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## 640 Skulls Go On Display at Cal Academy

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May 13, 2014



With a collection of craniums spanning millennia, the California Academy of Sciences' new *Skulls* exhibit approaches the sometimes macabre subject from a perspective that both scientists and artists can appreciate.

Because every skull—there are 640 on display, including a 1927 warthog skull from Tanzania, (pictured here)—tells a unique story, fascinating biological and historical discoveries are par for the course. Cases in point: The skulls of two male deer, who died in 1946 while their horns were hopelessly interlocked, illuminated for scientists the territorial behavior within the species; weighing in at 218 pounds, the cranium of an African bull elephant helped underscore its ranking as one of the largest living land mammals on Earth; and a young sea lion's braincase, bearing a deep gash from a fisherman's net, reveals the bone's attempt at regeneration, testimony to the fishing industry's impact on ocean life.

Every few days, one of the display skulls is cleaned by dermestid beetles, which is standard operating procedure not just for bone specimens entering a scientific collection, but also, presumably, in the wild, as part of the proverbial ashes-to-ashes process. Staring death in the face has never been so riveting.

*Skulls opens on May 16 at the California Academy of Sciences (Golden Gate Park).*

<http://www.7x7.com/arts-culture/640-skulls-go-display-cal-academy>