

## Coffin Calendar Girls: A New Take on an Old Trope

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This paper explores a recent manifestation of the Death and the Maiden art genre through an analysis of coffin calendar art. In Northern European art, Death and the Maiden generally features a young woman alone in the company of Death. This genre of art has a long history and the early images portrayed Death as a predatory male (Welch 2013). The first of these dates to the proto-Reformation<sup>1</sup> artist Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). His *Young Woman Attacked by Death (The Ravisher)* (c.1495; Fig. 1) clearly situates Death as a male sexual predator, and this theme can be seen in the contemporary artworks of Hans Baldung (alias Grien) (c.1484-1545; Figs. 10 and 13), Niklaus Manuel (Deutsch) (c.1484-1530; Fig. 7), and Hans Sebald Beham (1500-1550; Fig. 6). These proto-Reformist (prior to 1517)/early-Reformist (post 1517) artists produced erotic images in this genre which typically situated the maiden as a young fecund woman, and Death as a leech, either and most often imaged as

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1 The term proto-Reformist/Reformers refers to individuals who, before Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses in 1517 were sympathetic to, or working towards reforming the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in terms of afterlife beliefs and the eradication of purgatory. Dürer, despite being artist to the Holy Roman Emperor, had contacts with various proto-Reformers and is known to have been sympathetic to Lutheranism (see Harbison 1976).



Fig. 1. Albrecht Dürer. 1495.  
*Young Woman Attacked by Death.*  
 Private Collection. Public domain, via WikiArt.

a decomposing body, or occasionally an expressive skeleton<sup>2</sup>.

Firmly related to Biblical notions of gender, concupiscence, sin and the after-life, the proto- and early-Reformist artists were concerned to show in their *Death and the Maiden* work that lasciviousness in this-life could lead to a terrible after-life. With the Roman Catholic notion of purgatory for these artists questionable at the very least, their work graphically illustrated that an mortal existence of sin, signified by the woman who as Eve brought life (Gen 3:20) and the sin of sexual desire (Gen 3:16) into the world, could lead to a post-mortem eternity in hell; symbolised by the masculine figure of death, Adam was considered responsible in Augustinian theology (the theology of the Reformation) for bringing death into the world through the sin of disobedience against God in the Garden of Eden (Rom 5:12) (Welch 2014, 5).

Prior to the *Death and the Maiden*, death had largely been represented as an anonymous and genderless neutrally-posed skeleton, either in the 'Three Living Three Dead' style of artwork, which depicted three socially elite individuals in the company of their deceased opposites (Fig. 3), or in the 'Dance of Death' murals, which depicted members of every class of society (often from babies to bishops), each being taken away by a skeleton (Fig. 4), or, more rarely, an enfleshed depiction of death. (The Tallinn, Estonia, and Lübeck, Germany, are examples of the skeletal 'Dance of Death' mural, whilst the enfleshed can be seen in Lucerne, Switzerland.). Both the 'Three Living Three Dead' images, and the 'Dance of Death' murals clearly stated that death was not only a universal phenomenon, but that death was a social leveller (Welch 2014, 4).

Representations of Death personified, rather than death as a featureless and neutral skeleton, gives rise to issues of Death and gender, and as Guthke (1999) has noted, Death has been depicted in both male and female forms over the

<sup>2</sup> Death is very clearly a decomposing male in Grien's *The Three Ages of Woman and Death*, which images a piece of rotting flesh in place of/as Death's penis, whilst Sebald Beham's *The Hour is Over* (1541) is representative of the lewd skeleton depiction.

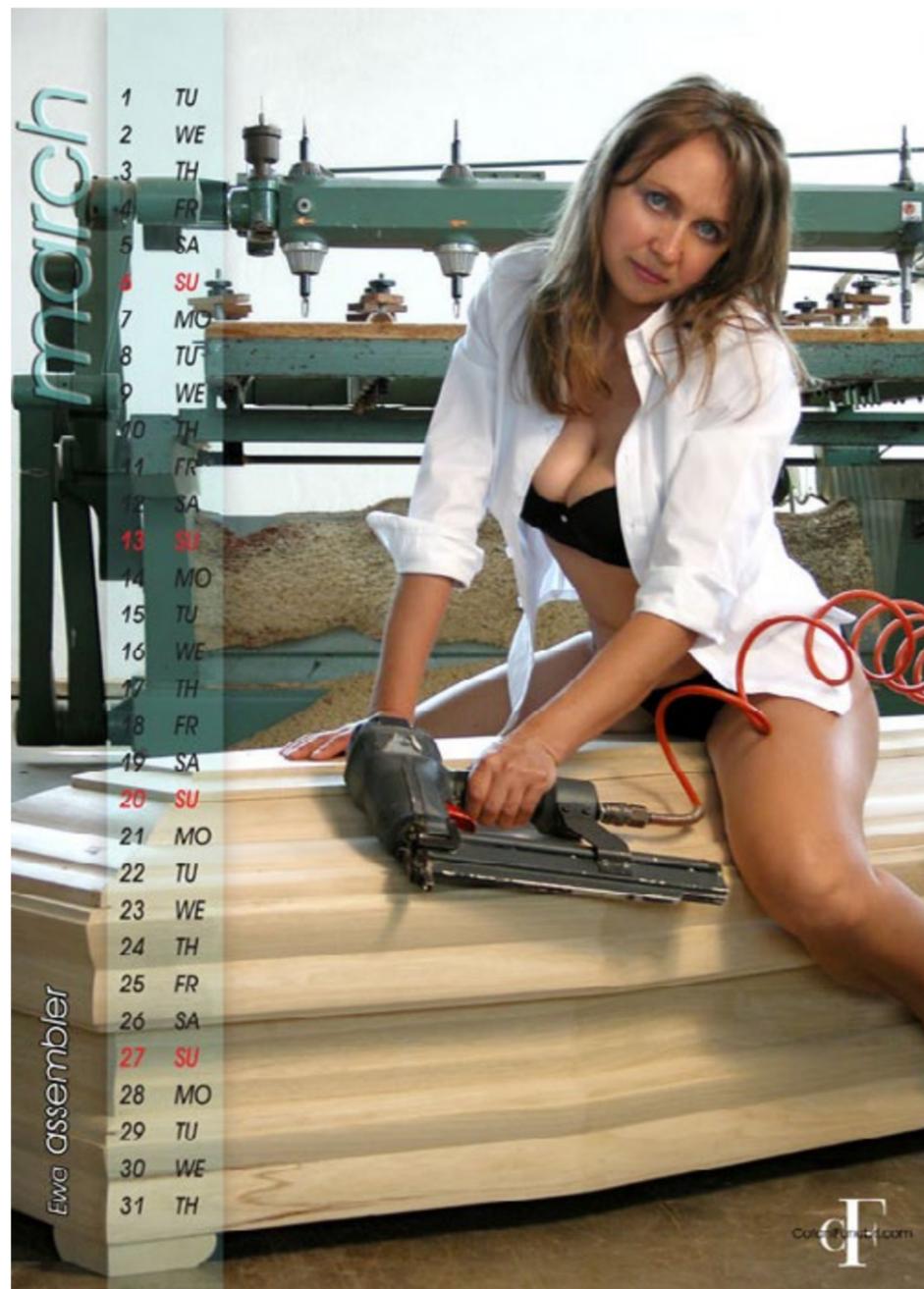


Fig. 2. Cofani Funebri.  
March Calendar 2005.



Fig. 3. *The Three Living and the Three Dead*.  
Fresco Painting. Église Saint-Germain de La  
Ferté-Loupière.  
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.



Fig. 4. *Dance of Death* (Detail), 1474.  
Fresco painting.  
Church of St. Mary, Beram, Croatia.

centuries. This has been both for linguistic reasons, for instance in German 'death' has a masculine designation, whereas in Spanish 'death' is grammatically female, but also for political purposes; for instance Niklaus Manuel in his Dance of Death mural for the Bernese Dominicans (1515-20), deliberately imaged the canon being led away by an elderly skeletal woman to show his dissatisfaction with the Catholic religion of the day (Guthke 1999, 119). Deutsch believed the Dominicans to be corrupt so incorporating a female Death indicated that the monks may have, against their religious orders, been consorting with women; a further image in this mural depicted a skeletal Death groping and kissing a young woman (21).

These Death and the Maiden depictions were essentially religious and political. They informed the viewer to think of the eternal afterlife (signified by Death), rather than the transient pleasures of this life (symbolised by the Maiden). They were produced at a time (c.1497-1547), and in a place (Northern Europe), that was characterised by religious upheaval; the questioning and eventual decline of Roman Catholicism in favour of Protestantism. Further, they were produced in an era where women were typically understood as signifiers of wantage, pleasure, and the unruly (Purkiss 1992, 74, 78), and when works such as the *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Hammer of Witches*) reinforced the generally held view that women were far weaker in their faith than men, and more lustful in thoughts and actions (Broedel 2003, 178); indeed women signified everything connected with concupiscence and earthly materiality (Weisner 2000, 272), and this was deeply problematic to those who encouraged thoughts and actions to be focussed on ones religious faith, and one after-life destination.

This paper draws on the Northern European gendered history of the representation of Death in exploring and complicating the Death and the Maiden photographs of two coffin manufacturers: the Italian coffin manufacturing company Cofani Funebri, which since 2003, has been producing calendars to advertise their coffins (in collaboration with co-owner, the Italian photographer, Maurizio Matteucci [in Sauer 2008]); and the Polish coffin manufacturer Lindner, who since 2010 have been producing their own version of this very particular

style of marketing. Both companies only sell their calendars online but no information about sales figures is available. It would be fair to say though that these are niche products designed for a specific collectible market. The paper will provide an overview of both sets of calendars from their inception to 2013, and explore the images in terms of the gendering of death with a particular eye to Bakhtin's Carnavelsque. Bakhtin's notion of carnival is concerned with liminality (the betwixt and between), parody and 'grotesque realism' (1984, 19), and whilst fertility is a leading theme, death is ever present (50). In a similar vein to Freud's (1924) Eros and Thanatos, life (fecundity) and death are intimately bound.

The first coffin calendar came out in 2003. Produced by Cofani Funebri in Italy, it featured six shots (1 page for two months) and a cover photograph. This initial foray into coffin calendars featured 5 shots of a woman, or 2 women dressed as angels posed with a company coffin, but one photograph was of a male angel (November-December). All the pages had a short piece of prose, written in English, and the designs were not overtly sexual although the presence of cleavage suggests mild eroticism. The 2004 calendar was more explicitly sexual and featured only women. One shot had a naked woman draped in an American flag reclining beside a company coffin (November-December), whilst another featured a young lady in the process of removing a company t-shirt (March-April); the pose suggests she is bra-less and the overall look gives a sense of voyeurism to the viewer. With all female models the calendar was very clearly in the realms of Death and the Maiden with a young (fecund) woman in the company of death, signified by a company coffin. 2005 moved to a 12-month format. This year found scantily-clad women engaged in the coffin manufacturing process. Miss March straddles a coffin dressed only in black lingerie and an open white blouse, holding a power tool (Fig. 2), whilst Miss July, in the same outfit, poses with a chisel. Both women display their ample cleavage and are posed in a semi-sexual manner. It would appear that whilst Dürer's Death attacks the woman (Fig. 1), here the women have the upper hand. Dürer's woman pulls away from Death, he is naked, she is clothed, whereas in these photographs, it is the woman who, virtually naked, command



Fig. 5. Cofani Funebri  
December Calendar 2007.



Fig. 6. Hans Sebald Beham. 1548.  
*Sleeping Girl and Death.*  
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden.  
Public domain.

the situation; they may still be on top of the symbol of death, but their direct gaze indicates they are firmly in control.

Clearly the calendars are not trying to state that death can be controlled (for death remains inevitable) but by playing with the Death and the Maiden trope, reversing the genre to place women rather than Death centre stage, these calendars can be read as Carnavalesque. The women signify fecundity, they are in their sexual prime, and their dress and pose eroticises them. This aspect becomes ever more prominent as the years progress. In 2006 we find an explicitly sexual calendar. The lighting is dim and the women are posed in just lingerie with a company coffin as a background. The women are very clearly the focus. June features one woman with a long metal chain around her neck, the second woman holds the chain and meets our gaze, whilst March features a woman masturbating; on all fours her left hand is between her legs whilst her right supports her weight. The eroticism has started to move from the playful to the pornographic in this calendar, and the images are now far more than busty women posed with coffins. The images are beginning to explicitly connect sex with death.

The 2007 calendar solidifies this. Overtly sexual, the photographs feature women in black lingerie with the accoutrements of a funeral procession. All the images show one or two young women in black top hats and black high heels, wearing black lingerie with black fishnet-stockings and a suspender belt. February features one female, she rubs her back against a gold electric torch, the type one might find in a funeral parlour. Wearing sheer fingerless opera gloves, her right hand is posed as if she is just about to slip her fingers into her knickers. December sees one young woman lying, back arched, on top of a coffin; the other woman is posed above her—the shots cannot be read as anything but erotic (Fig. 5). June however, is an anomaly. Here a slightly older woman wearing the same fishnets, heels and black top hat, is dressed in a black chemise which covers her torso. Although her gaze is at the viewer, she is posed as if hugging the coffin. This shot has traces of pathos, the coffin is more than just something to show off her sexuality; one is left wondering is



Fig. 7. Niklaus Manuel. 1517.  
*Der Tod als Kriegsknecht umarmt ein Mädchen.*  
Kunstmuseum, Basel.  
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.



Fig. 8. Cofani Funebri  
*October Calendar 2012.*

this coffin contains her deceased lover. 2008 appears to be a retrenchment from the soft porn shots of 2007. There is far less flesh on view, and although eroticism punctuates every image, the coffins are once more prominent. Most feature women posed against a coffin, their legs open, their breasts on view with their looks reminiscent of the soft porn shots one would find in a high street men's magazine; sexually knowing, and/or mildly provocative. However, in this calendar some effort was made to match the coffin design with an outfit. January sees a coffin decorated with flowers advertised by a young woman in a flowery summer frock; that she leans against it, eyes closed, pulling the hem to the tops of the thighs, suggests sexuality and again positions this year's offering within the reversed Death and the Maiden trope; death is present but the maiden is not pulling away.

In some of the earlier Death and the Maiden works, we find the maiden open to Death's sexual advances. Niklaus Manuels' 1517 *Death and the Maiden* (Fig. 7) is an example. Here a young woman appears to lift her skirt and allow Death's skeletal hand to touch her genitals. The couple are engaged in a kiss. Similarly Hans Baldung's 1519 *Death and the Woman* (Fig. 10) depicts a female seemingly content with Death's kiss. In both images there is a play on words. In Latin *Mors* is death, whereas *Morsus* is bite, and thus the bite of Death provides both a literary and artistic pun whilst simultaneously reminding the early Modern viewer of the Biblical truism that it was Eve's bite of the forbidden fruit in Eden that caused Adam to sin, and bring death into the world (Koerner 1985, 87). The Biblical links—casting Death as Adam and Woman as Eve—were potently depicted in Baldung's work, the most prolific and arguably best known of the Reformation-era Death and the Maiden images.

However, not all of the Reformist-era Death and the Maiden artists took this overtly biblical stance. Sebam Beham for instance, in his 1541 *The Hour is Over* (Fig. 6), depicts Death as a leering winged skeleton. This angel of Death holds an hourglass (a signifier of mortality) to the shoulder of a naked sleeping female. Legs wide open, her vulva is the centre of the image and it powerfully situates this woodcut as essentially a Carnavalesque image of sex

and death. The Carnavalesque nature of Beham's work can be seen in Death's grotesque leer, the earthy inclusion of a chamber pot in the image, and liminality of sleep, which is the state that connects life and alert wakefulness, with death and unconscious non-existence. This is an image designed to juxtapose opposites; sex and death, flesh and skeletal, earthy human imminence and the transcendence of one's heavenly afterlife.

This desire to shock, and to play with the themes of fecundity, eroticism, and mortality were evident in Cofani Funebri's 2009 calendar. This was the first of their calendars to be shot outside rather than in their factory, and their only calendar to date that deliberately plays with, and plays on, the Christian notion of death. Whilst previous calendars featured a variety of company coffins, this featured just one; a coffin with an engraving of the crucified Jesus—arms outstretched, head facing to the right, he is depicted from the chest upwards. The lingerie theme for this calendar was corsetry, and the calendar appears to suggest that whilst Christianity may give one an afterlife in heaven thanks to the sacrifice of Jesus, in this life, eroticism is all-important. Arguably this thrust of thought can be read in the general reduction of adherence to Christian traditions in Northern Europe; the Reformation Death and the Maiden images were designed to make one consider one's afterlife and renounce thoughts of sensual pleasures, whereas today's society seems to foreground sensual pleasure and marginalise thoughts of mortality (Welch 2014, 16).

The front cover of this calendar depicts a woman in a crucifixion pose resting against a coffin, which, on a stand, supports her outstretched arms. Around her are the five stages of grief taken from the seminal work of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1969): denial, depression, acceptance, bargaining and anger (Fig. 9). The Death and the Maiden link in this calendar are undeniable. Other images feature women in various sexual poses with the Jesus coffin. Two shots (July and August) feature women erotically posed with a processional cross and are so



Fig. 9. Cofani Funebri.  
Calendar 2009.  
Cover



Fig. 10. Hans Baldung. c.1518.  
*Death and the Maiden*.  
Kunstmuseum, Basel.  
Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

controversial they do not feature on-line<sup>3</sup>. However, arguably as controversial are the two shots that pose the models as engaged in erotic behaviour with Jesus; Miss October sits legs apart on the Jesus coffin, Jesus's outstretched arms reaching up towards her crotch, her white stocking-ed legs provide a stark contrast with the dark wooden coffin; her fleshy fecund humanity also contrasts with the hardness of the symbol of death. Miss April similarly sits aside the Jesus coffin. His left arm reaches out to her leg lower leg; the position of his hand emphasizes her knee-length laced black boots and her black fishnet holdup stockings. Jesus' right hand reaches upwards and signals to her black panties. She meanwhile she cups her breasts and with eyes closed, tips her head down towards the coffin lid echoing the position of Jesus' tilted head. The other calendar shots are erotic but feature women posed on top of or inside the coffin and as such are not so potentially controversial.

2010 continued with the controversy, this time giving the calendar a Bondage and Domination theme. This calendar includes a male model although unlike 2003, he features in three of the months (April, June and December), and on the front cover. The front cover shot shows a coffin with a large cross on the lid (as with 2009, this coffin is the only design in the calendar), in front of the upright coffin is a standing man reading a book, spade in hand and wearing black clothing. At his feet is a young woman clad in rubber with a ball-gag in her mouth. Holding the knees of a crouching female in a sheer rubber uniform. This shot sets the tone of the following twelve images, and indicates a clear shift to a darker gothic form of sexuality. On the web site of the photographer a number of other shots suggest that this style of photograph is one he is comfortable with<sup>4</sup>; his motto is 'I don't just take photographs, I capture life and death!' In virtually every shot, the female model or models are dressed in some form of rubber clothing, and the make-up is heavy with a gothic

<sup>3</sup> All bar the two offensive months are available to view here [http://www.trovatuttoedicola.it/index.php?mod=calendari&act=show\\_calendario\\_mese&id=368](http://www.trovatuttoedicola.it/index.php?mod=calendari&act=show_calendario_mese&id=368) (viewed 1 October 2014)

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.fotocommunity.it/fotografo/matteucci-maurizio/foto/1760123> for an overview of the photographic work of Matteucci Maurizio (viewed 1 October 2014)

feel; dark red lips, heavily kohl'd eyes, black nails. The shots for November and December feature the two cover girl women, in November they appear to be readying a coffin for burial; the coffin lies empty and a large wooden cross stands behind it. In December the cover shot man lies in the coffin, one woman holds his spade and the other his book. There appears to be a story here with the cover showing the man engaging in Bondage activity and the closing image with him dead, however, the intervening shots do not add to this story as they largely just feature women chained to the coffin in a variety of outfits and in a number of sexual poses.

2011 continues the rubber theme but this time includes a number of topless shots. Several coffin designs are used and the general thrust of this calendar is women posed on top of, or inside the company coffins. Miss April is shot in close-up sitting inside a satin lined coffin, but little of the coffin is on show and as such as marketing tool, this image, says little about the product. Miss July meanwhile sits on some steps in a state of undress, a bottle of spirits at her feet, while at the top of the steps is an upright coffin lid; again there is very little information here about the actual coffin for someone interested in buying one. The use of scantily-clad sexy young women to advertise products is not new; sex sells (Reichert and Lambert 2003) although quite how sex sells a coffin, or makes a coffin sexy, is unclear. For someone arranging a funeral, seeing these Pirelli-style calendars in a funeral parlour is likely to cause much distress. As such they need to be understood as a marketing ploy to raise the profile of the company through their unusual Death and the Maiden content, rather than a product designed to sell the company coffins to prospective purchasers.

The spectacle marketing element of the calendars is most clearly expressed in the 2012 calendar which does not feature a single company coffin. Each shot features a skeleton posed inside a Perspex coffin; something the company does not manufacture. The shots express the Carnevalesque, in that the skeleton reacts to the pose of the model; In October the skeleton crosses his hands over where his genitals would be, whilst the young woman holds a riding crop

ready to beat him; despite being a skeleton and thus genderless, the images strongly suggest the skeleton is male (Fig. 10). In December, the young woman straddles the Perspex coffin touching her crouch, whilst the skeleton attempts to break out of the coffin; it would be possible to read the skeleton as female and give the calendar a lesbian tone, but given the patriarchal nature of Italian society and their still relatively strong adherence to Catholicism, this queer reading is highly unlikely (Sansone 2009, 138).

The last calendar I will explore, the 2013, attempts to return to its roots. For the tenth anniversary edition, the calendar is titled, in English, '2013 Sexy Coffin Calendar' and features young women as angels; all posed on company coffins. The cover shot shows a skeleton coming down some stairs to find a young woman in gothic-style gear perching on the side of an open casket; hardly any of the coffin is visible but this shot gives a nod to the previous years' offering. The models this year includes a black female, who is always posed with black wings whereas the Caucasian models have white wings. Few of the images are overly sexual with the young women in a range of corsetry, although Miss September is touching her crouch; several shots feature women with chains which echoes the 2009 Bondage-themed calendar.

It is clear that the past ten years has seen an evolution of the Death and the Maiden theme in the coffin calendars by Cofani Funerari. Initially located in terms of death, rather than Death and the Maiden, the 2003 calendar with its angels and life-focused prose, complemented the marketing of the company coffins. However, the following year the calendar's images can be firmly located within the Death and the Maiden genre, with the coffin as the signifier of death. Over the next nine years, the portrayal of the maiden's in the calendar becomes increasingly erotic and as such echoes the proto-early-Reformation images, although as mentioned earlier, the calendar shots reverse the emphasis of the earlier Death and the Maiden imagery, placing the fecund female, symbol of transient life (*vanitas*) and earthly pleasure (*voluptas*) over the signifier of mortality. Whilst Death was personified in the earlier work, he now becomes the contemporary symbol of mortality, a coffin. Still masculine in

terms of gender norms, the coffin is more acceptable as an image of death for cultures in which the dead are hidden away, and the process of bodily disposal professionalised and industrialised (Walter 1994; Davies 2002).

Now we move onto the coffin calendars produced by the Polish company *Lindner*. These are described on the company website as 'exclusive products for collectors and beauty connoisseurs'<sup>5</sup>. The first calendar came out in 2010 and was a response to the Italian company's 'sex sells coffins' marketing. However, what is intriguing about this calendar is that whilst there is a very clear Death and the Maiden theme, in that a woman is posed with a signifier of Death, the female here could be read, in some shots, to be Death herself, thus echoing the Deutsch, Dance of Death mural image of Death and the Canon; however Death is now young and sexy rather than being elderly and a figure of humiliation. In a number of shots, the maiden holds weapons of death; the April shot features a woman in a camouflage bikini and high strappy heels, lying provocatively on top of a coffin; her back arched to ensure her breasts are prominent. She holds a rifle. June poses a young woman in a red tartan bikini and sneakers against an upright coffin. Her left hand holds a pistol which points down towards the ground. The black metal of the weapon contrasts with her white lacy stockings. Septembers depicts a woman in lingerie holding a scythe. With the setting sun as a backdrop, an open casket rests against a hay bale, and this blonde female grim reaper stands in front of the mahogany lid. Finally October images a model, scantily-clad in a strappy black cut-out basque with knee high boots, leaning on a large sword. Her direct gaze with the viewer, and slightly open mouth is sexy suggestive as she straddles a coffin. It is not clear what the sword has been used for, but its presence suggests violence, strength and power.

In all the above shots, the female model takes a masculine role in terms of normative gender stereotypes (predatory, connected with culture, dominant),

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.kalendarzindner.pl/editions/> for the 2010-2013 calendar shots for each month (viewed 1 October 2014)

yet she is dressed to thrill a hetero-normative audience. She acts then as both the fecund maiden, a symbol of life and lust, and as death, or at least the potential bringer of a violent death. Further, as with the coffins in the 2003-2013 Confani Funebri calendars, death is not personified; whilst this alters in their 2013 offering, the skeletal representation bears little resemblance to the enfleshed images in the proto-and early-Reformist artists, although echoes the Carnavalesque aspects of this early Death and the Maiden imagery.

Several images in the Lindner calendar however, do not give the maiden a Grim Reaper overlay, but clearly place her as a fecund and life-embracing figure triumphing over the signifier of death. March for instance features a scantily-clad woman with her foot resting on a coffin; her position sat above the casket and her sexy outfit connate life over death. In September, we see a young woman pushing a coffin off a pier into the water below. Dressed in a short silver dress and high heels, she too suggests that fecund life is prevailing. In November, we see a young woman in a shot that suggests she is about to bury a coffin in a sand quarry. She stands on the coffin beside a beaten up van in strappy heels, and a skirt so short her bottom is on display. Her left hand hold the handle of a spade, and as such the viewer is left in no doubt of her intention. This reading is reinforced in that the February image shows a young woman in black lingerie with a coffin half in a white limousine. Stopped on a country road, she seems to be pushing the black funeral casket into the vehicle. The shot implies she is disposing of the coffin and whoever is inside. In December, a bare-bottom blonde in black hold-ups and high heels, wearing a cropped fitted jacket, drags a coffin across a bridge, bottle of champagne in hand; quite where she is taking the coffin is unclear but the overall image connotes as a celebratory event.

January however is slightly more complex and ambiguous in terms of imagery. The image depicts a bride sitting astride a coffin. Showing cleavage and bare legs to the tops of her thighs, she is imaged in a moonlit cemetery with a scowling expression on her face and as in all the images, holds the viewer in a direct gaze. Her hands hold the coffin lid in such a fashion that the viewer

is left unclear whether she is about to open the coffin, or whether she has closed it, but given she sits on the coffin, the overall image suggests the later. Her bridal gown implies a future, a family, and happiness, life in its fullest, yet whether this bride put her spouse in the coffin, or is trying to get him out, the backstory is sinister. However, the shot situates her in an outfit that signifies life, sitting astride a signifier of death and as such is an image that reverses the proto-/early-Reformation Death and the Maiden trope. Life conquers, at least in this calendar shot, the symbol of mortality.

The 2011 has a similar theme, perhaps most potently expressed through the back cover image which features a couple seemingly engaged in coitus; the viewer sees a man, bare-chested but with pin-striped trousers on, and a woman sat on a coffin facing him, her left leg wrapped around him. His right hand rests on her thigh, and her arms hold his neck and waist – although the viewer does not see an act of penetration, the position of the couple is indicative of this. In effect, the calendars last word is that life in all its sensuousness conquers, if not death itself, then the knowledge that one day we will all die. Echoing Freud's concept of Thanatos and Eros (1962, 30). Lindner combines our drive toward death, with our drive towards life and creation. The front cover shot is suggestive of this, picturing a close-up of a female bottom, stocking tops just visible and wearing a black frilly thong. Her hands are clasped behind her back and thus visible; one arm is decorated with a pearl bracelet, a small coffin hanging off it, and in her hand is a pistol. The lingerie and pearls are erotic (Pearls have long been considered a symbol of fertility and eroticism [see Simpson, 2004]), and their sexual suggestiveness and material pleasure contrasts with the coffin and gun, both indicative of mortality.

However, the calendar shots inside take a less direct stance in juxtaposing sex and death, and indeed, are somewhat ambiguous. In April, we return to the maiden as the bringer of death. A woman in a short pin-striped dress holds captive a man. She stands, pistol in one hand, holding a rope that binds his hands. The man sits naked, bar a pair of boxer shorts, in a chair; coffins line the walls. As a grim reaper figure she breaks stereotypes, for, as with several of

the 2010 shots, the female model is in heels and bears a lot of flesh; as a grim reaper figure, the Lindner models bear no resemblance to Deutsch's elderly woman, nor the masculine hooded skeleton; young, sexy, and provocative, these women are life-embracing, erotic signifier of earthly pleasure (*voluptas*) and transient life (*vanitas*); indeed, as potential bringers of death through the weapons they wield, the *vanitas* association is amplified.

Yet, other shots negate the maiden's possible murderous role. In January the viewer sees a lingerie-clad woman trying to save a near-naked man from being shot by a gangster; he is perched on an open coffin, machine gun to his neck, she appears to beg for his life whilst remaining a signifier of worldly pleasure through her scanty lingerie (Fig. 12). February shows a corset-clad model in an elegant living room, drinking whiskey from a cut-glass tumbler; the decanter is placed on a coffin which acts as a table. May depicts two women playing roulette in a casino, one rests her knee on a coffin, and September features a topless woman, holding her breasts in her hands, reflected in a mirror. In pearls and red lipstick, a coffin is reflected too.

The ambiguity in terms of Death and the Maiden evident in both the 2010 and 2011 calendars can be explained in that 2010 was designed to feature some famous Polish landmarks, whilst 2011 had a Gangster feel, with the Jack Daniels style of marketing appropriated by the company; indeed in July we find an erotically-styled women breaking open a company coffin to liberate bottle stored inside—behind are wooden crates marked 'Lindner, Old Whiskey'. However, both editions do accentuate the sensuous and accentuate life-embracing materiality; perhaps odd for a company that is trying to sell coffins, for whilst sexy girls sell fast cars, as a marketing ploy the use of Pirelli-style imagery to advertise funeral caskets, is problematic.

The problems of using erotically posed women to sell coffins is particularly evident in the 2012 calendar. This edition focuses on the football world cup and sees twelve young women body painted in football colours, each posed with company casket. February features an English theme; a casket



Fig. 11. Linder.  
April Calendar 2010.



Fig. 12. Linder.  
November 2011 Calendar.

with a golfer on and the model body painted to imply the bear-skin guards at Buckingham Palace. April has a model in body painted *lederhosen* sat on a coffin that reads *Ruhe in Frieden* ('Rest in Peace'); this is their German shot. May meanwhile has a Marilyn Monroe look alike sat on a coffin engraved with a guitar and musical notes, to represent the USA. Football and sexy young women have very little to do with death, and should a bereaved person find one of these images in a funeral home or undertakers, I strongly suggest they would be unimpressed; as such their use as a marketing tool to sell coffins needs to be negated. However, what they, and the Italian calendars have done is drawn on the Death and the Maiden visual trope to raise the profile of the companies themselves. The juxtaposition of *eros* and *thanatos* in Death and the Maiden visuals remains a potent mix and speaks to Paul Messaris' notion of iconicity. Here pictorial representations 'make a persuasive communication due...the emotional response to the visual image presented' (1997, viii-xv). They are designed to stimulate erotic desire in heterosexual men through the use of heteronormative soft porn, naked or semi-naked young women in suggestive poses.

Lindner's 2013 does the heteronormative soft porn look in spades. It features totally naked (although heavily photo-shopped) women in a variety of situations. May shows a women sat on a bed that is coffin shaped; the image is shot so the women and coffin bed appears in a grave; the red rose signifies this is an image of love rather than necrophilia. June shows a naked female posed on a coffin inscribed with the words 'Rest in Peace'. Resting on her elbows and knees, chocolate drips down onto her back and onto the coffin. December depicts her in a mesh dress playing a piano, the keys being white coffins. And September implies a sexy satanic side to the female protagonist. In this image, the maiden is framed with fire, enthroned, she sits in a feathery black corset whilst beside her lays a large phallic looking submarine. November meanwhile makes the maiden a vampire, tearing flesh from her male victim whilst a wolf howls at the large full moon in the background. These appear to be fantasy shots, designed to play to particular sexual proclivities.

However, this particular calendar is more than just twelve images of erotic women with coffins that conform to the Death and Maiden genre in terms of signifiers. In October we find a *memento mori* image. Here a female angel draws out, what we assume is the soul, of a near naked young woman. The background features a clock and a coffin, reminders that there is a time to die. But this calendar's use of religion is also of particular note, and indeed in several shots echoes the religious roots of the 'Death and the Maiden' trope. January images a naked woman holding a globe. In the background is the universe, and the coffin she lies on is engraved with creatures. It is not unreasonable to read this as an echo of the Creation story in Genesis. February sees a naked women draped across a coffin which is the first in a step of coffins that stretches into the sky, this and April, which shows a naked female sat in front of a coffin with a ladder reaching into the sky, suggest Jacob's Ladder (Gen 28:12) (Fig. 14). March meanwhile features a naked women sat on a coffin with a snake wrapped around her. Behind her is a blasted tree and beside her an apple, this image is a clear signal to the Fall (Gen 3:16); here we find a reference to the maiden as Eve, a recurring theme in the work of the early Reformist arts, Baldung Grien, in particular.

The proto-and early-Reformist artists utilised the symbol of death in the presence of a fecund maiden to highlight the folly, futility and transience of earthly vanities, and the need for the viewer to foreground ones likely afterlife destination when considering material pleasures. In these calendars though, the trope is reversed, the transience of early pleasures is highlighted and in our contemporary Western commercial-driven society, the earthly is all-important; after all youth is fleeting, death is eternal so why not enjoy what you have whilst you can. However, they do remain much of the Carnavalesque and whilst doubtless shocking to some viewers, are less sexually and anatomically graphic than the proto- and early-Reformation 'Death and the Maiden' imagery. It would appear not only are modern audiences somewhat squeamish about death, but sex too has been sanitised for contemporary consumption.

In conclusion then this paper has explored ten years of coffin calendar images



Fig. 13. Hans Baldung. c.1530.  
*Eve, the Serpent and Death.*  
 National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.  
 Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.



Fig. 14. Linder.  
*March Calendar 2013.*

that fall into the 'Death and the Maiden' style of visual representation. It has examined them in connection with the gendering of Death, which whilst moving from a personified image to a company coffin has retained its masculinity. It has also analysed the calendar shots in regards to the visual message of the image. Whilst both sets of Death and the Maiden imagery fall within Messaris' concept of iconicity, the didactic has shifted. Proto- and early-Reformation Death and the Maiden work was designed to highlight the folly and futility of *vanitas* and *voluptas* for life was temporary and death eternal. With death also inevitable, one's afterlife destination, the artists considered, should be centremost. However, the coffin calendars have a different purpose; they are designed to raise the profile of the firms that manufacture the coffins, and as such are not necessarily intended to have a strong educational element. Yet, by drawing on the Death and the Maiden trope, they do. The images reflect contemporary Western society's commercially-driven desire for *vanitas* and *voluptas*; the earthly material sensuous pleasures that we know are transitory and therefore valuable. They reflect the modern's world's delicacy over the reality and inevitability of death, and the anatomical realism of the female form. Death is no longer personified and becomes a coffin, or a skeleton inside a coffin, and the maiden is erotic but photo-shopped, and/or dressed in apparel that is designed to appeal to a hetero-normative audience. Further, and perhaps most importantly, in a complete reversal of the early works, the calendar girls are seen to conquer this symbol of mortality, no longer is the Maiden taken by Death, but she seeks to defeat, if not death itself then at least its visual reality; the calendar images are a new take on an old theme and represent the modern Europe's rejection of the reality of death.

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Fig. 11. Linder. *April Calendar 2010*. [www.kalendarzbindner.pl/2010-en/](http://www.kalendarzbindner.pl/2010-en/). Last accessed 1 October 2014.

Fig. 12. Linder. *November 2011 Calendar*. <http://www.kalendarzbindner.pl/>

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Fig. 13. Hans Baldung. c.1530. *Eve, the Serpent and Death*. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons. [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hans\\_Baldung\\_Grien\\_-\\_Eve,\\_Serpent\\_and\\_Death.JPG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hans_Baldung_Grien_-_Eve,_Serpent_and_Death.JPG). Last accessed 1 October 2014.

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