bizarre idea of sending someone's face on a root vegetable.
- **Holiday Potatoes:** Christmas, Halloween, Valentine's Day—if there's a holiday, there's a potato for it.
- **Potato Gift Baskets:** It's like Harry & David, but with significantly less flavor or class.
- **Souvenir Spuds:** If you've ever thought, "I'd love to memorialize this moment with a photo on a potato," your moment has arrived.



WHY POTATO PARCEL IS STILL "CHEF'S KISS!"

What keeps Potato Parcel fresh (other than climate-controlled storage) is its unwavering embrace of silliness. In a world full of "disruptors" and "innovators" touting apps that barely work, Potato Parcel offers disarming simplicity. You're not trying to change the world with a potato—you're just trying to make someone laugh. And let's face it, that's not nothing. After all, absurd times such as these call for absurd measures.

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ART BORN FROM NATURE'S REMAINS: THE ROGUE ETHEREAL CREATIONS OF

MIKE OLANDESE

By Sebastien Bernard

In the world of alternative art, Michael Olandese stands out as a Merlin of transformation. His eerily stunning phantasies bridge the gap between life and death, using elements of nature that most would overlook, disdain or discard. Hailing from the sun-soaked deserts of Arizona, Olandese's distinctive approach to art combines ethical sourcing with a deep respect for nature, resulting in pieces that are both haunting and captivating.







A PASSION IGNITED IN CHILDHOOD

Born and raised in rural Oklahoma, Olandese has a fascination with the oddities of nature that began in his youth.

"As a kid, I was always intrigued by skulls and bones," he recalls.

Despite the initial discouragement from his family, who found his interests rather unconventional, Mike nurtured his curiosity.

"Bringing home skulls that I might have found wasn't a thing," Mike shares with a chuckle, referencing his mother's disapproval.

Yet, his indelible childhood curiosity laid the foundation for his future as an artist.

"I WAS ALWAYS INTRIGUED BY SKULLS AND BONES."



THE L.A. ORIGINS OF A LIFE PURSUIT

Olandese's artistic journey began in earnest in 2015, during a pivotal moment at a café in Santa Cruz, California.

"[My wife and I] were grabbing breakfast at a local joint up in the mountains called Spanky's, and we decided that we were going to pursue this," Mike recalls.

This decision led to a move to Los Angeles, where Olandese crafted his first pieces from his own collection, refurbishing old, wooden boxes with glass windows to display his provocative inventions. Since that time, Mike has found success in turning his proclivities into profit—but he considers his peculiar pastime to be much more than just a way to generate coin.

"I don't officially make a living off of it," he admits, noting that selling his art is not his primary source of income, "but it's definitely [a passion] that I can't really stop. It's something that I need to do as far as my own [sic]. It's the best way I've found to express myself…."

Mike and his wife Vanessa currently reside in Tucson, Arizona where they are involved in the world of vintage goods and antiques. The couple now has a full-time store inside Midtown Mercantile Merchants, a massive two-floor antique mall in Tucson, where patrons can have the pleasure of viewing and purchasing Mike's wares in person (just like in the "olden" days).







THEY'RE JUST NATURAL EARTH CREATIONS.

THE ROGUE ETHEREAL: A UNIQUE ARTISTIC VISION

Describing his art as "Rogue Ethereal" or "Osteo Art," Olandese creates exceptionally eye-popping pieces that are otherworldly and just may leave your mouth agape. (For those unfamiliar, "Osteo Art" is an homage to "osteology," which is a branch of anatomy dealing generally with bones, skeletal structures and their functions.) Mike's style often fuses elements that result in creations that are simultaneously familiar and alien; he draws viewers into a world where the boundaries between the living and the dead irresistibly blur, such as adding tongues to skulls or spines to invertebrate animals.

"Sometimes I just kind of have, you know, in [the] left hand and right hand, kind of like electric power plugs, and I just kind of put the two together," he explains in describing his merging of traditionally incongruous concepts.

Olandese's innovations often feature themes of mushrooms, skulls and other natural elements, reimagined in ways that are both unsettling and captivating.

"I'm using elements and what I technically call 'supplies,' but [they're] just natural earth creations," he notes.

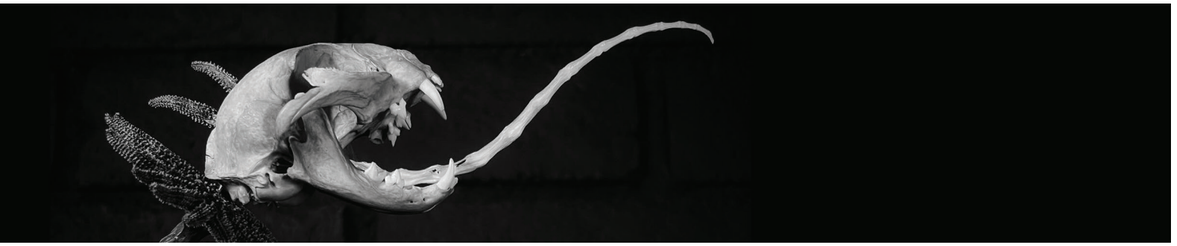


ETHICS AND ART: A DELICATE BALANCE

Olandese's commitment to ethical sourcing is unwavering. He emphasizes the importance of being "very observant and aware of where things come from and what's protected and what's not."

This conscientious approach means that most of his materials come from zoos, breeders, pet shops, ranchers and taxidermists, ensuring that no animals are harmed in furtherance of his art. (For the sake of clarity, Mike is not a taxidermist himself.)

"I've never hunted or shot any animal," he states firmly, underscoring his dedication to principled practices.



HOME DISPLAYS AND PRESERVATION

Olandese's Arizona home is a testament to his art, filled with both his creations and taxidermy mounts. While some might find it eerie, Mike ensures that his collection is a harmonious blend of both the alluring and the bizarre.

"It's kind of a revolving door of art products," he says, describing how pieces come and go, depending on his creative output and sales.

One of the key challenges he faces is preserving his work in Arizona's dry climate.

"We have a humidifier in basically every room," he explains, noting that the arid air can cause the teeth in skulls to split.

One could understand how those who reside outside of Olandese's universe would assume that teeth are practically indestructible (particularly those who are obsessed with true crime documentaries). However, it is a little-known fact that animal teeth become dry and brittle and break quite easily after death, presumably due to lack of moisture. To combat this, Olandese uses humidity packs to maintain the integrity of his subjects' teeth and other remains.







SHARING THE STRANGE AND WONDERFUL

Olandese regularly showcases his work at various events, including the Oddities Flea Market, Monsterpalooza and the Oddities & Curiosities Expo. These venues allow him to connect with like-minded individuals and share his passion for the unusual.

"Each one's very much different," he says, appreciating the unique atmosphere of each event.

For those unable to explore the world of Mike's art in person, his pieces can be found on his website and Instagram page under the handle Arcanexus. Here, visitors can purchase novelties that range from the simple to the complex, each imbued with his meticulous attention to detail and love of the macabre.





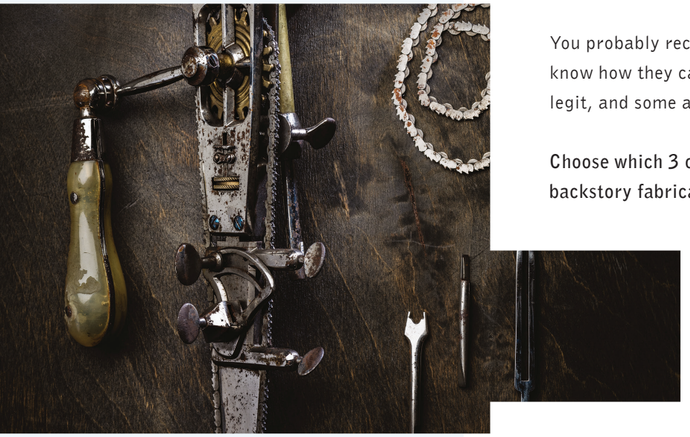
DEATH BEFORE THIS HONOR

Through his art, Olandese offers a new perspective on nature and death, transforming what many might find off-putting or grotesque into something visually stunning. Mike's work challenges viewers to see the beauty in decay and the potential in the discarded.

As Mike says, "It's all in the details"... and in those details, he finds a way to honor life, even after it has come to an end.

Fictionary!

Idioms



You probably recognize most of these expressions, but do you know how they came to be? Some of these origin stories are legit, and some are complete bologna.

Choose which 3 of the following 10 idioms have a fake backstory fabricated by our Editorial Staff!

1 BITE THE BULLET

Wounded WWII soldiers were given a bullet to bite on while doctors (and … non-doctors) performed amputations and other major surgeries when they didn't have anesthesia to administer. Ouch.

2 A SIGHT FOR SORE EYES

Satirist Jonathan Swift penned a popular pickup line in his 1738 book, *A Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation*: "The Sight of you is good for sore Eyes." Ooh la la.

3 CAUGHT RED-HANDED

Fifteenth-century Scotsmen who had just committed murder were sometimes found guilty of their heinous crimes after being caught strolling into town with their hands stained (or even *dripping*) with their victim's blood. The legal term was used for poachers, too.



4 RULE OF THUMB

In early 14th-century Britain, male adolescents were constantly looking for ways to rag on each other. Among the ribbings that emerged during this time period was claiming that a chum's manhood was "no longer than his thumb." Then the question becomes, how would the wisecracker even know if that were *true*? Hmmm …

5 RUB THE WRONG WAY

In the ancient tales of Arabian Nights, characters would rub the magical genie's bottle in an upward motion for the genie to grant them three wishes. But if they rubbed it downward, the genie would cast three curses on them.

6 PUT A SOCK IN IT

Respectfully, shut up. Or you can just put a sock in it. Apparently, this colloquialism comes from the early 20th century during the gramophone days. They didn't have a volume control dial, so listeners put a sock or other cloth in the speaker to muffle the sound, effectively lowering the volume.



7 SPILL THE BEANS

Legend has it that during elections in ancient Greece, voters used either a black bean or a white bean to cast their votes. If someone accidentally knocked over the jars of beans (votes) before all the votes were cast, then people could probably tell which candidate was going to win before all of the votes were tallied.

8 BURNING THE MIDNIGHT OIL

During the 1980s, hot rod Miami drag racers would tear up South Beach's Ocean Drive in the middle of the night. Sometimes, novice drivers would burn their high-powered engines because they used the wrong type of oil.



9 COST AN ARM AND A LEG

There are many theories about the origin of this saying. Here's a fun one: Some historians say that portrait painters would allegedly charge more money if customers wanted them to paint limbs. Just head and shoulders—no knees or toes, please.

10 BLOW SMOKE UP YOUR ASS

Blowing smoke up someone's bum was a medical procedure used in 18th-century England to revive unconscious people. In one case, a woman had passed out, and—out of his desperate need to rouse his wife—her husband stuck a tobacco-filled pipe up her booty and blew forcefully into that shit (no pun intended). Yes, it did work, but don't try this at home.

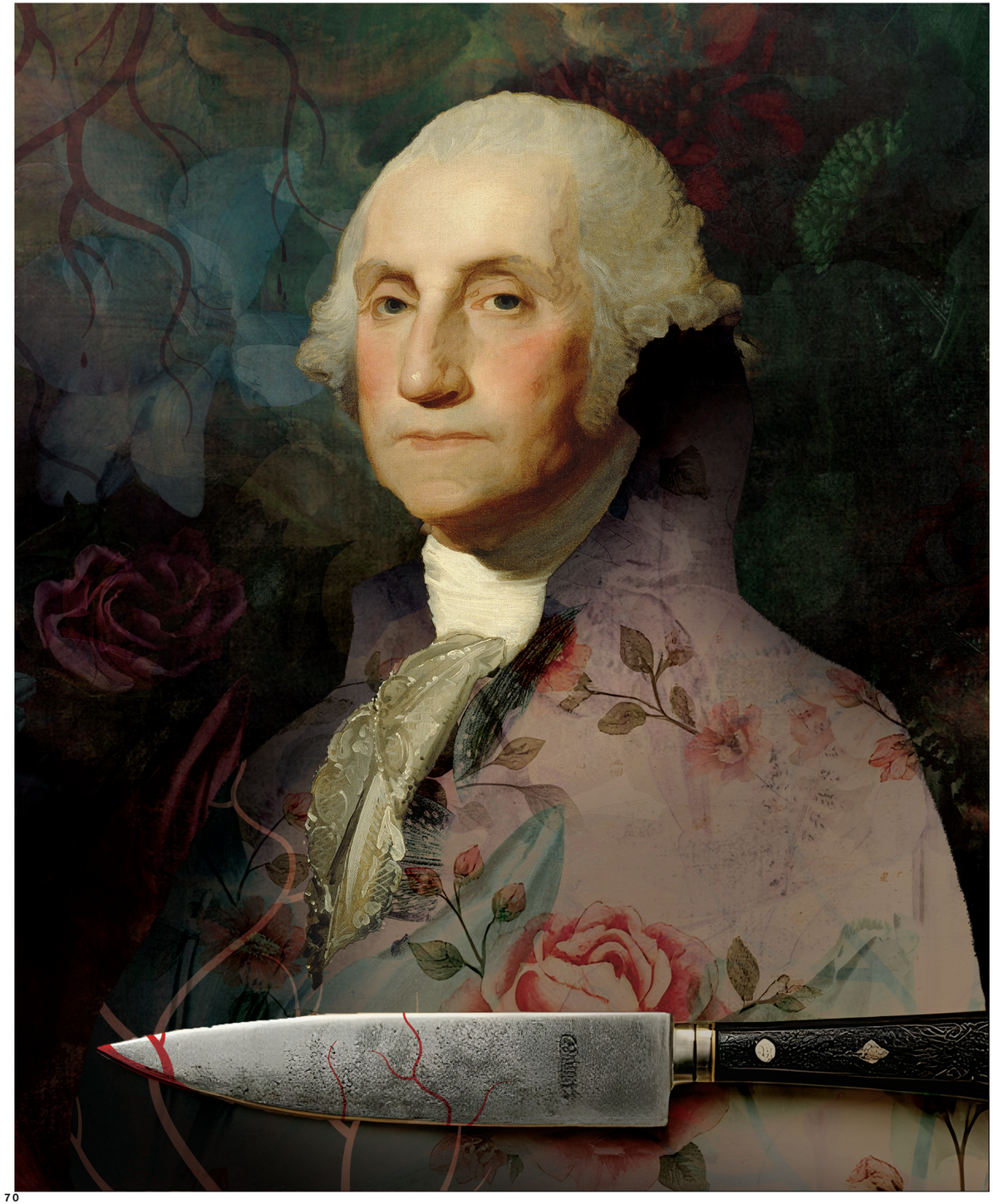
FIND ANSWER KEY ON PAGE 80

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

The Safety Coffin Craze of the 18th to 19th Centuries

By Lucia Brawley

Arising from a Romantic-era cultural fascination with death and the supernatural in literature and art, the fear of premature burial, or *taphophobia*, overtook Germany, England and the United States in the 18th and 19th centuries. Limited medical understanding, as well as actual cases of accidental entombment, exacerbated these concerns, sparking the invention of "safety coffins," designed with means of escape, should the prematurely buried revive post-funeral.



paragons of the era rumored to have possessed a terror of being buried alive ... George Washington ... who wanted his veins cut open upon his death ...

The earliest known safety coffins were created in Germany around the 1790s. Some designs included mechanisms such as bells connected to a string in the coffin, which could be pulled to alert people above ground if the "deceased" awoke. Others involved air tubes or periscopes to provide ventilation or visibility.

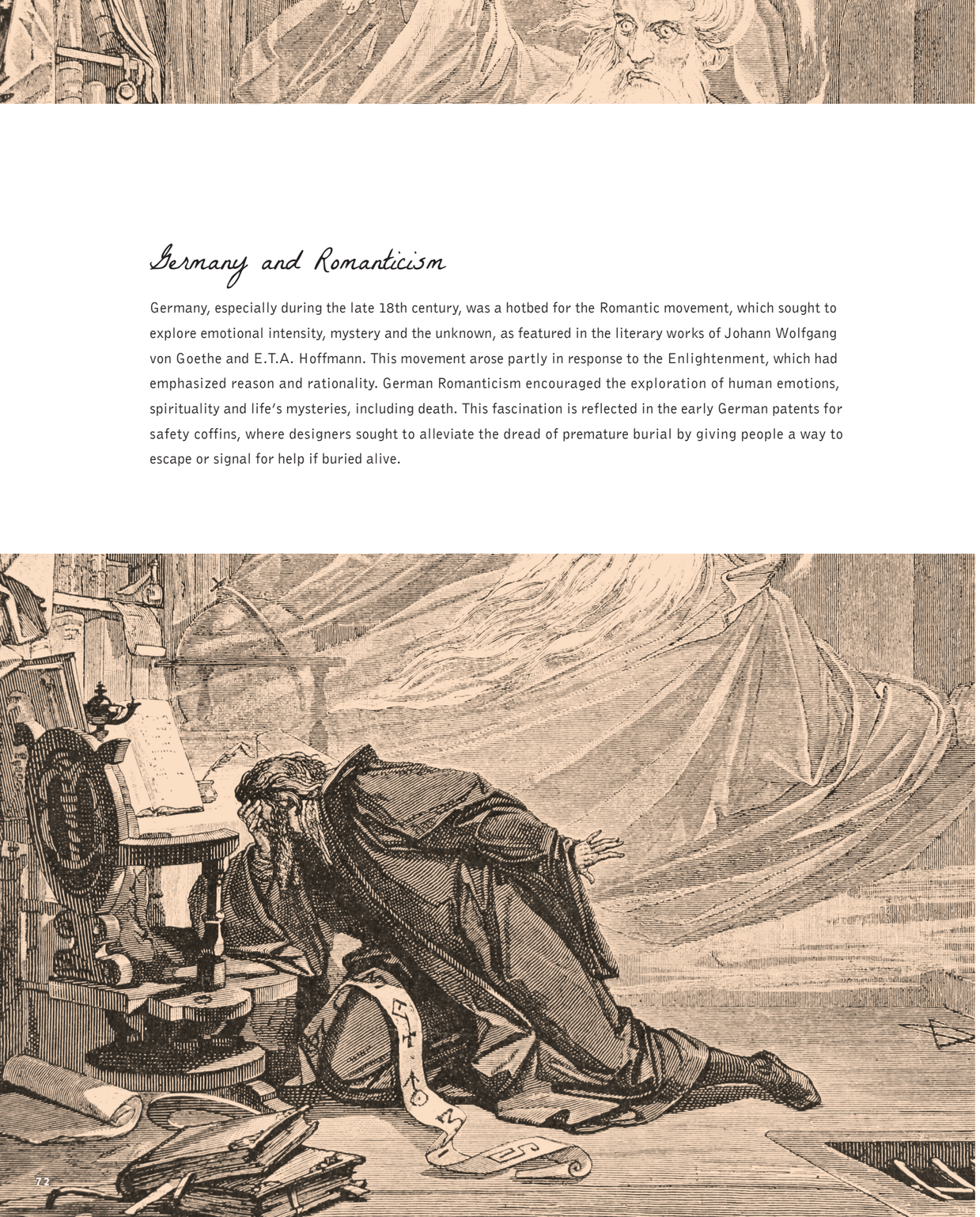
One of the most famous models, patented in 1868 by Franz Vester, included a ladder and a bell-ringing system, allowing someone who revived to climb up or signal for help from their "grave." In another notable design, Christian Eisenbrandt's 1843 coffin could open at the slightest movement within, though it was intended to be stored in above-ground vaults for safety.

According to the Ancient Origins website, paragons of the era rumored to have possessed a terror of being buried alive included: "Hans Christian Andersen, who wanted his veins cut open upon his death, George Washington [and] Alfred Nobel, as well as the popular composer Frédéric Chopin, who demanded that his heart be cut out once he was dead—to ensure he stayed that way."

Although they were usually unnecessary, safety coffins exemplified the 19th-century obsession with both the boundaries between life and death, as well as the technological solutions that were developed to quell existential fears.

Why Certain Cultures Were Prone to Taphophobia

The European and American obsession with mistaken burial stemmed from a mix of scientific curiosity, Romantic ideals and societal changes. During this period, death was not only a prominent subject in art and literature but also in science, as medical knowledge was evolving yet still had a long way to go. This convergence of interests led to the popularity of concepts like safety coffins, séances and horror literature, like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which explored the boundary between life and death.



Germany and Romanticism

Germany, especially during the late 18th century, was a hotbed for the Romantic movement, which sought to explore emotional intensity, mystery and the unknown, as featured in the literary works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and E.T.A. Hoffmann. This movement arose partly in response to the Enlightenment, which had emphasized reason and rationality. German Romanticism encouraged the exploration of human emotions, spirituality and life's mysteries, including death. This fascination is reflected in the early German patents for safety coffins, where designers sought to alleviate the dread of premature burial by giving people a way to escape or signal for help if buried alive.



JOHN HENRY FUSELI, THE NIGHTMARE

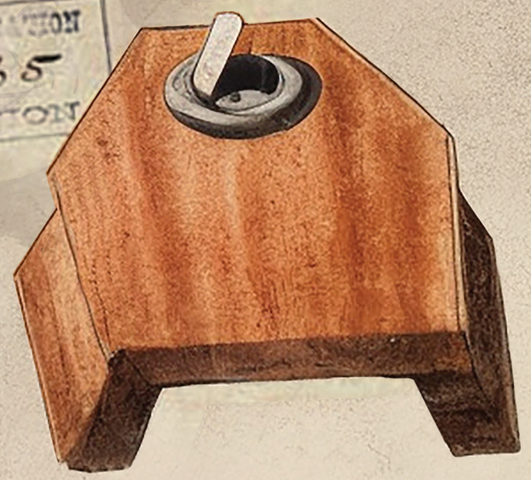
England's Victorian Era and the Gothic Movement

In England, the Victorian era (1837-1901) saw an intense fascination with death, mourning customs and the supernatural. Victorians wore mourning attire for extended periods, developed detailed funeral customs and even practiced postmortem photography to memorialize the dead. Gothic literature, which became immensely popular in England during this time, contributed to an almost romanticized view of death, exploring themes of horror, haunted houses and the undead. The novels *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) by Robert Louis Stevenson and Irish author Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) furthered the public's interest in the two sides of the curtain, as it were.



CLASSIFICATION
3335
DIVISION

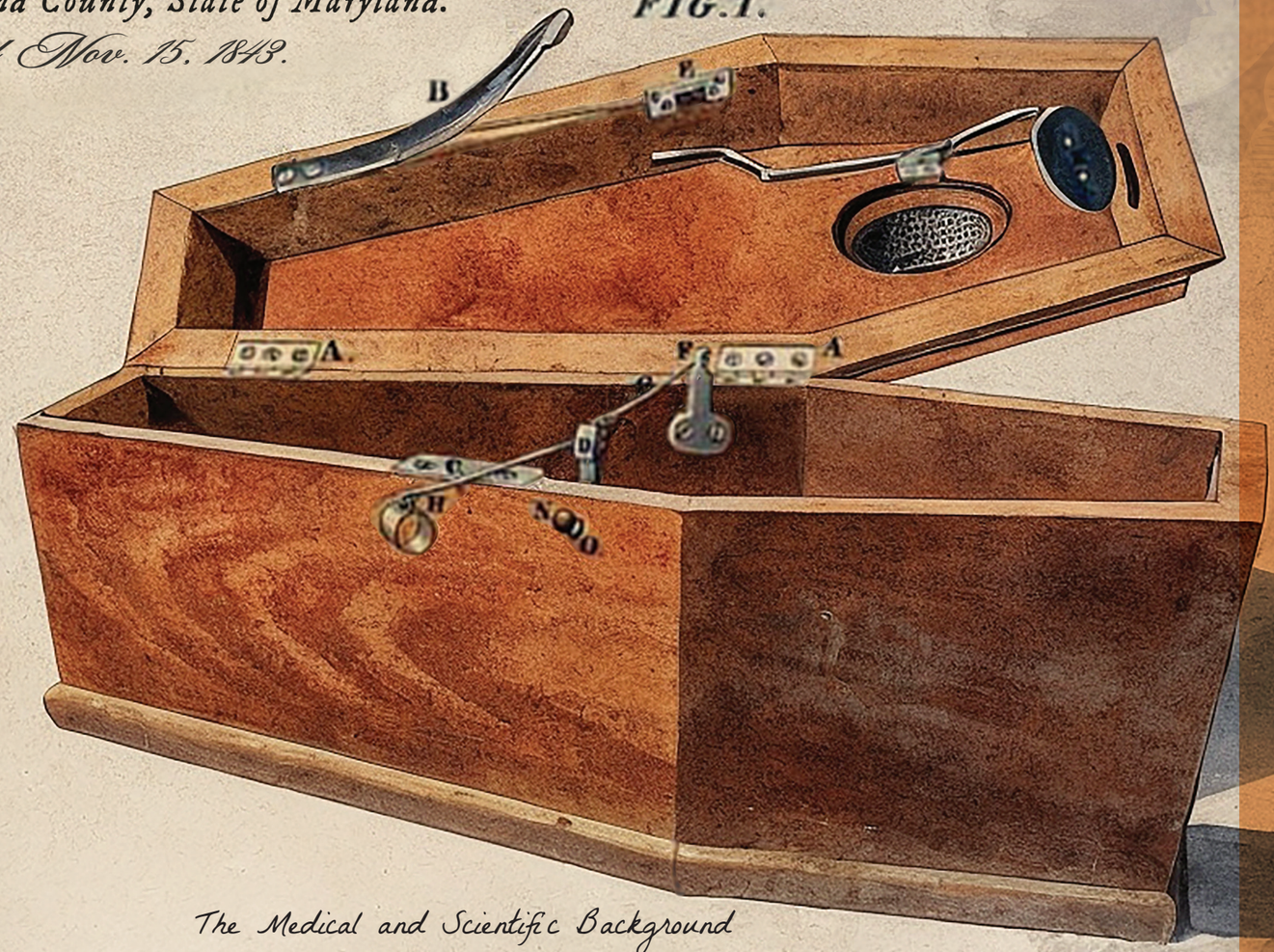
FIG. 2.



LIFE-PRESERVING COFFIN;
IN DOUBTFUL CASES OF ~~ACTUAL~~ DEATH.

By Christian Henry Eisenbrandt.
Of Baltimore City, and County, State of Maryland.
Patented Nov. 15. 1843.

FIG. 1.



United States and Spiritualism

Taphophobia landed across the pond in the 19th century, which saw a surge in American "spiritualism"—the belief that the living could communicate with the dead, as evidenced in the theosophists' obsession with the occult. This trend began in the 1840s with the Fox Sisters in New York, who claimed to communicate with spirits through "rapping" sounds. Spiritualism gained mainstream appeal, particularly after the Civil War, as grieving families sought to reconnect with lost loved ones. Séances and spirit communication became popular practices, adding to the broader cultural fascination with the afterlife and supernatural phenomena. In addition to performing séances, spiritualists adopted trance-speaking, automatic writing, seeking the help of mediums and the use of Ouija boards to connect with their loved ones "on the other side." As in Europe, fears of being buried alive influenced inventions and patents for safety coffins, which became common in American publications and patent filings.

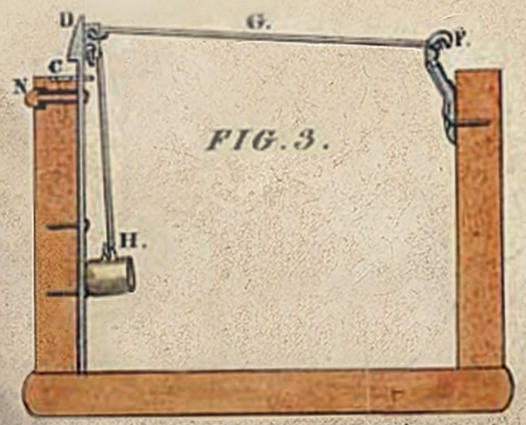
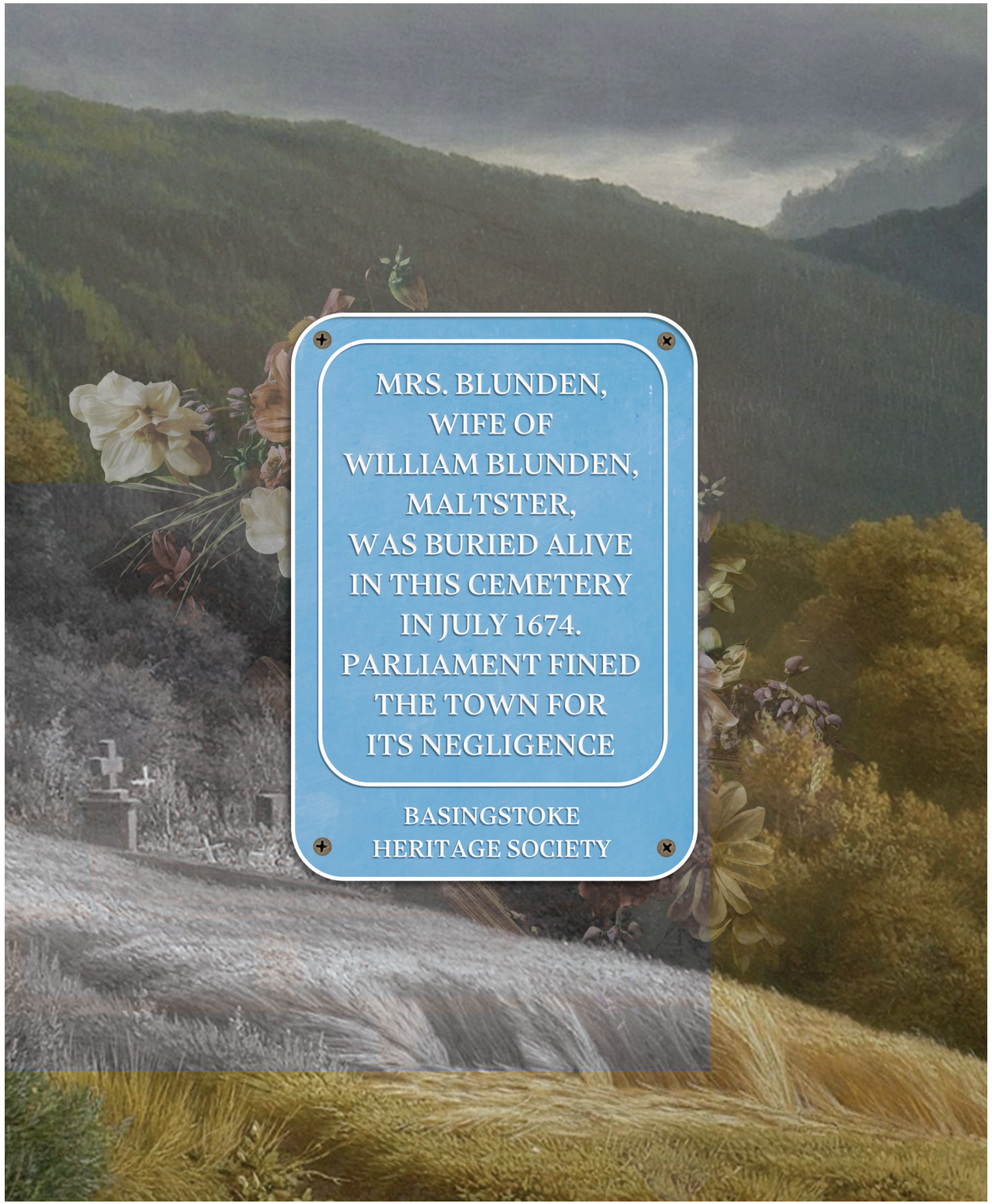


FIG. 3.

The Medical and Scientific Background

Whether in Germany, England or the United States, a lack of reliable medical standards to confirm death contributed significantly to these fears. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, medical professionals struggled with the exact diagnosis of death due to limited tools—stethoscopes, for example, weren't widely used until the mid-19th century. As a result, reports of people awakening after being declared dead fueled public fears and a fascination with "suspended animation," or states where individuals seemed dead but might revive. Experiments with "galvanism," or the use of electric currents on dead bodies, also fueled these obsessions, famously inspiring Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and leading to a broader cultural fascination with reanimation.



Mrs. Alice Blunden of Basingstoke, England, who was buried alive ... twice.

Alice Blunden, the Woman Who Was Buried Alive

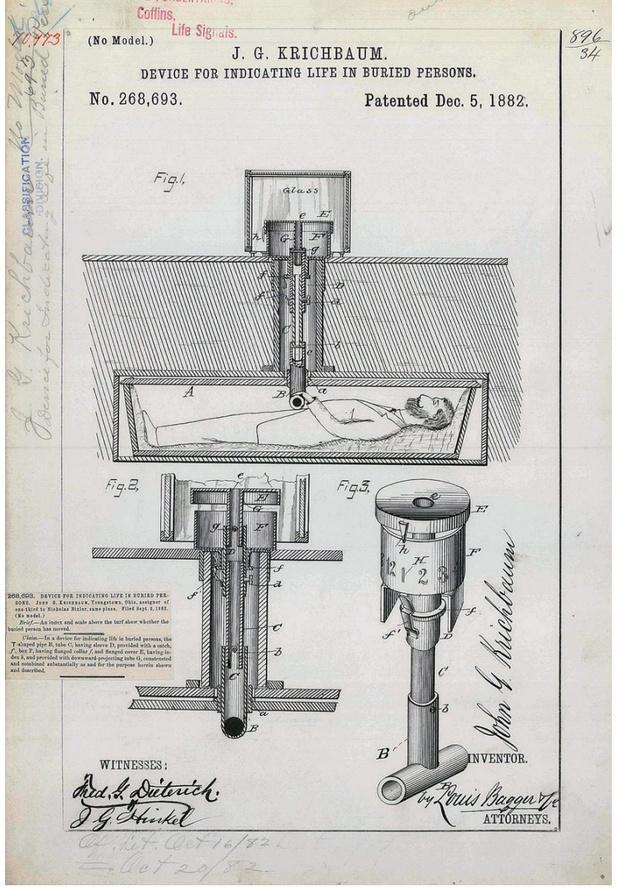
Taphophobia may appear quaintly sensationalist to our modern sensibilities. However, real-world examples exist of actual premature burials. Perhaps strangest of all is the tale of Mrs. Alice Blunden of Basingstoke, England, who was buried alive ... twice.

Around 1674, Mrs. Blunden reportedly fell into a deep coma after consuming a large amount of poppy tea, which had strong sedative effects. The doctor tested her breathing by holding a mirror to her nose and mouth and pronounced her dead. She was soon buried; but a day or two later, children were playing near her fresh grave, when they heard the scratching of fingernails and muffled cries from her grave. When they reported to their headmaster what they had witnessed, the children found themselves dismissed unceremoniously for telling tall tales.

However, just to make sure they weren't lying, the headmaster went the next day to take a look at the grave and heard the same sounds. Horrified, he realized she might still be alive. When the townsfolk exhumed her, her body popped out of the coffin because it had been crammed in tightly. Bloodied and battered from trying to escape, Mrs. Blunden was close to death.

The family said that, seeing as she was practically dead anyway, they should leave her in the grave overnight, rather than exhume her and bury her again. They hired a guard to watch over her. However, the guard, disturbed with his morbid post, popped round to the local pub for a pint. When he returned, Mrs. Blunden was, in fact, finally and truly dead.

Her family were acquitted of any wrongdoing in the eyes of the law, as holding a mirror under the mouth and nose was a medically approved method of determining death at the time. Nevertheless, Mrs. Blunden's tragic story grew in infamy, influencing the invention of safety coffins to prevent similar tragedies in the UK, Germany, the United States and beyond.


Coffins.
Life Signals.

(No Model.)

J. G. KRICHBAUM.

DEVICE FOR INDICATING LIFE IN BURIED PERSONS.

No. 268,693. Patented Dec. 5, 1882.

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.

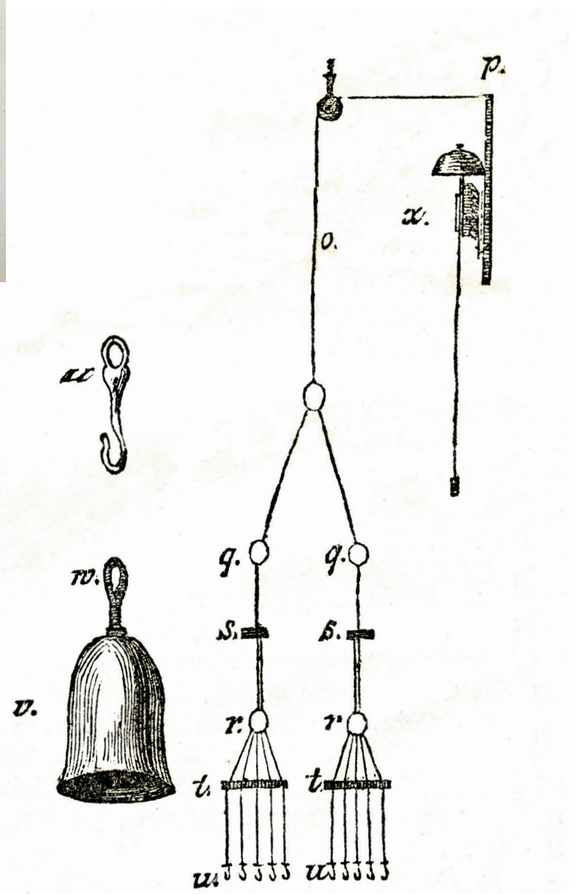
WITNESSES:

INVENTOR.

ATTORNEYS.

1. Germany

Germany was an early adopter of safety coffins, likely due to both cultural and medical concerns. Early patents appeared in Germany in the late 18th century, and these were often designed with air tubes, alarms or even escape ladders to assist anyone buried prematurely. German intellectuals were influenced by Romanticism, which emphasized the supernatural and the gray area between life and death. This fascination fueled the demand for such devices.



2. England

The fear of being buried alive also took strong hold in England. Some British designs featured a bell attached to a string that a person could pull to signal above ground if they regained consciousness. England saw some of the most inventive designs, which even included coffins with glass panels to allow families to check on the deceased after burial.

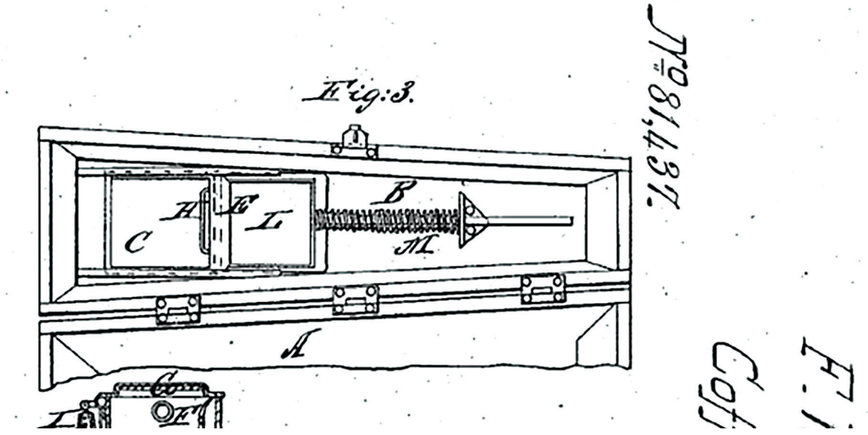


Fig. 3.

3. United States

Safety coffins became increasingly popular in the United States in the 19th century, with a notable rise in patents and sales. American designs included coffins with air tubes, bells and spring-loaded mechanisms that could open upon movement. Franz Vester's 1868 patent, with its bell and rope mechanism, exemplifies the American market's demand for reassurance against premature burial.

Fig. 4.

Patented Aug. 25, 1868.

These countries' shared concerns reflect a common theme of "death anxiety" during this period, coupled with a lack of reliable medical criteria for confirming death. The popularity of safety coffins waned in the early 20th century as medical advances improved the reliability of death determination methods.

Answer Key

4 RUB THE WRONG WAY

In the ancient tales of Arabian Nights, characters would rub the magical genie's bottle in an upward motion for the genie to grant them three wishes. But if they rubbed it downward, the genie would cast three curses on them.

TRUE ORIGIN: This turn of phrase was used in the 1800s to refer to the correct way to rub a cat's fur, which is from head to tail in the natural growth direction. They don't appreciate their fur being rubbed the wrong way.

5 RULE OF THUMB

In early 14th-century Britain, male adolescents were constantly looking for ways to rag on each other. Among the ribbings that emerged during this time period was claiming that a chum's manhood was "no longer than his thumb." Then the question becomes, how would the wisecracker even know if that were *true*? Hmmm …

TRUE ORIGIN: Back in the olden days (17th century) tradesmen would use their thumbs as a way measurement tool. "Rule" could also be interpreted as a "ruler" or "measuring stick."

8 BURNING THE MIDNIGHT OIL

During the 1980s, hot rod Miami drag racers would tear up South Beach's Ocean Drive in the middle of the night. Sometimes, novice drivers would burn their high-powered engines because they used the wrong type of oil.

TRUE ORIGIN: This timeless saying was first used in the 1600s to describe someone who had to light an oil lamp or candle when they were working late into the night.

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WHAT'S THE APPEAL OF AMERICAN GHOST TOURS?

(THEY'RE NOT EVEN THAT SCARY)

By Amber Amortegui

Ghost tours are popular tourism attractions in the most notoriously "haunted" cities across the U.S. Whether this niche tourist experience involves participants walking alongside their fearless, storytelling tour guide or enjoying a ride on a trolley around town, the ghost tour industry boasts a unique blend of entertainment and history.

KEEP IN MIND THAT ENCOUNTERS WITH PARANORMAL ACTIVITY ARE NOT GUARANTEED.

And while many ghost tour companies advertise frightening chills and thrills (and some even have age restrictions), many tours are quite tame and family-friendly. Most don't involve overzealous actors decked out in their best gory costumes, popping out of the shadows trying to scare tour-goers.

This then begs the question, why do people pay to hear haunting stories about the city they're visiting? And what is it about these tours that entices paranormal enthusiasts and history buffs alike? Well, take out your rosaries and EMF (electromagnetic field) readers because it's time to explore the allure of American ghost tours.

THE DARK TOURISM APPEAL

Aside from the occasional gory and grotesque descriptions mentioned in some stories, most of these tours do not intentionally target the faint of heart. To be honest, these tours might not be suited for the everyday thrill-seeker or paranormal fanatic, unless, of course, they're curious about a city's haunted history. In this case, ghost tours bridge the best of both worlds, capitalizing on people's curiosities and fascinations with Americana's eerie past.

Ghost tours are characterized as "haunted tourism," which falls within a larger industry category known affectionately as "dark tourism." There's a good chance that you already know what dark tourism is, because why else would you be reading this magazine, you *beautifully twisted soul?* (FYI, this is a term of endearment here at ***Permanent Record***!)

If you're unfamiliar with this niche, dark tourism is pretty much exactly what it seems: tourist attractions that feature themes of death, tragedy and the macabre. It's also proven to be quite a lucrative industry. In 2023, the global dark tourism market made about $31.9 billion, and it's expected to grow by nearly three percent from 2024 to 2030.

Aside from haunted tourism (like ghost tours), "dark tourists" also enjoy museums, excursions or attractions related to genocide, slavery, the Holocaust and nuclear warfare. While these topics probably won't be part of your next Disney World trip, most dark tourists seek out more than just a disturbing experience—they relish the opportunity to learn more about an event's historical, cultural and emotional impacts.

The same is true for ghost tours. Envisioning an iconic city's past through the lens of its tainted history invokes an entirely different perspective. And, even more chillingly, sometimes it reframes how one perceives walking down a city's sidewalks.

Take Tampa, for example. Tampa has a tragic history of constructing roads, buildings and even picnic shelters on burial grounds that belonged to the indigenous Tocobaga tribe, which founded Tampa around 1200 CE. They even named the coveted city "Tampa," which means "sticks of fire" (i.e., "lightning").

Despite the namesake, beneath some of downtown Tampa's roads are Native peoples' remains and artifacts forever cemented in time. It's one of those historical revelations whereby you hear it once and then you can't exactly unhear it, which can make a lasting impression on your family-friendly ghost tour.

POPULAR GHOST TOUR DESTINATIONS

From the halls of Alcatraz to the cobblestone streets of Savannah, the U.S. is by no means lacking in haunted cities that entice all the ghouls and spirits, resulting in an endless list of potential ghost tour destinations. After all, some of the earliest American ghost tours date back to the mid-20th century, and these excursions have been growing in popularity ever since. So, the next time you plan a trip, consider visiting these five locations, especially if you're looking for a hauntingly good time:

NEW ORLEANS, LA

"Nawlins" is haunted by its history of voodoo, yellow fever and drunken jazz musicians.



SAVANNAH, GA

Savannah is known for mass graves, restless spirits and hauntings of slavery.

GETTYSBURG, PA

This sacred ground is where a bloody Civil War battle left ghostly soldiers wandering among us.

ST. AUGUSTINE, FL

Consider visiting the oldest city in the U.S., with tiresome colonizer spirits.



SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Frisco is the home to gold rush tragedies, Alcatraz ghost sightings and Chinatown spirits.



WHAT MAKES A "GOOD" GHOST TOUR?

Okay, this question is pretty subjective, but it's still worth asking, right? Well, perhaps a better question is, what makes "good" ghost storytelling? Sure, the historical context and tales should be intriguing and worth sharing, but it comes down to one major factor: the tour guide.

Not to be dramatic, but your tour guide could literally make or break your experience. If you check reviews of popular tours (paranormal and non-paranormal alike), most people mention their guide's enthusiasm, knowledge and ability to … well … guide the tour, including the storytelling component. There's nothing more awkward than watching a self-proclaimed history buff fumble and stutter through retellings of the locale's lesser-known past.

It's important for your tour guide to not only share the historical facts but also convey them in such a way that they capture and engage you. Exceptional tour guides understand the power of a dramatic pause, and they know both when to raise their volume for emphasis and lower it for solemn respect of the ghosts in question. Some are known to bring a more theatrical approach by altering their facial expressions and pacing. If you're lucky, you might even feel a chilling shiver run down your spine, making your ghost tour worthwhile after all!

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PHOTOGRAPHY: ROBERT CLARK

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Blurring the Boundaries: THE MESMERIZING, "HYBRID" ART OF Kate Clark

By J. Gerard Legagneur Jr.

With her striking sculptures, Kate Clark explores the hybrid relationship between humans and animals, creating works that challenge perceptions and spark deep reflection.



blurs the line between humans and animals.

A Striking Fusion of Humanity and Nature

In the world of contemporary art, few creators are as deeply rooted in the concept of hybridity as Kate Clark. Based in Brooklyn, New York, Clark has spent nearly two decades curating a unique body of work that blurs the line between humans and animals. Her sculptures, each a seamless fusion of human and animal forms, are far from generic combinations of "beauty and beast." Rather, they entice our intrigue and compel us to embrace an uncanny, enduring and deeply symbolic relationship between humanity and the natural world.

Clark's extensive career speaks for itself. Her work has graced museum walls across the United States and internationally, from the J. Paul Getty Museum to exhibitions in France, Korea and Australia. Her sculptures have been featured in major publications such as *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and she has been a subject of a *National Geographic* documentary. Yet, despite her accolades, Clark approaches her work with the same curiosity and reverence as she did when she first started.



the primal connection between humans and animals.



The Genesis of a Distinctive Vision

Clark's signature style began to take shape during her time in graduate school, where an experimental approach led her to explore the fusion of human and animal forms. Initially inspired by a fascination with how human faces communicate intricate emotions as compared to animal expressions, she began sculpting faces that blended species. The trajectory of Kate's artistic journey was crystallized when she sculpted her first human-animal hybrid from a raccoon head—an experiment that, while imperfect, sparked her to delve more deeply into the primal connection between humans and animals. Over time, Kate's work evolved from scientific inquiry into a broader rumination on hybridity, identity and the inherent dignity of all living beings.



"[My work] is not leaning towards 'monster.'"

The Human-Animal Hybrid

One of the most striking elements of Clark's art is its blending of the human form with traditional taxidermy, though not in a way you might expect.

"[My work] is not leaning towards 'monster,'" she says. "It's really meant to be the sort of very smooth transition between the human face and the animal body."

The result is a creative portfolio that feels almost meditative, asking viewers to pause and reflect on the relationship between humankind and the animal kingdom. Her sculptures are large, sometimes featuring life-sized animals with human facial features. What makes her work even more compelling is the way she honors the animal form. She uses real animal hides, which she describes as fundamental to the integrity of her work.

"When you're looking at the piece, the shaved animal skin has oils and pores just like our skin, and it has that kind of energy," she explains.

This is no simple task. The hides are often difficult to obtain, and Clark must ensure they are ethically sourced, often using well-worn and damaged hides unsuitable for use in conventional taxidermy.





“now the hybrid is unbelievably celebrated.”

Crafting a Seamless Transition

What sets Clark apart from the average sculptor is her method. Kate doesn’t merely paste a human face onto an animal body; instead, she sculpts a human face in clay, then meticulously works the animal hide back over it, incorporating features like eyelashes, fur patterns and horns to create a seamless transition between human and animal, underscoring what is perhaps a false dichotomy between the two.

“I sculpt a human face and then put the animal features back over it,” she says, “like the eyelids, sometimes the chin features, the little piece of hair that goes back to the antlers.”

This labor-intensive approach leads to pieces that evoke both fascination and occasional unease.

“People used to react to the work and think ‘monster,’” she admits, “but now the hybrid is unbelievably celebrated.”

As society has increasingly embraced hybrid identities—whether regarding gender, ethnicity or otherwise—Clark’s work finds resonance with a culture that increasingly values fluidity, acceptance and connection.



art ... will always provoke strong reactions.

A Mixed Reception

Notwithstanding the thunderous accolades that her oeuvre has inspired, the reactions to her work are not always positive. She has received her fair share of criticism, particularly from more mainstream audiences who may not fully grasp the subtleties of her art and reflexively reject the unfamiliar.

"[My husband] always tells me not to read the negative comments, but I do anyway," she laughs.

Still, she understands that art, especially the kind that challenges preconceived notions, will always provoke strong reactions.

"It's always more important to get any reaction from an art piece than for people to just walk by disinterested," she says.



Honoring the Animal Form

Beyond the aesthetic, Clark's work also carries a strong message about the human-animal connection. Her use of real animal hides and her insistence on honoring the bestial form highlight the importance of respecting Mother Nature.

"Animals are incredible," she says, "and I don't want any viewer to not recognize that that beauty is what happened in nature."

Her sculptures are not just about hybridity—they're also about dignity. For instance, she tells the story of a pair of life-sized zebras she created for a piece called "Entangled." The zebras, with their massive, masculine faces, appear to be rearing up, perhaps in combat, but there's also a tenderness to the way their limbs are intertwined.

"It looks like they might kiss," she says.

The piece is a reflection on the contradictions of human attitudes toward animals—both revering them and exploiting them.



Gender and Hybridity in Art

And then, of course, there is the hybrid element. Clark often plays with gender roles in her work, such as sculpting a feminine human face onto the body of a large male antelope.

"The gender-bending is there, but it's not always the first conversation people have about the work," she notes.

Perhaps the most poignant aspect of Clark's art is that it forces us to confront our oft-complex relationship with the natural world. Her sculptures are both familiar and alien, reminding us of the primal connection we have with animals while also challenging our perceptions of identity. Whether it's a bear, a zebra or an antelope, each piece draws the viewer into a contemplative space where the lines blur between human and animal.

find the beauty in the unexpected.



The Power of Visual Communication

At its core, Clark's work is about communication—between species, between worlds and, ultimately, between individual observers and the art itself.

"The simple combination of human and animal does make people resist it," she explains, "but when people see it in person, the transition is just really smooth, and it's undeniable."

Her sculptures may unsettle at first glance, but they invite us to stay, to look a little closer and to find the beauty in the unexpected. Even a momentary gaze into the unblinking eyes of any one of Clark's pieces can spark a flood of thoughts and emotions that most artists thirst to elicit, but few ever attain.



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