

M & M's has a lot of skeletons in their closets



WSN photo by Lisa Koenig

By CHRIS MELE

Make no bones about it — Henry Galiano's childhood infatuation with natural history has matured into a serious love affair.

Galiano buys, sells and rents a variety of skulls. "Everything from a mouse to an elephant," boast his advertisements,

as well as "bones, skins, horns and other unique anatomical materials."

"Only in a place like New York can this happen," said Galiano, 34, who is founder and president of Maxilla & Mandible. "It epitomizes the uniqueness of New York."

Indeed, "unique" is the word that

aply describes the store's macabre treasures and bizarre artifacts. Maxilla & Mandible, located at 78 W. 82nd St., and named after the scientific terms of the upper and lower jaw (Galiano's favorite structures), is a "close encounter of the third kind with reality," the former artist said.

The encounter may be frightening for some. The main showroom features bright lights shining on stark white bird, bear, antelope and lion skulls. At the center of the room is a large elephant skull, including tusks, and hanging nearby are complete human skeletons.

The instinctive reaction is to go "Ugh!" Galiano said as he stuck his tongue out in imitation of visitors' revulsion. "But actually, it is very well-received. The fact is everyone hates it or loves it," he said.

For Galiano it was love at first sight. Growing up as a child in Spanish Harlem, Galiano "needed relief" from the "dirty" reality of his neighborhood. Picture books of the Grand Canyon and visits to the Bronx Zoo and the Museum of Natural History became his means of escape.

Galiano never went to college, but described himself as "self-educated." A graduate of the High School of Art and Design, he worked at the Department of Vertebrate and Paleontology at the Museum of Natural History for 13 years. Prior to that, he did two years of what he called "market research" by selling bones at flea markets. Encouraged by the public's overwhelming positive response — "I could count the number of bad reactions on one hand"

— Galiano opened his store in September 1984.

By dealing directly with trappers, hunters and medical suppliers, Galiano stocks thousands of skulls and skeletons for his customers. He has rented bones for a Calvin Klein window display at Bloomingdale's and human skeletons for Michael Jackson's *Torture* video.

The largest percentage of his customers, he said, are sculptors, painters, photographers and interior decorators. "The artist can recognize the symmetry, the design, the beauty of it all," Galiano said. "Art derives inspiration from the real world. This is the world's finest art. It can't be beaten; no artist can dream up stuff like this."

Galiano sees himself as "creating a bridge between science and the public. A scientist isn't a guy who's partly bald and wears a lab coat and glasses. He's a regular guy with an interest."

For now, Galiano's main interest is in building a reputation and attracting investors for his ultimate goal — establishing "New York City's first biological supply company." Galiano said he wants to develop "a department store catering to science" where there would be various departments ranging from bones to minerals.

In the meantime, Galiano said he is running his store like a "mom and pop" operation by offering individual attention to his customers and working 10-hour days. "People are very aware of the store," he said. "It's going to be a major landmark, a tourist attraction. People are going to visit the Statue of Liberty and then come here."



WSN photo by Lisa Koenig

Henry Galiano poses with some of his friends.