



This is an ex-parrot...

Some people can't bear to be parted from their beloved pets when they die — so they have them preserved and mounted

PHOTOGRAPHS BY LUCA ROTONDO



Above: Lilli the dog was preserved as a gift from the circus owner Marco to his wife, Vanessa, left. Below: their pet parrot Piuma, who used to perform at the circus, is kept on display at the ticket office





Above: the maltipoo Moncici was preserved by her owner, Chiara, right, despite protests from her husband and children. "I am terrified of forgetting the things I care about," she says



Above: Carlos keeps Achille, left, at his antiques shop. "I'm not an emotional person," he says, "but I had a special connection with Achille"



Right: Tito is on display in the dining room of Feberico and his nephew Claudio, above, who live near Venice



Above right: Pini's body was buried in a pet cemetery and her skin used for taxidermy. The cat's owners, right, wish to be buried with it

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Sales of dogs and cats have rocketed over the past year as many of us swap office co-workers for four-legged friends. Never has there been a greater need for furry bundles of joy, proven to boost our health and wellbeing — all while becoming everyone's favourite family member. So what happens when they reach the end of their lives? The photographer Luca Rotondo noticed a growing trend for pet taxidermy in his native Italy, and travelled across the country to meet the owners who have chosen to have their dead dogs, cats and even parrots preserved for posterity. Animal taxidermy is nothing new. In Victorian Britain every town had a taxidermist and Queen Victoria herself collected stuffed birds. The practice fell out of fashion in the 20th century owing to its links to hunting and the illegal

trade of animals. But in more recent years it has enjoyed something of a revival, led by "ethical taxidermists" who source their subjects humanely — often animals that are found as roadkill or, as in these cases, from owners who can't bear to part with their pets. Rather than stuffing them, taxidermists remove the skins, preserve them at freezing temperatures and then arrange them around models of the original bodies. Creating lifelike results is painstaking work that can take several months and cost thousands of pounds, but bereaved owners are often willing to pay top dollar for a realistic reminder of the creature that brought them years of comfort and joy ■



Right: Aida has nine dogs, three cats and the preserved pincher Beige, above. Friends were sceptical, but "it makes me feel good, like he's still here", she says



Right: Alberto had Dinho, above, for five years. "I've embalmed his head to keep his memory alive as a form of respect and tribute, like a bust of an ancient emperor"



Right: Debora had Pascal, above, for nine years before he died of heart disease. She went to a taxidermist because "I couldn't accept the idea of not seeing him again"



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