

Portrait of Skull with Man

by Vina Jie-Min Prasad

MALE Figure Model Available (PLEASE READ DESCRIPTION!!!)

Hi and thanks for reading. I'm an experienced figure model, 27 years old, Chinese, and 175 cm tall. (If it matters, the skull I'm holding is from a 30 year old European man who used to be about 180 cm tall. He had no previous modelling experience.)

I'm open to unusual and unconventional shoots, but I have to be depicted with the skull. This is **ABSOLUTELY** non-negotiable. On the plus side, if you're doing a Memento Mori thing, you're in luck!

Frequently Asked Questions:

Do you charge?

No. I work on a time-for-print (TFP) basis—send me the best shots from the session, or a high-res photo/scan of your final artwork.

I know you mentioned the skull, but can you...

The skull **MUST** be in frame. I'm okay with setting it down, but it needs to be visible in the final work.

What if you put your...

Poses are to be discussed on a case-by-case basis.

SERIOUS INQUIRIES ONLY. This is not a sex ad!!

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Richard was too tired to use the controller, and I was playing video games for him—not that there was much gameplay in the arthouse

shit he liked, so technically I was shooting dudes and helping to trigger boring cutscenes for him to watch. It wasn't even the *fun* kind of shooting since this game was the kind with some sort of anti-war message.

"Hey," Richard said, his head lolling against my shoulder. "What photo are we using for the obituary?"

"I don't know," I said. "I was thinking that passport-sized one." It looked terrible in colour, and was bound to look even worse when scaled up and put in greyscale newsprint, but I'd scoured Richard's social media and all that came up were Tom Stoppard memes and blurry class reunion photos.

"Aren't there any others?" I could feel Richard wincing against my neck.

"You're the one who said you didn't believe in taking photos, remember? We should live in the moment instead of capturing it for endless replay, blah blah blah, why put a screen between us and life?"

"Oh." He thought for a while. "I said that?"

"Yes." In fact, he had said it at a Morrissey concert, just before complaining that "How Soon is Now" was on the setlist and blocking my perfect shot of the man himself. "I guess we could take a photo now."

"God, no, I look terrible. I want people to remember me as I was." Presumably he meant 'a really hot dude', and not 'a snooty asshole'. A more charitable person, or someone who knew him less well, might have argued that the combination of both was part of his charm.

"Anyway, about the..." I gestured to one of the enemy corpses I'd shot. It dissolved into a stream of symbolic blue butterflies, probably so the developer didn't have to deal with fallen-corpse clipping errors. "Do you want cremation or what?"

"Of course not," Richard said. "That's too plebeian."

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As usual, I was spending my free time in a dingy hostel room completely naked, holding my dead boyfriend's skull. It was art school application season, and a lot of students were trying to dash out their applications to Goldsmiths or Tokyo University of the Arts or that one in Chicago, whatever its name was. I'd been through a few posing

sessions with Somchai, which were mainly memorable for his desire to have me grip the skull while splaying my fingers out in terribly uncomfortable positions.

I adjusted my grip, and a voice boomed in my head. *If you crack my skull because of this kid, I'm going to haunt you forever.*

"Oh my god, Richard, shut up," I hissed.

"Sorry?" Somchai looked up from his canvas. "Did you say something?"

"No, no, please go on. I was just talking to myself."

Sort of reminds you of that place, doesn't it? The one with all the cockroaches

"Yeah," I murmured. "A little." A lot, actually, but hell if I was going to let Richard know that because he'd be stupidly smug about it. We hadn't been able to find anything which suited Richard's exacting tastes and had been forced to settle for one-room no-cooking-allowed in the middle of nowhere. Occasionally the owner's cat would come by and eat the cockroaches that had made their way into our room.

On the day we found a better place to rent, we'd thrown an impromptu party with a borrowed hotplate, repurposed birthday candles, and my laptop playing The Smiths on shuffle. After we'd finished dancing along to Hand in Glove and scraped the candle wax off the floor, we'd fed the cat some leftover steak.

Somchai pushed his chair away from the canvas and stretched, a signal that we could both take a short break while his latest coat of acrylic dried.

"So," he said. "Why a skull?"

"It's something that belonged to a good friend of mine. He gave it to me because he wanted to see what different artists could do with it."

"Oh," Somchai said. "A fan of art?"

"Yeah, galleries, theatre...kind of a pretentious guy, but I agreed to do this for him, so I might as well see it through."

"Theatre, huh..."

No, I think he's going for it, stop him—

"Can you do the thing from Hamlet? You know, 'alas poor Yorick, I knew him well'..."

"Well, sure," I said, interrupting before he could mangle it further.

"But it's actually 'I knew him, Horatio'. Lots of people make that mistake, it's fine...hell, I used to make it too. You want me to do the whole soliloquy, or just the front bit?"

"Just the front, I think."

Oh my god, thank you, Richard's voice said, so I made sure to ham it up beyond tolerable limits just to hear him wince.

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Richard and I both irritated the other in a way that neither could get enough of, the kind of all-pervasive itch that burned under your skin and made—well, made me wish I'd get reincarnated alongside him just so I could detest him all over again. I had no intention of dying despite having spent all my weekends with depressed artists, but the fact that death and corpse beetles and bleach didn't stop Richard from coming back to piss me off made me a bit more confident that my wish was, at the very least, possible.

Before cramming Richard into my backpack, he told me to get large prints in matte and send them for framing. Since I didn't want to be surrounded by giant pictures of myself, I got photo-sized glossy prints, made sure to print the date in orange in the lower right corner, and bought an album just to put everything in. The album's cover said "Our Cute Little Boy" in pastel blue block letters, and it came with a sheet of train-shaped stickers.

Back home, I spread everything out on my desk, and started filling the album in, positioning Richard where he could see it. Out of respect for Richard's artistic intent, I refrained from using the stickers on the photos, even if I spotted prime opportunities for the one with the "Choo Choo" speech bubble.

After finishing, I flipped through the pages—I'd been doing the project for months on end now, and we had quite the collection going. The disastrous skullfucking photoshoot, the one where I'd had to stuff wilting roses into Richard's eye sockets, and the series where I'd cradled him tenderly, held him in front of me, and finally pressed my lips to his teeth.

Hey. Do you ever miss me?

"You're still here, aren't you?"

No, I mean, the other me. Back when I had a body.

"Well," I said. "Yeah, but whenever that happens, I just think of this quote, and then it doesn't hurt so bad."

What is it?

"Alas, poor Richard, I knew him well. A fellow of infinite whatevers, who was really fancy..."

I hate you.

"You know you love me," I said, and gave him a big wet kiss.

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