

PROVISIONAL COVER

A collection of mesmerizing photographs from contemporary photographer Lynn Stern, including eight series on skulls.

Skull

Lynn Stern

Essay by Donald Kuspit

Illustrated throughout

28.0 x 30.5cm

332pp

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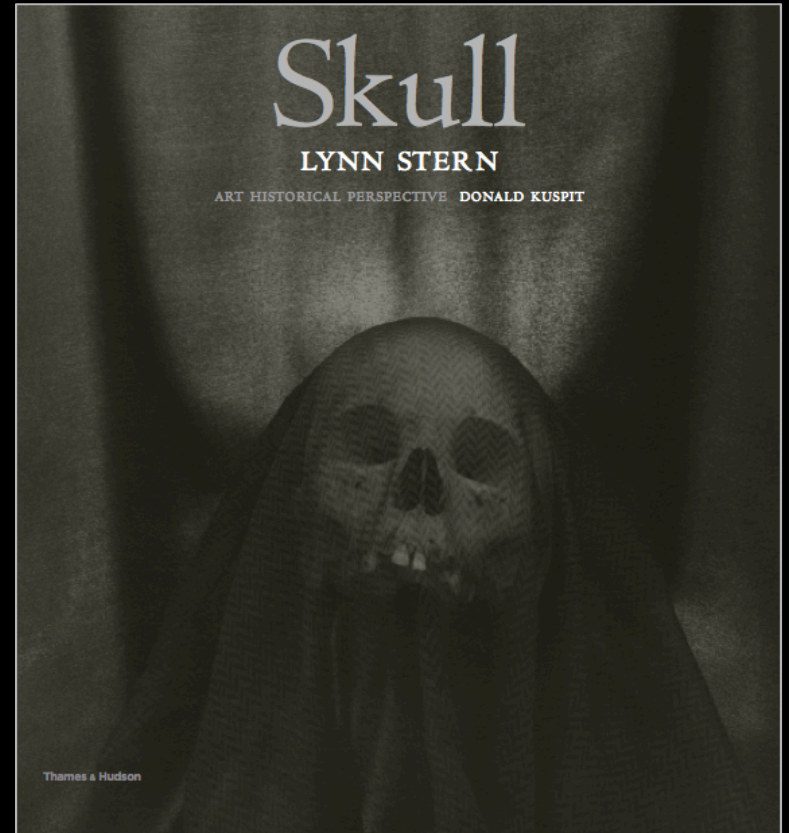
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Key Sales Points

- Features nearly 150 tritone and quadratone reproductions of Stern's photographs, as well as forty colour illustrations of other artists' work
- Includes an extended essay by renowned art critic Donald Kuspit
- Publication coincides with an exhibition of Lynn Stern's work at the Thomas Gibson Gallery, London

If the modernization of the skull into one among many banal objects occurs in the still lifes of Cézanne, Picasso, and Penn, then its postmodernization—kitschification—occurs in Damian Hirst's transformation of it into a diamond encrusted trinket and Gerhard Richter's glamorous paintings of it as a photogenic star. The traditional religious skull was too hot to handle; a sacred relic of life, one could only submit to its meaning by meditating upon it. It epitomized the sacred mystery of Christ, who rose from the dead, as one hopes to do by accepting death. Contemplating the skull—death



Paul Cézanne, *Self with Skull*, 1906–07



Juan Sanchez Cotán, *Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber*

incarnate—one in effect meets one's maker, as Adam's skull does in many paintings of the crucifixion, where it appears at the base of the cross, as though kneeling before Christ, devotion to him guaranteeing that one's body would be resurrected, as his was. The sacred skull is at once a curse and a blessing—a reminder of the inevitability of death and a promise of eternity. The modern

secular skull has become somewhat cooler, and thus easier to handle, to treat as one among many profane objects, to take its place in what the sociologist David Riesman famously called "the lonely crowd" of modern mass society, symbolized by the crowded still life. Nothing is sacred in the modern crowd, nothing is respected; the skull, like everything else, has lost its sacred aura. It is of formal interest—one form to be placed in aesthetically interesting, sometimes intriguingly uncanny, relationship to another form—but not of subjective interest, just as the people in a crowd are impersonal objects formally observed rather than subjective persons emotionally experienced. One only has to compare the sacred still lifes of Juan Sanchez Cotán—in effect devotional offerings on the altar of God—to the profane still lifes of Cézanne, Picasso, and Penn, where objects are sacrificed to art, to get the point.

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In postmodern art the skull is neither sacred nor profane—the distinction between them collapses—but entertaining. Where the traditional religious skull had spiritual resonance and the modern secular skull had a certain aesthetic and social sense, the postmodern skull is another mass produced novelty of what the aesthetician and sociologist T. W. Adorno famously called the “cultural industry.” Richter’s skulls, all 1983, are no more memento mori than Madame Tussaud’s



Gerhard Richter, *Skull with Candle*, oil on canvas, 1983

warwork figures. They are not horse, but wax, and as waxes as the photographs they derive from. Like little Statues of Liberty and Eiffel Towers, they are souvenirs of a visit to a museum of reproduction. Richter’s skulls are too slick and mediagenic to ever have been covered by aging skin and rotting flesh. Their smooth handling belies the ugly meaning of the skull by prettifying it—glossing it over. The empty space in which he places the skull confirms that it has been emptied of existential meaning.

In one work Richter places a candle next to the skull, mockingly staging its religious meaning, as Hirst’s *For the Love of God*, 2007 does. And like Hirst’s skull, it becomes an ingratiating ornament. Decorated with diamonds, the work makes it clear that Hirst is “all business,” as Warhol was. Warhol called himself a “business artist,” declaring that the hardest art was making money, and



Andy Warhol, *Skull*, acrylic paint and silkscreen on canvas, 1976

Hirst is his devilish son, for the grinning face—a sort of ironic comic mask—is devilish. Warhol also made glamorous, money-symbolizing skulls—money the root of all evil, and the skull being evil—as mass reproducible as Richter’s as well as perversely glamorous and confrontational as Hirst’s.

... In postmodern art the skill is neither sacred nor profane—the distinction between them collapses—but entertaining. ... Stern's skulls are not entertaining, for they don't exist for contemplation alone, but are rather deeply rovocative, their ingenious aesthetics drawing us into their tragic interior. ...





ANIME #7, 1995-1998

406



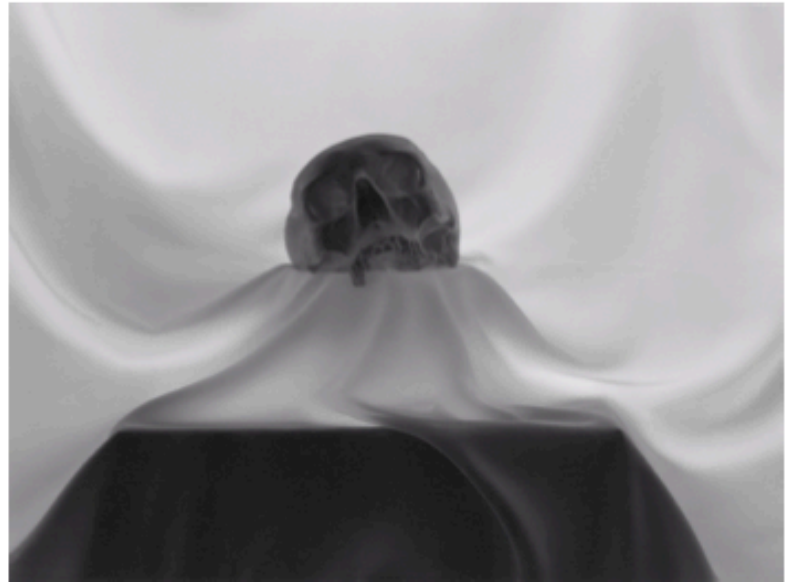
ANIME #14, 1995-1998

407



SKULL #21A, 1997

418



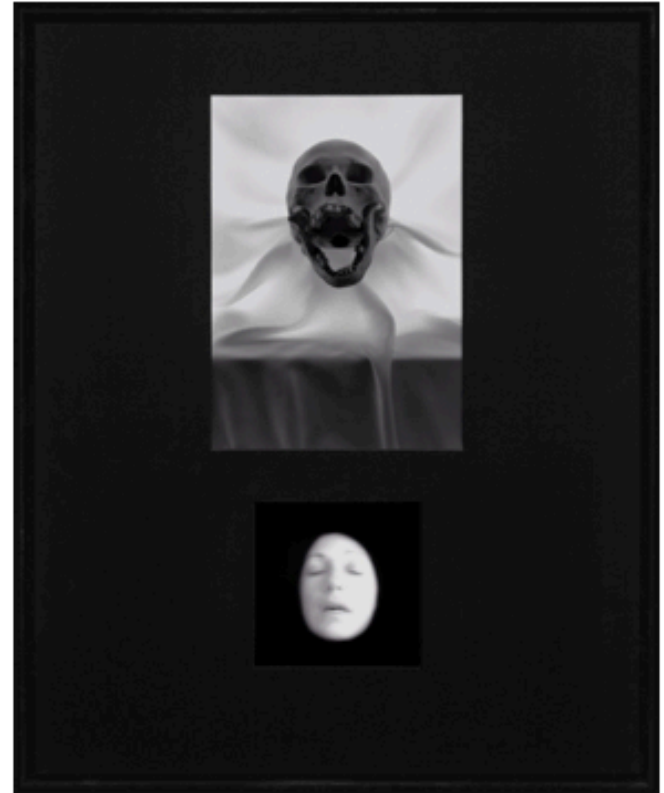
SKULL #21A, 1997

419



областение #3, 1990-1992

400



областение #10, 1990-1992

401

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