

DAILY NEWS

35c

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER®

Thursday, October 31, 1985

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Fighting the chill of fear, you descend a flight of stairs. Ahead is a heavy, black door. It's ordinary enough to the rational eye but the fear makes it sinister and forbidding. What horrors does it conceal? It creaks open.

The crypt awaits.

Gleaming skeletons. Grinning skulls. Bones. Bats. And, smiling darkly, the master of it all invites you to inspect his ghoulish collection.

Step closer if you dare and see a row of dangling skeletons moving gently with the tremor of your passage. Skulls are ranged along shelves. In a side room, the remains of a snapping turtle lie in a bowl of bleach.

Okay, that's enough atmosphere for Halloween. What we have here is a basement store on W. 82d St., off boutique-infested Columbus Ave., that sells and rents bones—animal and human.

It's not Vincent Price who welcomes you but a breezy young proprietor, Frank Galiano, who claims that he runs the only bone store in the world. To tell the truth, the mood in the subterranean Maxilla and Mandible store is more clinical than horrific, more cheerful than morbid.

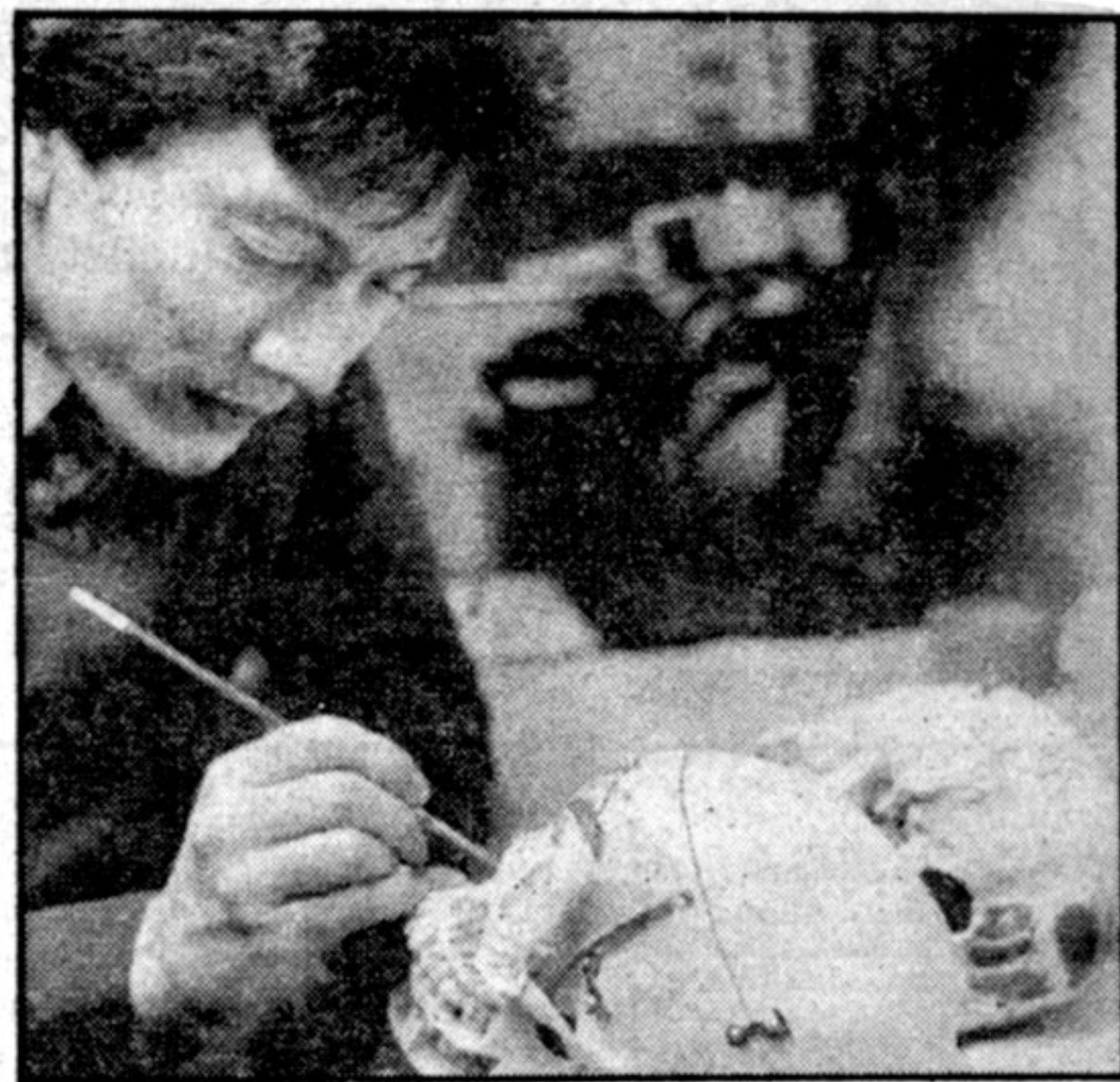
In business for just over a year, paleontologist Galiano, 34, collects items from all over the world, from human skeletons to preserved bats, for rental or sale to medical students, sculptors, interior decorators, window dressers and movie makers.

"Sometimes I'm working down here until 2 a.m. and it never bothers me. There are problems, though. Fishing the turtle skull out of the bleach bowl, Galiano admitted, "Cleaning the carcasses sometimes grosses me out. I like bones. I'm not into flesh and blood."

The leg bone connects to the knee bone, the backbone connects to the shoulder bone, and now at the end of October all of it connects to Halloween.

"At this time of year we get a lot of people coming in to rent items for the night," Galiano said. "It costs \$50 to rent a skull overnight and \$150 for a skeleton."

Halloween or not, there's a boom in death along W. 82d St.



Photos by **LEE ROMERO/DAILY NEWS**