

SKELETONS OF WAR

Many of the works in this exhibition were inspired by the horrors experienced by soldiers and civilians in war-torn regions. World War I, among the most devastating conflicts, left Europe and its people broken and changed. Reeling from the horrors they experienced, artists reacted in varying ways. During the decades following the war, expressionism reached its peak in dark, emotionally-charged artworks, as in the suite of prints by the Austrian artist, Stefan Eggeler, who retreated into darker subjects to reference the war's destruction. Eggeler's *Musical Miniatures* mix carnivalesque themes of music, love, and death with broad references to the world of the post-war period. Skulls and skeletons appear throughout this series of prints, where fantasy, sin, and corruption fill dead forests and grim cityscapes.

Like the Eggeler prints, Georges Rouault's work in the post-war era tended towards the deeply emotional and expressive. However, instead of retreating into chaos and darkness, he embraced his Christian faith, where death was a means to life. This exhibition features a number of prints from his monumental *Miserere* series, which reference the horrors of war in macabre and grotesque ways. However, while suffering and man's inhumanity is a central theme in Rouault's work, the prints focus on the Passion of Christ and the promise of peace through salvation. The skeletons in his work indeed represent

death, but for Rouault, suffering, misery, and death are not the end; they are ways of meeting Christ.

From horrific symbols of man's most gruesome crimes to uplifting icons of salvation, the works in this exhibition illustrate that the skeleton is a complex symbol which can be imbued with a wide range of meanings, some contradictory. Moreover, they demonstrate how human ideas and attitudes—particularly those regarding life and death—may persist relatively unaffected by time.

This exhibition is a curatorial project by Lindsay Kearney '15

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Stefan Eggeler, *Musical Miniatures: III: War Song*, 1921



Georges Rouault, *Death Took Him as He Rose From His Bed of Nettles*, 1920-27

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

SCIENCE & MEDICINE

1. "The Skeletal System," from Andrew Combe, M.D., *The Principles of Physiology applied to the Preservation of Health, and to the improvement of Physical and Mental Education* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836), Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections.
2. Abraham Blooteling, *View of the Muscles and Tendons of the Forearm of the Left Hand*, plate 68 from Govard Bidloo, *Anatomi humani corporis centum et quinque tabulis* (Amsterdam: Joannes van Someren, 1685), engraving and etching, 16 3/4 x 13 in. (47.3 x 33 cm). Gift of Dr. Kenneth B. Roberts, 2000.1.2.
3. William Hogarth, *The Company of Undertakers*, 1736, engraving with hand coloring, 10 x 7 1/2 in. (25.4 x 19.1 cm). Gift of The Brooks V Limited Partnership Collection, 2011.7.66.

THE HORRORS OF WAR

4. Artist unknown ("The Caricaturist General"), *Bony's Vision or a Great Little Man's Night Comforts*, 1811, etching and aquatint, 8 3/4 x 14 3/4 in. (22.5 x 37.8 cm). Gift of The Brooks V Limited Partnership Collection, 2011.7.77.
5. Stefan Eggeler, *Musical Miniatures: I: Pierrot's Song of Love and Death; II: Prostitute and Organ Grinder; III: War Song; IV: Drinking Song; V: Serenade; VI: Death Game: The Burning of the Witches*, 1921, etchings, each 3 1/4 x 3 1/4 in. (7.9 x 7.9 cm). Gift of Joan L. Tobias, 2009.7.71-6.
6. Georges Rouault, *Man is Wolf to Man* from *Miserere*, 1920-27, etching and aquatint, 25 3/4 x 20 in. (65.4 x 50.8 cm). Gift of Drs. Meyer P. and Vivian O. Potamkin, 1969.1.50.37.
7. Georges Rouault, *Arise You Dead!* from *Miserere*, 1923, etching and aquatint, 25 3/4 x 20 in. (65.4 x 50.8 cm). Gift of Drs. Meyer P. and Vivian O. Potamkin, 1969.1.50.54.
8. Rupert García, *Calavera Crystal Ball*, 1992, serigraph, 28 x 20 in. (71 x 50.8 cm), 2002.15. Purchased with funds from the Class of 1982.

FURTHER READING

Cheney, Liana. *The Symbolism of Vanitas in the Arts, Literature, and Music: Comparative and Historical Studies*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992.

Flora, Holly and Soo Yun Kang. *This Anguished World of Shadows: Georges Rouault's Miserere et Guerre*. New York: Museum of Biblical Art, 2006.

George, Mary Dorothy. *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum*. 12 vols. London: The British Museum, 1870-1954.

Haslam, Fiona. *From Hogarth to Rowlandson: Medicine in Art in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996.

Hans Holbein the Younger: The Dance of Death. New York: Dover Publications, 1971.

Jonas, F. M. *Netsuké*. Rutland, VT: C. E. Tuttle, 1973.

Rothschild, Judith Rice. "The Dance of Death." *Medieval Perspectives* 22, January 2007, 108-125.

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Front Cover: Artist unknown (Japanese), *Skeleton with Water Bucket*, twentieth century, ivory netsuke, 1 1/4 x 1 1/4 in. (4.4 x 3.2 cm). Gift of Joan L. Tobias, 2008.11.11.

THE COMING OF DEATH

9. Artist unknown (German), *Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, sixteenth century, woodblock, 3 x 2 1/2 in. (7.6 x 6.4 cm). Gift of Prof. Julius Held, 1983.5.82.c
10. Circle of Albrecht Dürer, *Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, sixteenth century, woodblock, 3 x 3 in. (7.6 x 7.6 cm). Gift of Prof. Julius Held, 1983.5.83.d
11. Artist unknown, *Apocalyptic Vision*, sixteenth century, woodblock, 2 x 2 3/4 in. (5.1 x 6 cm). Gift of Prof. Julius Held, 1983.5.79.a
12. Georges Rouault, *This Will Be the Last Time, Dear Father!* from *Miserere*, 1920-27, etching and aquatint, 25 3/4 x 20 in. (65.4 x 50.8 cm). Gift of Drs. Meyer P. and Vivian O. Potamkin, 1969.1.50.36.

VANITAS

13. Ludwig Rach, *Vanitas*, 1876, oil on canvas, 68 1/2 x 39 in. (174 x 99 cm). 1986.13.

ANCESTORS AND AFTERLIFE

14. Georges Rouault, *He Who Believes in Me, Though He Be Dead, May Have Life* from *Miserere*, 1923, etching and aquatint, 25 3/4 x 20 in. (65.4 x 50.8 cm). Gift of Drs. Meyer P. and Vivian O. Potamkin, 1969.1.50.28.
15. Georges Rouault, *Death Took Him as He Rose From His Bed of Nettles* from *Miserere*, 1920-27, etching and aquatint, 25 3/4 x 20 in. (65.4 x 50.8 cm). Gift of Drs. Meyer P. and Vivian O. Potamkin, 1969.1.50.45.
16. Manuel Álvarez Bravo, *Day of the Dead*, 1979, gelatin silver print, 8 x 10 in. (20.3 x 25.4 cm). Gift of Lawrence and Carol Zicklin, 1986.1.2.8.
17. Georges Rouault, *Gulf of the Dead*, 1939, aquatint, 30 3/4 x 22 3/4 in. (77.8 x 56.8 cm). Gift of Drs. Meyer P. and Vivian O. Potamkin, 1985.9.10.
18. Artist unknown (Japanese), *Skeleton with Water Bucket*, twentieth century, ivory netsuke, 1 1/4 x 1 1/4 in. (4.4 x 3.2 cm). Gift of Joan L. Tobias, 2008.11.11.

BONES

Representing the Macabre

March 5–April 18, 2015



THE TROUT GALLERY
The ART MUSEUM of Dickinson College

BONES are a vital part of us: in life, beneath our skin, they form the living structure that animates our bodies; in death, stripped of flesh, they hauntingly remind us of our mortality. From the medieval *danse macabre* (Dance of Death) to the Mexican *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) celebrations, bones—particularly human skeletons—fascinate us. We find them entertaining and comical, yet frightening and gruesome. When reanimated in art and imagination, they often participate in lively scenes, inspiring fear or awe. Yet, in more rational contexts, skeletons are informative and the object of scientific study. The works displayed in this exhibition illustrate how the bones inside us have come to represent a wide range of meanings to scientists, satirists, and artists. These diverse representations of the human skeleton reveal intimate human attitudes regarding, among other things, life and death.

THE SKELETAL SYSTEM

From a biological point of view, the skeleton is vital to human function. Without it, we would have nothing holding up our muscles and tissues and we would collapse into a formless sack of organs. The skeleton also provides internal armor-like protection for the body's more fragile organs like the brain, eyes, heart, lungs, and spinal cord. Our bones and joints give shape to our bodies, including some that impart individuality. The differences in our faces are determined in part by the skulls beneath them; chin and jaw, cheekbone and brow bone give us each a unique shape and individual expression. Yet, we rarely look at someone and picture the bones beneath their skin. The thought of imagining the biological systems and skeletal structure beneath our fleshy exterior is unsettling and even grotesque to most of us. Isolated from a living body, the skeleton appears human-like, yet utterly foreign. And since the only way to view a skeleton is after the death of its body, skeletons have become fearsome images of the inevitable end. Perhaps because of this, the anxious human imagination has created impossible yet somehow wholly believable scenarios of



Abraham Blooteling, *View of the Muscles and Tendons of the Forearm of the Left Hand*, 1685

reanimated and repossessed skeletons that act like humans yet are now an entirely alien species.

THE DANSE MACABRE

In 1424/5 a monumental fresco representing the *danse macabre* was painted on the arcade walls of the cemetery of the Holy Innocents in Paris. The fresco depicted a procession of the living and the dead, beginning with the most socially important—popes, kings, dukes—and ending with the lowliest of peasants. The *danse macabre* motif emphasizes the equalizing power of death; in the end, no one can escape Death's



Circle of Albrecht Dürer, *Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, sixteenth century

eventual call. Although destroyed in the seventeenth century, the fresco may originally have been associated with a superstition that the dead rise from their tombs at midnight to dance in the graveyard before setting off to claim victims from the living.

The appearance of numerous variations on this theme speak to its popularity during the subsequent centuries. Among the most famous and influential was Hans Holbein the Younger's series of woodcuts that represent intimate encounters between Death and a living person of one station or another. Elements of this genre appear in the sixteenth-century Apocalypse woodcuts in this exhibition, which show richly dressed men desperately trying to evade the sweeping arm of the fourth horseman—Death. The popularity of this motif continued into the subsequent centuries, as we witness in Georges Rouault's *This Will Be the Last Time, Dear Father!*, where a skeleton arrives to snatch away another member of the living.



Georges Rouault, *This Will Be the Last Time, Dear Father!*, 1920–27

MEMENTO MORI

From the tradition of the *danse macabre* developed the symbolism of the skeleton or simply the skull as a *memento mori*—a “reminder [that] you will die.” Christians regarded such images as warnings to prepare for their corporeal death and spiritual judgment. *Memento mori* objects take many forms, but frequently depict a



Ludwig Rach, *Vanitas*, 1876

skeleton or skull engaging another figure or even the viewer in a dialogue about the inevitability of death.

Many seventeenth-century Dutch still-life paintings feature *memento mori* imagery alongside other related symbols. In these compositions, the skull symbolizes *vanitas*—vanity, referring specifically to a preoccupation with material goods and temporal matters that will mean nothing after death. Other symbols—books, charters, candles, globes, musical instruments—represent the passage of time and transience of life. A particular collection of symbols may refine the meaning of a given *vanitas* composition, perhaps making direct reference to the patron's profession or preoccupation. In this exhibition, Ludwig Rach's *Vanitas* from 1876 illustrates the enduring popularity of this imagery and its symbolism.

THE LONE SKULL

A single, isolated skull often appears in other contexts, too. In Georges Rouault's *He Who Believes in Me, Though He Be Dead, May Have Life*, a gallery of skulls line the walls of a vaulted, dark passage. Rouault positions a single skull at the base of a bold cross to symbolize Golgotha, the place of Christ's Crucifixion. According to theologians, Golgotha was the resting place of Adam, the source of the Fall, and place of Christ's death, the source of redemption. Many images of the Crucifixion include Adam's skull at the base of the cross, to associate eternal death with eternal life. For Christians the Crucifixion, though violent and horrible, represents self-sacrifice as the means for penitents to earn redemption and salvation.



Georges Rouault, *He Who Believes in Me, Though He Be Dead, May Have Life*, 1923

Manuel Álvarez Bravo's *Day of the Dead* shows a skull of a different sort. In this photograph, the young woman presents a sugar skull, which is made as part of the Mexican All Souls' Day celebrations or *Día de los Muertos*—Day of the Dead. In pre-Columbian Central America, skulls referenced Mictecacihuatl, the Aztec queen of the underworld. However, once Catholicism reached the shores of Central America, the symbolism of the skull was expanded to encompass the celebration of deceased loved ones. Participants of the festival honor the memory of their ancestors by making sugar skulls, decorating graves with garlands of flowers, and attending religious services. Here, death is not dark and fearsome but celebrated as a complement to life.



Manuel Álvarez Bravo, *Day of the Dead*, 1979

Of course, not all skulls and skeletons have such peaceful connotations. Rupert García's *Calavera Crystal Ball* bears an ominous message. Here, the skull—in black and grey—carries a portrait of Christopher Columbus with his facial features blocked out by a yellow handprint. Taken together, the juxtaposition of Columbus and the menacing skull bears witness to crimes against indigenous peoples and the wave of death that followed the tide of colonialism.



Rupert García, *Calavera Crystal Ball*, 1992