



Artists put heads together

Thirteen artists, including Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin, have each customised a skull to reflect their personalities. They were persuaded to get ghoulish by Abigail Lane to create the centrepiece for her *Bone Idle* exhibition at the Charing Cross Gallery in London. Hirst, 40, the former bad boy of Brit Art, called his design *Spin Skull 5, 2005*, while Emin, 42, perhaps best known for candid revelations of her love life, created *Little Baby 2005*. David Grob, the gallery owner, said: "It is fascinating to see how each skull has been

adapted by the artists, each with a different interpretation but still in their own unique style. From these, we may possibly be able to reveal their inner psyche and get to the core of their personalities. We anticipate that each individual skull will command a fair price at auction." The skulls will be sold at a private auction in the gallery as separate lots on November 24. Works pictured, clockwise from top left, are by Gary Hulme, Angus Fairhurst, David Harrison, Damien Hirst, Peter Blake, Abigail Lane, Don Brown and Sarah Lucas.

Troops told to wear body armour

British troops in northern Afghanistan have been ordered to wear body armour and helmets at all times when travelling outside their base after the death of a colleague (Michael Evans writes). Lance Corporal Steven Sherwood, of the 1st Battalion The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment, was identified by the Ministry of Defence as the soldier who died on Saturday. Corporal Sherwood, 23, died when a gunman suddenly opened fire with a machinegun at his patrol which consisted of two unarmoured Land Cruis-

ers. He was not wearing body armour or a helmet because his patrol was driving through the centre of Mazar-i-Sharif, which was considered to be a safe area. Defence sources said: "This man just stepped out and opened up with a machinegun which has forced us to carry out a reassessment of the whole security situation in Mazar." The incident happened in front of Mazar-i-Sharif's 970-year-old Blue Mosque, the second biggest mosque in the world. Five other British soldiers were wounded.

Cutlery under the hammer



What could be the oldest complete set of silver cutlery in the world is expected to fetch £500,000 at auction at Christie's in London on December 1. The German *basse-taille* enamelled silver and parcel-gilt service dates from 1615. Intricately worked and enamelled in bright, translucent colours, it is in exceptional condition. It was made by David Altenstetter, an Augsburg goldsmith and one of the finest enamellers of the Renaissance.

Madonna defends her beliefs

Madonna has provoked anger from Jewish groups after defending her devotion to Kabbalah beliefs with the assertion that "it would be less controversial if I joined the Nazi party" (Adam Sherwin writes). The 47-year-old singer defended the ancient Jewish mystical tradition after the house arrest in Israel of one of its leading figures and called for greater tolerance of its devotees. But she lashed out at kabbalist rabbis who criticised her decision to release a song apparently about the faith on her latest album, saying: "What

are they doing commenting on pop songs? Don't they have synagogues to pray in?" Describing her faith to the *New York Daily News*, Madonna said: "I find it very strange that it's so disturbing to people. It's not hurting anybody. It would be less controversial if I joined the Nazi party." She said that she could relate to the actor Tom Cruise, who has been ridiculed for being a Scientologist. Madonna said: "If it makes Tom Cruise happy, I don't care if he prays to turtles. And I don't think anybody else should."

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