



Memento Mori: The Dead Among Us

Paul Koudounaris

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Death is universal, but the human response to death varies widely. In Western society, death is usually medicalized and taboo, and kept apart from the world of the living, while in much of the rest of the world, and for much of human history, death has commonly been far more integrated into peoples daily existence, and human remains are as much a reminder of life, *memento vitae*, as of death, *memento mori*. Through photos taken at more than 250 sites in thirty countries over a decade, Paul Koudounaris has captured death around the world. From Bolivia's festival of the little pug-nosed ones, where skulls are festooned with flowers and given cigarettes to smoke and beanie hats to protect them from the weather to Indonesian families who dress mummies and include them in their household routines; from naturally preserved Buddhist monks and memorials to genocide in Rwanda and Cambodia to the dramatic climax of Europe's great ossuaries, *Memento Mori* defies taboo to demonstrate how the dead continue to be present in the lives of people everywhere."

Memento Mori: The Dead Among Us Details

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Author : Paul Koudounaris

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From Reader Review Memento Mori: The Dead Among Us for online ebook

Colona Public Library says

This book has outstanding photographs of death culture from around the world! Checking out this book is worth it 5/5 stars just for the photography alone! I've learned a lot about other cultures death ceremonies and monuments and it is a shame that death culture is not prominent in the US. This is a must if you are morbidly curious! You can special order this book at the Colona Public Library! ~Ashley

Åshild Livsdatter says

The most beautiful book of death out there, with stunning pictures of how several cultures in the world treat their dead and their bones, bejeweling them, giving them sunglasses and cigarettes, placing them in shrines, caves and cathedrals, and you get the history behind them.

Karie says

So fascinating and beautiful

Taryn says

The book's introduction is worth its price for the knowledge gained about the transformation that has resulted in Western culture's current bizarre denial of death. The beautiful photographs and stories from around the world make this work even more important.

Jenny says

Just letting you know in accordance with Goodreads policy that I received this book as part of the Goodreads First Reads giveaways.

First of all, let me just say that this is a beautifully designed book. The archaic style art (I'm not sure if the art was designed for the book or is actually art from the past) on the cover and the back are really cool. And, I liked the use of the different old art and pictures around the text in the first part of the book. The book is also very colorful. I wasn't expecting it, but it was a nice surprise, and I think it was really well done. This is a book containing mostly photographs with only a small amount of writing. The first 27 pages are the author explaining a little bit about the history of death, death customs, and how death was and is dealt with. This part was extremely interesting to me, and really well written. And, I plan to look into Paul Koudounaris's other books because I really enjoyed his style of writing. The rest of the book contains high quality pictures of charnel houses, ossuaries, mummies, memorials, and more. One chapter in particular was

really hard hitting, and it contained pictures of memorials that had bones of thousands of people who were slaughtered due to intolerance of other cultures.

Memento Mori also shows how most of western society has changed in relation to how we deal with death. Death in many societies today is sterile, medical, and impersonal. Not too long ago though, people in western societies had a more personal relationship with death, and death wasn't something to be feared the way it is today.

Anyway, I enjoyed "Memento Mori: The Dead Among Us" a lot. What writing there was, was interesting and informative, and the rest of the book was visually engaging. 5 stars!

Whitney says

Review written for and published by Portland Book Review on May 11th:

Memento Mori: The Dead Among Us is a hardcover coffee table book that takes a look at how people through history and various parts of the world handle the concept of death, as well as different treatments of human remains. Author Paul Koudounaris points out how death in the Western world has become removed, clinical, and something to be feared. Where in the past, families spent time with the corpse for several days and dressed and cleaned the body themselves, now most of the time bodies are bagged, tagged, sorted, dressed, presented, and buried by professionals in the medical and/or mortuary professions. In the Western world death is no longer part of our everyday existence. However, this was not the case in the past, nor is it still the case in different countries.

Memento Mori is part history lesson, and part documentary. The book guides readers through the practice of charnel houses and ossuaries that were once a common part of Catholic religion – a place for people to go to contemplate their own mortality, as well as to connect with the past generations. There is a chapter on burial caves throughout Asia, the enshrining of victims bodies to commemorate genocides and other mass senseless deaths, churches decorated with bones in strangely lovely artistic ways, and the use of mummies in various religions in the past through current times. The book discusses the ñatitas, skulls that are enshrined in homes in Bolivia and are treated as family members and esteemed friends, as well as the jewel encrusted martyrs of the Old Catholic faith.

The book is peppered with images, most of them photographs taken by the author on his travels around the world. The images are tasteful and surprisingly loving, despite the Western world's general aversion to images of bones and corpses. You won't find any blood and guts here, just the final resting places of the long dead.

This is a fascinating book that points out the evolution of the perception of death and the dead in various cultures. While probably not the best book for the squeamish, *Memento Mori* is perfect for those interested in learning a bit more about historical changes regarding death and the treatment of bodies, and those with an interest in the macabre.

Jantine Zandbergen says

Although not as deep and informative as his previous two books on death, 'Memento Mori' is another must-read book by Paul Koudounaris. As always the photography is stunning, and reading about these wonderful

places is a delight. If you're just starting with Paul's books I'd recommend reading this first. If you're already a fan of the other two I can only say that you won't regret buying this one as well. Beautiful book, must read for fans of the macabre.

Ginny says

Similarly high-quality photos and low-focus on text to *Heavenly Bodies: Cult Treasures & Spectacular Saints from the Catacombs*. I would have liked to have more info but the quality of the photos really makes this a treasure. I was unfamiliar with the Bolivian ñatitas. Koudounaris strives to strike a balance between European and other cultures.

Grayson says

A lot of the places covered in this had been covered in the author's first two books, but there was new text and some photos from elsewhere in the world. A nice read, but too much repetition from the other books.

Pocki says

What a truly beautiful book!

I have all three books in this trilogy (and the last two were gifts from the same person on different occasions, which is very sweet) but I haven't finished reading *Empire of Death*. For some reason to text in that takes a long time to get through. This book however had less text, and in much smaller bites, which I enjoyed. I really like that we got a glimpse into practices from all over the world, and how they both differ and resemble each other.

The photography is gorgeous as always. But I would expect nothing less from Paul. The overall look of the book was a bit shocking at first, with its super bright colours and lavish decoration around text blocks etc. However, I rather quickly started to really appreciate the unique look of it all. It's also a great format (but Paul, if you make the next book any taller it won't fit in my bookshelf!) and a lovely satin binding. It feels very special and luxurious, and if I had a coffee table I might've had to put it on display for parties. For now it gets to live on my osteology/archaeology shelf with all the other great books about death.

Carole Tyrrell says

Memento Mori: The Dead Among Us

What a fabulous looking book! Thames & Hudson are to be congratulated on the very high production values on all 3 of Paul Koudounaris's books. The lovely iridescent cover on this book and the wonderful colour photos by the author throughout, which include some foldout ones, really enable you to see these sites and memorials at their best. These also benefit from the book's foolscap format.

Memento Mori is divided into 8 chapters and an introduction. It's concerned with how different cultures and religions have remembered their dead over the centuries up to the present day.

In the introduction, Koudounaris discusses how some cultures regard their dead as being still part of the family and to be involved in daily life. They do not see Death as removed from them and he quotes Cicero as saying 'That last day does not bring extinction to us, but change of place.' In the chapter, The Good Death, the end is seen as a threshold to eternal life through the passing of the physical body. Charnel houses which contained the visible bones and skulls of the dead are also featured as they reminded visitors of their own inevitable fate. One in Portugal has a sign which states 'We bones that are here await yours.' By contrast in The Bad Death, all vestiges of death have been tidied away and the dead now belong in cemeteries. They are no longer seen as part of daily life but are now put out of reach and death is experienced remotely in hospital for example. The elaborate displays of Sedlec and Paris are discussed in The Dead will Rise. The author visits Indonesia, Ethiopia, Egypt, Italy, Cambodia, Rwanda and Sicily amongst others and this gives the book a very broad canvas.

In some cultures, visitors and family members often communicated with their dead ancestors via their skulls and by bringing them offerings. However, in Bolivia an annual day is held for the family skulls or natitas (the little pug-nosed ones) where they are venerated as good luck charms or spiritual guides. Indeed the national police service openly credits two skulls known as Juanito and Juanita with solving many crimes for them.

Koudounaris has done his research thoroughly and this made for a fascinating and engrossing book. It ends with the Catacomb Saints which featured in his last book, Heavenly Bodies, which was another beautifully produced and entertaining book. Memento Mori is a great book for anyone interested in anthropology and how other cultures deal with the great mystery of life – Death.

And if you still think that displays of skulls are macabre then consider the emotional impact of those in Cambodia's Killing Fields and, more recently, the horrors of the Rwandan genocide.

Kyla says

Loved it. Paul is a gifted photographer and fascinating writer.

Susannah says

This is a beautifully bound book on a seldom discussed subject: the communing of the living with the dead. This hardback is covered in blue satiny cloth, with orange printed text, and the image of a skull. The facing pages are also bright orange, and the book itself is filled with many full page photographs.

Koudounaris has written several books about the living's relationship with the dead, but this is the first of his that I have read. In Memento Mori he discusses how throughout history in the Western World death was ever present, and acknowledged as a part of life, but that it has now become divorced from life in modern times. However, in many other cultures, such Bolivia, and some in Asia, death is present as a part of life.

This book showcases ways that cultures throughout history have found a way to continue living with loved ones beyond death through the celebration and reverence of skulls and bones. This includes Bolivian skull decorating, mummification, and the elaborate bone chapels of the Catholic church.

This book is a macabrely beautiful celebration of life and death. Though it may not be for the faint of heart,

as some images are a bit gruesome.

Amie says

This is a beautiful book filled with colorful and interesting photos of how several different cultures treat and view their dead - or better, display their dead. It could best be described as a coffee table book due to its size (just over 13" tall) so it doesn't stand upright on a bookshelf very nicely unless your shelves are highly spaced apart. The photos and the stories/information contained within do make this book a real treasure to read, look at and want to explore more.

James says

Stunningly beautiful coffee table book touching on the rituals and treatment of the dead in far flung regions of the world. A little lightly written without a lot of depth behind its explanations, but the photos more than make up for it. Unforgettable in the right sort of ways, and very respectful of the topic - doesn't sensationalize.
