

Considered the father of Mexican printmaking, José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913) created thousands of illustrations in his lifetime, many of which feature calaveras, Spanish for skulls. The exhibition *Calaveras Mexicanas: The Art and Influence of José Guadalupe Posada* includes images of skulls and skeletons depicting famous heroes, politicians and common people acting in serious and even satirical roles.

But Posada is not the only artist who used skeletons in works of art. The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, has many sculptures, paintings, artifacts and more from around the world and across the centuries that show skulls and bones.

The MFAH Education Center receives generous funding from The Kinder Foundation.

All education programs at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, receive endowment income from funds provided by Caroline Wiess Law; the National Endowment for the Humanities; the William Randolph Hearst Foundation; the Fondren Foundation; BMC Software, Inc.; the Wallace Foundation; the Louise Jarrett Moran Bequest; the Neal Myers and Ken Black Children's Art Fund; the Favrot Fund; and Gifts in honor of Beth Schneider.

Image Credits
(Cover)

José Guadalupe Posada, *Calavera de la Catrina (Skull of the Female Dandy)*, from the portfolio *36 Grabados: José Guadalupe Posada*, published by Arsacio Vanegas, Mexico City, c. 1910, printed 1943, photo-relief etching with engraving, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Museum purchase funded by the friends of Freda Radoff.

(Interior)

1. Egyptian, *Mummy of a Child*, 30 B.C.–A.D. 150, painted linen, Museum purchase funded by The Brown Foundation, Inc.
2. Constantin Brancusi, *A Muse*, 1917, polished bronze, Museum purchase funded by Mrs. Herman Brown and Mrs. William Stamps Farish.
3. Phillippe de Champaigne, *Saint Arsenius Leaving the World*, 1633, oil on canvas, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston.
4. Franco-Netherlandish, "*Wendekopf*" *Memento Mori Rosary Bead*, 16th century, ivory, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston.
5. Grupo Mondongo (Juliana Laffitte, Manuel Mendanha, and Agustina Picasso), *Calavera 4 [Skull 4]*, 2009, plasticine on wood, Museum purchase funded by the Latin Maecenas.
6. Damien Hirst, *End Game*, 2000–2004, glass, stainless steel, human skeletons, and medical equipment, gift of Jereann and Holland Chaney in memory of Robert H. Chaney.
7. Akan, *Ring with Skull and Crossbones*, 19th century, gold, gift of Alfred C. Glassell, Jr.
8. Huastec, *Celestial Conch Shell with Skulls*, 900–1521, conch shell, Museum purchase funded by James C. Flores in honor of Alfred C. Glassell, Jr., at "One Great Night in November, 2007"
9. Moché, *Skull Vessel*, 100–800, terracotta with slip, Museum purchase funded by The Brown Foundation, Inc.
10. Maya, *Vase with Three Gods of the Underworld*, 600–900, terracotta with slip, Museum purchase.

A LOOKING ACTIVITY

CALAVERAS AT THE MUSEUM

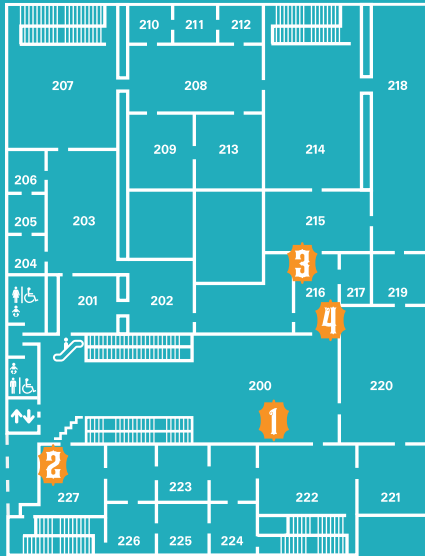
MFAH THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON



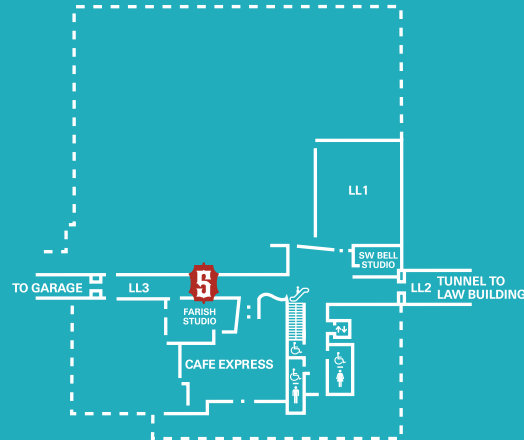
Using the map of the Museum inside, can you find these ten works of art that have images of skulls and skeletons?

A LOOKING ACTIVITY: CALAVERAS AT THE MUSEUM

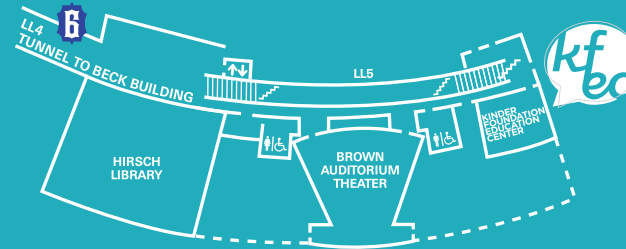
Find at least 6 of the *calaveras* below and collect a prize at the Kinder Foundation Education Center!



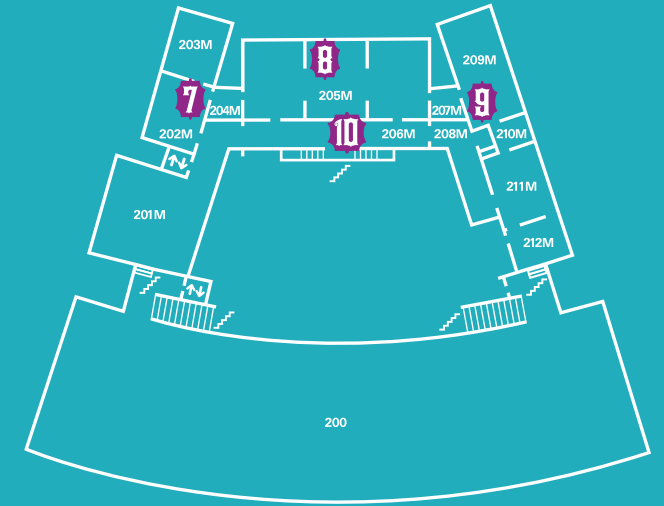
Audrey Jones Beck Building,
Second Floor



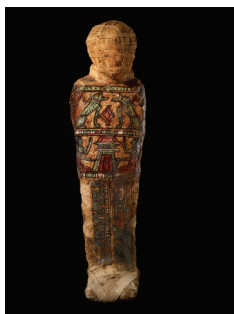
Audrey Jones Beck Building,
Lower Level Corridor



Caroline Wiess Law Building,
Lower Level Corridor



Caroline Wiess Law Building,
Second Floor



1 Beneath 2,000-year-old, colorfully painted linen mummy wrappings are amulets, jewelry, and real skeleton bones.



2 Shinier than bone, the artist Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957) created this simple human form from polished bronze in 1917.



3 Born to a wealthy Roman family, Saint Arsenius would later give up all his worldly possessions to wander the Scetes Desert of Egypt in this painting from 1633.



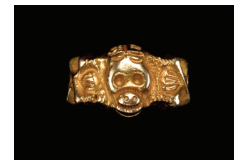
4 This ivory rosary bead from the 16th century has two sides representing both life and death—one side a skull, the other the face of Jesus Christ.



5 Look closely inside the skull to find many tiny sculptures made of modeling clay by the Argentinean artist collective, Grupo Mondongo, in 2009.



6 In this cabinet, created between 2000 and 2004, by Damien Hirst, male and female skeletons are surrounded by surgical instruments.



7 For the Akan people in Africa, gold rings with skull and crossbones such as this made important statements about a chief's power.



8 Look closely at this conch shell from the Huastec culture (900–1521) and see the carved details of skeletons and skulls.



9 From the Moché culture of Peru (100–800), this skull vessel may have represented the common practice of human sacrifice.



10 On this more than 1000-year-old vessel, look closely at the procession of Mayan gods led by the God of Death with a skeleton torso and head.