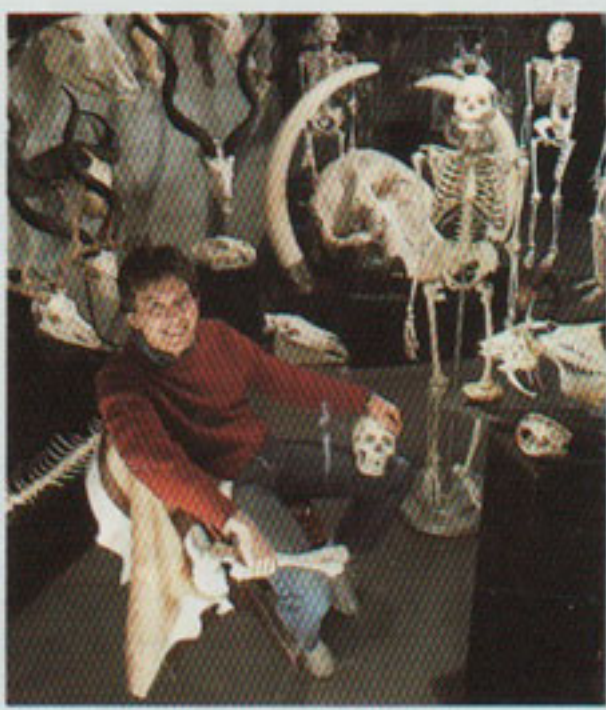


Alas, Poor Yorick



Kelly/Mooney

Peering from the walls and grinning from glass cases are the skulls of spirits past—humans, yes, but also lions and elephants, Gila monsters and mice. The Museum of Natural History? No. Dem dry bones are for sale. Maxilla & Mandible, the world's only retail bone shop, is the lively business of Henry Galiano, a street kid from East Harlem who's a self-taught vertebrate paleontologist. Galiano gets his stock from cattle ranchers in Wyoming, bushmen in Botswana, trappers, zookeepers, and game wardens. The bones arrive still gamey, and preparing them down in the cellar is labor-intensive. First a nonhuman staff of beetle larvae swarms over the bones to give them a thorough cleaning; then they're bleached and waxed. Prices start at just \$1, for individual python ribs. Delicate skunk and muskrat skulls are under \$30, a stately longhorn steer skull goes for \$475, and collectors shell out \$2,100 for a hippopotamus head. Mail order is a major concern. The 120-page catalogue, fancifully illustrated with Victorian engravings from Galiano's collection, is \$6.95. Maxilla & Mandible; 78 West 82nd St.; New York, NY 10024; 212-724-6173.