



Museum/Mausoleum
wood, canvas, paint, mirror, glass, metal, skull, ashes
20x24x12" 2007

A Pre-mortem Post-mortem Declaration,
July 14, 2007

I, David Dixon, being of sound mind and body, do declare that, upon my death, my head should be removed from my body and cleaned using standard taxidermic techniques (dermestid beetles). The rest of my body, other than my head, should be cremated. The material remains from these two processes (skull and ashes) should be placed in the assemblage, Museum/Mausoleum, in a manner demonstrated by the work's artificial stand-ins. The individual, or representatives of the individual, who desires to possess Museum/Mausoleum after my death, should supervise this procedure. Contacts for the professionals (taxidermist and crematorium) contracted to perform the above-mentioned procedures are available. If no one comes forward desiring to possess Museum/Mausoleum, my entire body should be cremated and Museum/Mausoleum remain in its current model form. It is my hope, as indicated by the piece's title, that one day, after being kept for a time by those who loved me, this assemblage might find its way into a museum collection, preferably a universal survey museum like New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, as opposed to a museum exclusively dedicated to modern or contemporary art. I am making this distinction primarily because I wish to be "interred" along with other relics that stretch current definitions of the art object, for example Fayum mummies or the ancestral skulls of New Guinea, into the realm of death ritual.

On first consideration, this desire to preserve my skull may seem grotesque, but, upon careful reflection, one might begin to feel a subtle longing to possess a skull oneself, especially that of a loved one. What more precious object could exist? And we, as a culture, routinely throw them away, burn or bury them in the cold ground. That cold ground is usually located near a church or in the sanctified space of a cemetery, or if you're lucky, outside the walls of Jerusalem to be the first resurrected when the Messiah comes (or comes again). In other words, where and how we are buried is not benign; it is rich with cultural meaning and interconnects with our cultural identity. Traditionally, religion has mitigated death, yet religion's hold on death's meaning is loosening and we must (and we do) re-imagine death's rituals to claim them for ourselves. Personally, I've always appreciated the humble poetry of throwing one's ashes to the wind, or dumping them in the sea. But upon my own mother's death, and after seeing the ancestral skulls in the Musée du Quay Branly in Paris, I realized that having her skull would be the most precious of *memento mori* imaginable; perhaps, I could even recognize her in her skull. Of course, I am not going to dig her up, in fact she would have been horrified at the thought of someone possessing her skull, but that does not prevent me from imagining what I should do with mine *vis-à-vis* the loved ones I leave behind. We, as a culture, as a species, should reconsider how we dispose of our dead, why we push them to the edge of town to be forgotten. It is not, as is often claimed, only about hygiene (we eat dead cows and chickens, throw the bones in the trash); it's about fear. The Egyptians, for example, lived with their dead fearlessly; there is evidence that before mummies were interred they spent several generations in the home, possibly in the vestibule, to be acknowledged daily by living kin, "Hello granddad, having a good day? How is it down in the underworld? I'll be seeing you there soon."

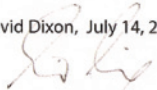
I realize I am asking a lot, perhaps too much (legalities need to be worked out, this reading and your signatures are the first step in that process), and that my desire may be perceived as arrogant or indecent. But I imagine this not only to preserve my self (wherever and whatever that is), but also to establish a possible new protocol towards the dead. To be remembered as I have outlined here has to be the antithesis of mass graves and genocide. My hope is that respect fostered by close proximity to the dead could possibly undermine inhumanity in life.



Let us now turn to the portrait before us. It is a death portrait; therefore, it is quite serious and grim. He has on his black suite and a somewhat pretentious, introspective scowl. But you have to confirm something for me, the aspect of the portrait that I like best: when you approach him, as you get closer, doesn't his face lighten-up a bit? His scowl transforming slightly, knowingly into a whimsical little smile, as if he is happy you have come close to visit with him – he alone there, right there, in his lonely death.

In conclusion, I would like to share with you a dream I had which was inspired by this piece. Interestingly, at least to me, this piece has inspired several dreams, more or less the reverse of surrealism which is dream inspired. In this particular dream, I had filleted myself with a knife, not just the skin, all the way down to the bone, into a skeleton. I was able to walk around like this but very gingerly. I was sore, raw and sensitive and had very little energy, but I was glad that I had done the filleting, and others, despite the fact that it pained them to look at me, seemed to appreciate the effort. There was a scene with a doctor who was able to look at my joints in action, and one where a policeman came up to me while I was stiffly resting on a curb in a blue-skied, green-grassed suburb. He seemed angry as if I had committed some crime, but I hadn't: there was no rule against filleting yourself. Ultimately, he too seemed rather touched by the effort I had gone through and was careful and concerned. Others around were approaching quietly, curiously looking on. I was sad and in pain but pleased that I was able to do this thing, not only for myself, but for others. I was not afraid of dying, but was aware that what I had done could have long-lasting negative physical consequences. I appreciated the people's understanding.

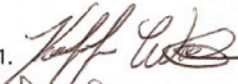

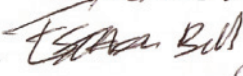
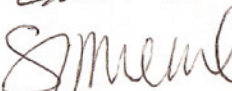
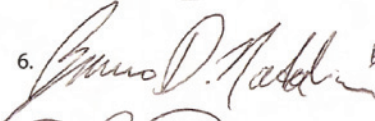
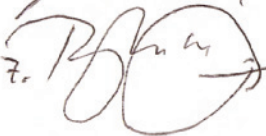
David Dixon, July 14, 2007



FRANCES M. FORGIONE
 Notary Public, State of New York
 No. 01 PQ471053
 Qualified in Kings County
 Commission Expires 05/31/2011

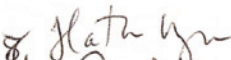


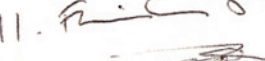


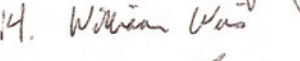
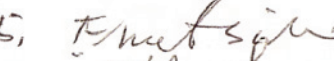






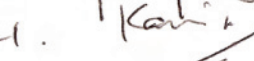
Frances M. Forgione 1/23/08

Witnesses:

1.  KRISTOFER W. HELM
2.  Leticia McKinley
3.  ESTHER BELL
4.  Anne-Sophie Simeul
5.  PATRICK KILLOGAN
6.  BRUNO D. NADAIN
7.  DOUGLAS M. ROSS



Witnesses (cont'd.) - not less important

8.  HEATHER WAGNER
9.  NICOLAS SARTOU
10.  MICHAEL DUX
11.  FLAMINIA GENNARI-SANTORI
12.  SÉVERINE GOSSART
13.  QUENTIN CHIAPETTA
14.  WILLIAM WEIS
15.  EMMA ARCHER
16.  EMMA ARCHER
17.  FRED DOYEN
18.  MARTIN VERIGIN
19.  JEFFREY HAGERMAN
20.  JENNIFER SCANLON
21.  KARI CAMPBELL
22.  MATHEW EDVAULT