

DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY

THE WORLD OF HR. GIGER

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**THE WORLD OF H.R. GIGER**

DOCTORAL THESIS

Submitted by:  
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Valencia, 2004

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*To Lucía and  
Mar To my family  
and friends*



This work is the result of much effort and would not have been possible without the invaluable help of my supervisors Pilar and Carlos, who have supported me throughout the years that this project has lasted.

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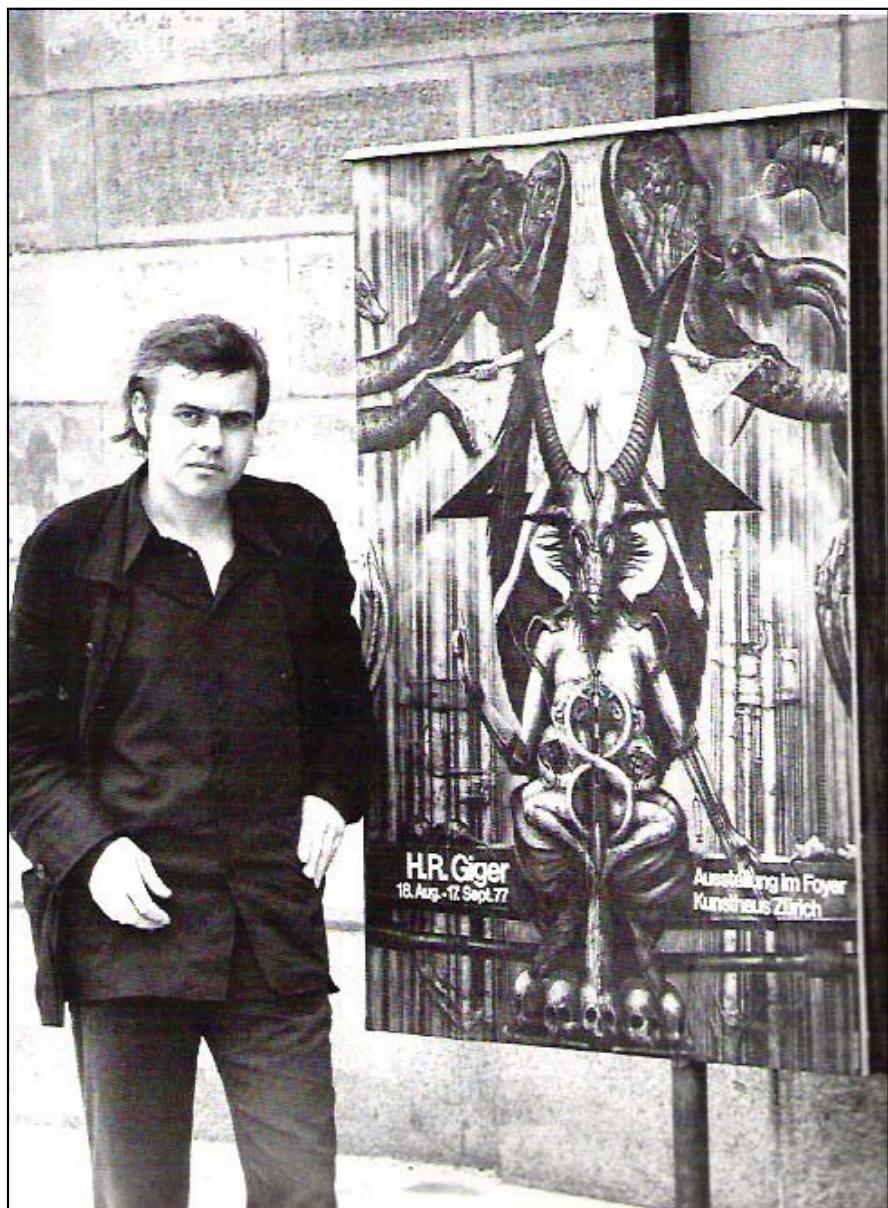
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*H.R. Giger in front of the poster for the 1977 exhibition at the Kunsthaus in Zurich.*



## INTRODUCTION

H.R. Giger's work provokes astonishment and strangeness at first glance, as it seems familiar to us for some reason, whether because of cinema, because we associate it with images linked to certain music, or for other reasons that we cannot pinpoint. This research originated initially from our fascination with this artist's work and, from there, from the need it created in us to analyse and publicise the most interesting aspects of his art.

He is a multidisciplinary, contemporary visual artist whose career spans almost half a century and who is virtually unknown in the academic world. Consequently, this work has a clear vindictory value because, although when we started it we thought it was unfair that Giger went unnoticed in the history of contemporary art, we are now convinced of it.

The absence of an in-depth study of Giger's work at university and the lack of a publication in the publishing world that went beyond the strict dissemination of his imagery stimulated our desire to begin research on this artist. Despite being ignored in academic circles and by most institutions related to the visual arts, we observed that his work exerts a certain fascination on various sectors of popular culture, generating a very interesting ambivalence that we will analyse towards the end of this study. The fact that Giger is admired by a wide range of contemporary creators who revisit his <sup>work</sup><sup>1</sup> and keep his artistic contribution alive, together with the unconditional support of the project directors, was the main motivation for the project, which was further enhanced when we had the opportunity to meet the artist in person and visit him on several occasions in his city, Zurich. Giger was initially surprised but offered to collaborate in any way possible so that we could get to know his world and his art first-hand.

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<sup>1</sup> In the section on the impact of his work, we will see how other creators have embraced Giger's original vision.

Our work aims to unravel his complex universe, which is made up of various factors to be taken into account, such as his training, his environment and his concerns. Giger's world, his imagination, will be the subject of the thesis. Our intention is to provide an overview of the artist, highlighting the most notable aspects and delving into the keys that drive his art and expression.

The historical period in which Giger's work takes place corresponds to the turn of the century and millennium and the doubts and fears that this generates, with the post-industrial revolution, the computer age and the Internet, and major scientific and technological advances that have not gone unnoticed by the artist.

### **The artist**

Giger is a unique creator with a very strong personality. He is a Swiss artist known primarily for his work on the film *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), in which he designed and created the monster protagonist and its *environment*. Fans of fantasy films know him because his designs have appeared in a dozen films of the genre or have seen his style plagiarised in many others. But film design is just one facet of Giger's work, as he is a multifaceted author: illustrator, painter, sculptor, writer and designer, not only for film, but also for posters, objects and architectural spaces. As a result, his work is very varied and extensive, spanning the last four decades. In this study, we will look at the highlights of Giger's different creative disciplines, emphasising not only his designs for cinema but also his pictorial work, as we believe this to be the most important because it allows us to better define the style, theme and content of his art.

One characteristic that makes any work by Giger unmistakable is his style, which he himself coined as *biomechanical*, a concept he uses to define his particular way of synthesising forms of natural (biological) and artificial (mechanical) origin, giving us an insight into some of the motivations behind his art. *Biomechanics* runs through all his creations with great coherence and unity and can be seen in his designs, paintings and sculptures. It is his form of expression and

constitutes his response to the world in which he lives, which in turn logically influences his way of seeing things. He contemplates with fascination the integration of man and machine and how they coexist in the industrial age in an unsettling communion. Man is increasingly becoming a prisoner of technology. In his work, we see machines growing like nature, in an uncontrolled, wild way, invading the human environment, and how man is transformed, metamorphosing into a monster, an aggressive and terrible being.

Giger can be considered a leading representative of late 20th-century magical realism. In this sense, he continues the basic principles of magical art, which is why various critics have sometimes classified him within movements such as surrealism and symbolism. The truth is that Giger has drawn on various influences from different historical periods, such as ancient cultures (mainly Egyptian), the Middle Ages, the 19th century and the modern era, and has combined them with various disciplines such as medicine, literature, mechanics, biology and robotics, thus shaping his personal universe. He combines these references with his particular concerns and obsessions, such as sex, the grotesque, the morbid and the deformed, in a complex and changing historical and cultural context such as the last third of the century, a time of revolutions and rapid transformations at all levels, a world in which science and technology are consolidating their position as fundamental tools for change and transformation. This is one of Giger's main concerns, and he uses art as a means of escape and expression. In some cases, he sends clear and forceful messages about what is happening around him, for which it is convenient to use his thematic palette and, above all, the iconographic and symbolic repertoire he has developed throughout his career, nourished by science fiction, cinema, horror novels and the occult. All these keys are juxtaposed in Giger's works, especially in the years when he worked with the airbrush, when his paintings took on greater dimensions and became more baroque in the sense that they were filled with figures and elements. These works have come to constitute Giger's "classical" period, because the

The highly elaborate and sophisticated images from this period fully define his characteristic style.

Starting from spiritual and sometimes psychedelic foundations, he has explored the dark and sinister side of human existence, managing to crystallise his hidden worlds plastically and visualise the deepest fears of our time. The results of his work warn us of the latent dangers in our end-of-century society in a terrifying and direct way: the politics of the *cyborg* body, the dilemmas of posthumanism, the dawn of the golden age of biology (cloning, transplants, prosthetic limbs...), the risks of space adventure and the deterioration of environmental conditions (destruction of the environment through atomic bases, pollution and overpopulation) constitute a host of problems that affect and concern us but which we easily forget. Giger's images seek to provoke a response, to move us and to anchor themselves in our unconscious. In fact, it is difficult to forget his airbrush paintings, his furniture designs or his monsters for the cinema. Their collective impact has been far-reaching due to the proliferation of certain aesthetic elements, mainly in the cinema, which owe much to Giger's formal and artistic approaches, but also thanks to the dissemination of his designs for album covers, posters and his illustrated books.

His artistic foundation is partly based on the premises of surrealism, one of the movements that has most influenced him; not surprisingly, his role model is Salvador Dalí. There is a common element in his works: the presence of the *fantastic*, in which unusual and imaginary elements play a fundamental role. As a good surrealist, he uses acid black humour and rescues from the unconscious world the nightmares that torment him in his dreams. However, despite the use of these resources, the most disturbing thing is the realism of his images, as everyday objects, organs and anatomies, especially phalluses and vaginas, are clearly recognisable. On the other hand, Giger does not create from nothing; he is very well documented through books, films and magazines.

In this way, he develops a tremendously rich individual mythology due to the powerful literary substrate that underlies all his work. Giger always sought new forms of expression and the expansion of knowledge, especially in his years of creative splendour, the 1970s. In 1972, he found the ideal medium to represent his personal universe: the airbrush, a tool with which he left his mark and endowed his particular style with its own characteristics. During those years, he used magic, alchemy, esotericism, Tarot cards, eroticism and, above all, his dreams to create a captivating imaginary world with which to nourish his pictorial universe.

One of the central themes of Giger's work is the human body and its manipulation, alteration and physical destruction. The body serves as a field of experimentation and an operating theatre for his ideas, which flow freely without self-censorship. In his work, the body is literally penetrated by technology. Therefore, the presence of bones and metal is logical to represent this relationship, as well as the symbiosis of anatomies and organs with mechanical objects. Just as in other eras artists such as Bosch or Goya represented some of the more sordid aspects of life such as death, violence and torture, Giger dwells on the macabre and terrible aspects of existence, but also cares for beauty and harmony. We see this contrast constantly. One of the foundations of his work is the balance between opposing forces, positive and negative, and the confrontation of opposites such as the archetype of beauty and the beast, and organic, living matter with inorganic, dead matter.

Throughout the study, we will consider different interpretations of his work from various disciplines such as art history, philosophy, medicine, literature and cinema. All these versions enrich the assessment of the work as they focus on specific aspects and comment on concrete appreciations, offering a multidisciplinary vision, something uncommon in artists of recent decades, who are normally only dealt with by art critics. Despite having received criticism that labels him as a mere film or *comic book* artist and therefore not worthy of attention as a major artist, we believe he is very interesting for contemporary historiography.

It is striking that assessments and opinions about his art are being expressed from all these fields, as it is normal in contemporary art for artists not to transcend beyond certain intellectual circles. The fact that Giger reaches such diverse fields is another factor to be taken into account when defending his work.

Giger is an unconventional and enigmatic artist, not so much because he always dresses in black, but because of the aura of mystery that surrounds his public appearances and photographic poses. His art has been received in different ways by the public, ranging from outright rejection, because they say it is strange and repulsive, to fascination, precisely because it is so strange and disturbing. The truth is that his works rarely leave anyone indifferent, and this catches our attention because it provokes an immediate response, which is not easy in today's elitist art scene. This is due to their visual impact, as they are very direct at first glance.

We find it interesting for several reasons:

- For his creative talent. Giger's art has an innovative and futuristic quality, seeking to create new things, unseen forms. In this sense, we think that giving shape and existence to things that occur in his imagination or in his dreams is something that is, in principle, difficult to achieve satisfactorily. Giger will try to develop his skills and technical knowledge in a self-taught way in order to take the expressive possibilities of sculpture and, above all, painting further.
- Because of the aesthetic value and uniqueness of the images he creates, because they speak to our society. His world is in a way ours too, but few know how to express it or dare to do so. The symbolic content and themes, the body, birth, death, sex, monsters and nature are current. He uses a modern discourse to address these issues.
- Because his work is open and continues to be reinterpreted, it is influential in contemporary culture. It is currently being revisited and in Europe there are attempts to bring it to the public's attention through exhibitions such as the one taking place in Paris this autumn.

## Research structure

To meet our objectives, we will structure the research into three main blocks.

We will first address the life and career of this artist in a *biographical study*, to gain an understanding of the world that has surrounded him from childhood to the present day. In the first section, we will see what kind of influence his environment and surroundings may have had: his family, the city and his friends shaped the artist's origins. During his childhood and adolescence, Giger developed a series of obsessions and hobbies that would have a profound impact on his maturity and become the themes he would work on as an artist. The second section will reveal his academic training and where he received it. Once we have learned about his artistic beginnings, we have divided his career into three stages, beginning with his first exhibition in 1966 and concluding in 2004 with a major retrospective in Paris.

We have titled the first stage '*experimentation*' between 1966 and 1971, as he tried out various techniques and disciplines in an attempt to consolidate his style. In 1972, he discovered the airbrush, which would become his signature tool and with which he fully consolidated his style, thus reaching his *mature* phase. In addition, thanks to his collaborations in film, his work spread throughout the world. In 1990, he abandoned the airbrush, beginning a new stage with *new ideas* and working mainly on sculptural and architectural projects.

In the second chapter, *Study of his work*, we will assess his creations as a whole from various points of view. First, we will analyse his references, especially literary and artistic ones. In the section dedicated to iconography, we will classify the various icons that appear repeatedly in his works. Section 2.3, *Artistic Disciplines*, constitutes the core of the work, as we will address his main creative facets, led by painting and cinema, as well as drawing, graphic design, sculpture, and architecture. Finally, in *Gigeresque Images*, we highlight a

series of symbolic categories that are very present throughout his work. These are the representation of women, children, monsters and portraits.

The third chapter is devoted to the impact that Giger's work has had on popular culture. We will reflect on Giger's role in contemporary culture, given that he has influenced various art forms such as fantasy art, science fiction cinema and literature, tattooing, comics and graphic design. Some current avant-garde movements consider him a cult artist and value him as one of the architects of the emerging aesthetics of the sinister, the *dark* style and the emergence of a new fin-de-siècle gothic. But perhaps even more interesting is Giger's visionary nature, as from his artistic beginnings he raised the issue of *the cyborg* and its medical and philosophical implications. He is also considered the initiator of postmodern trends and sensibilities such as *new flesh* and is admired by *cyberpunk* authors.

We will visually document the work with Giger's most relevant productions, as the total number of works would be overwhelming and sometimes the motif is repeated. The various translations are the work of the author, as most of the publications are originally written in German, English and French and the testimonies collected are in German.

## Sources

As we began our search for bibliographic material, we noticed that there were no books that studied Giger's work in detail. Most of the publications on Giger have been produced by the artist himself, which could lead to a biased view in our work. Giger has published around 20 books on his work, which will form the basic corpus of our analysis, as they are one of our main sources of information. They include, on the one hand, reproductions of practically all of his works, with specific details about them, and, on the other hand, autobiographical texts by Giger himself, sometimes supplemented by writings by critics and experts on his work.

The books published by Giger are noteworthy because their titles always feature the artist's name in the genitive case. For example: *Giger's Necronomicon*, *Giger's Biomechanics*, and *Giger's Film Design*. As Fellini did with his films (*Fellini's Satyricon*, *Fellini's Roma*), Giger thus emphasises the author's signature, his personal vision of the work produced as a form of artistic vindication. They also constitute a kind of artist's and collector's book, as they offer very striking formats and are sometimes published in special editions, numbered with lithographs or some other type of special material. The reproduction of the images in these books is of high quality. The accompanying texts are generally autobiographical, with anecdotes and memories of the artist. Within this set of publications, some critics have delved deeper into the study of his work, publishing articles of reflection with interesting comments that we will take into account when discussing the interpretations and readings of Giger's work.

Initially, our bibliographic search allowed us to find various publications, mainly related to the world of cinema, which mentioned his name, usually associating *it* with the film *Alien*. Giger's books have usually been published in German and English and have occasionally been translated into French and Japanese. Since Giger began working with the German publisher Taschen in the 1990s, his books have been translated into other languages such as Spanish, Italian and Dutch. In Spain, only two of his books have been translated: *H.R. Giger ARh+* (1991) and [www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com) (1997), both published by Taschen, which usually follows an editorial policy of translating its books into several languages to achieve wider distribution of its products<sup>4</sup>. Giger's other publications are difficult to find in Spain since virtually no public library has Giger's books in its collection (except for these two translated ones that have been

<sup>2</sup>The most interesting critical texts for our study are found in his books (mainly *Necronomicon I* (1977), *Necronomicon II* (1985) and *Biomechanics* (1988)) and in catalogues about his work (*Passagen* (1974) and *Visione di fine millennio* (1996)).

<sup>3</sup> Of particular note are the opinions of art critics (Fritz Billeter, Horst Albert Glaser and Michel Thevoz), contemporary thinkers (Timothy Leary, Stanislav Grof) and creators (the artist Ernst Fuchs, the filmmaker Ridley Scott and the writer Clive Barker).

<sup>4</sup>Both are more of a summary of previous publications and texts that have appeared in his other books.

more widely distributed) and it is somewhat difficult to find his books in bookshops, as some are currently out of print, sold out or have never been distributed here. Another factor to take into account is the lack of exhibitions in Spain, which could have generated catalogues or critical articles, meaning that the debate surrounding Giger has not taken place, except in certain cultural circles or on the street, where we have detected a certain interest in Giger.

Despite this considerable number of books promoted mainly by the artist himself in his eagerness to make his work known, or by companies simply interested in disseminating it, there is practically no rigorous, outside view, nor any accredited publication edited by an independent cultural institution or entity, which could undoubtedly have provided an external critical assessment of his work. We find this fact very significant, as it confirms that Giger's now extensive body of work, spanning more than 40 years of artistic career, has barely aroused institutional interest in his own country, unlike other artists. This fact caught our attention from the outset, since, as we shall see throughout this study, Giger is one of the most internationally renowned Swiss artists, whose work has had the greatest impact in recent decades, in various media and in different intellectual circles, which allows us to appreciate his contribution to the culture of the end of the century. With such a long and partially recognised career, a broad overview is needed to address the different phases or periods the artist has gone through, as well as a commentary on the personal, social and cultural situation that has surrounded him.

In contrast to the lack of monographs on Giger, there are a large number of articles containing critical information that will help us to compare data and comments on the artist. These texts have appeared in newspapers and magazines around the world since his first exhibitions and publications in Switzerland, highlighting the latent interest in his work. However

<sup>5</sup> Only the library of the Reina Sofia National Art Museum has a copy of the catalogue of the exhibition that Giger held at the Sydow-Zirkwitz Gallery in Frankfurt in 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Attending the Sitges Film Festival (2001 and 2002) and the International Science Fiction Congress in Nantes (2001 and 2002) made a pleasant impression on us, as we discovered the interest that the completion of this thesis aroused among critics, writers and artists.

It should be noted that most of these are journalistic approaches, more focused on the myth that underpins new aesthetic profiles connected to alternative cultural movements than on the artist himself.

The lack of information in Spain led us to consider searching for it in the artist's country of origin. In 1999, the Swiss cultural foundation Pro-Helvetia awarded a research grant for various stays in the country, which we took advantage of between 1999 and 2003. Thanks to this grant, we were able to access much of the information generated in Switzerland about Giger<sup>7</sup>. We also managed to contact the artist himself, visiting and interviewing him on several occasions. He has been our main source. This contact allowed us to view and evaluate a large number of his original works and to enter the artist's intellectual circle (gallery owners, critics, filmmakers, collaborators) to conduct interviews and chat with people who had direct knowledge of Giger's career.

After consulting the bibliographic sources, we noticed that there was a lack of classification and organisation of his work, as there is some confusion in his books due to the constant repetition of works, often reproduced without a clear chronological order.

In addition to bibliographic material and interviews, another very important source for us has been audiovisual material. Viewing his short films, *music videos* and films in which he has participated, documentaries about his work and audiovisual expressions clearly influenced by his work have made an important contribution. We have also systematically searched the Internet and visited various websites, especially Giger's two official sites, <http://www.hrgiger.com> and <http://www.giger.com>.

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<sup>7</sup> During these visits, we gathered approximately 90 per cent of the material published by and about Giger. In Zurich, we conducted research at the S.I.K. (Swiss Institute for Art Research) documentation centre and at the Kunsthaus (Museum of Fine Arts) library. In addition to these trips, we travelled to New York in September 2000, where we contacted his current manager, Leslie Barany, who provided us with a large part of the material published on Giger in the United States.

While this author is still relatively unknown in international academic circles, this is even more pronounced in Spain<sup>8</sup>, where he is practically unknown despite the fact that most people immediately recognise and associate certain works with him, as is the case with *Alien*, thanks to the cultural impact that cinema has on modern mass culture. Current curricula overlook the significant revitalisation that fantastic art is undergoing in contemporary popular and artistic culture. As Giger is one of the most important exponents of contemporary fantastic art, we will attempt to reflect on this issue throughout our study. Although Spain has fundamental artists in the tradition of visionary art such as Goya, Gaudí and Dalí, who are certainly closely related to Giger, the consideration of the Fantastic in this country is practically non-existent. A fundamental school of this artistic trend in the 20th century, such as the *Vienna School of Fantastic Realism*, is totally unknown, not to mention *modern Visionaries*.

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<sup>8</sup> With the coordination of Professor Carlos Plasencia, we have given a seminar on Giger at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the Polytechnic University of Valencia, with four editions of the seminar taking place in recent years. Through these experiences, we have seen the interest in Giger and his fascination among the university's fine arts students.

<sup>9</sup> When we began our work in late 1999, we had previously searched the curricula of several Spanish universities for subjects related to our work, but we did not find any topics that caught our attention. The truth is that in certain centres, Giger's name may have been mentioned in the classroom, almost always in relation to the film *Alien*, studying his connection with cinema and with the design of characters and creatures for this medium.

## **TUS OF THE ISSUE**

The approach to Giger's work has been mainly through his exhibitions, promoted by galleries and museums, and his books and catalogues. Subsequently, with his collaborations in cinema and his sculptural and architectural designs, his work has taken on a broader character, merging various concepts and artistic disciplines.

From the beginning of his career in the 1960s, the local press reported on his first exhibitions and works, arousing great interest among Swiss critics, who have been following his activities ever since. With the dissemination of his work in the 1970s to neighbouring countries such as Germany, texts began to appear that delved deeper into his work and creative personality. However, it was his collaboration on *Alien* and, above all, his Oscar win that brought him worldwide recognition. Since 1980, American film critics have closely followed his career and collaborations, producing a wealth of documentation on the subject. In addition, articles in Swiss and European newspapers and magazines have also multiplied.

### **The 1960s**

People began to talk about Giger from the moment he started exhibiting his work in public. This happened in 1966, when he held his first exhibition at the Benno Gallery in Zurich. Since then, he has continued to show his work in various Swiss galleries, mainly located in Zurich. The press echoed these events and published articles and reviews about the exhibitions and about Giger. The first articles we found date from November 1968. They refer to Giger's surrealism and his relationship with Austrian fantastic realism, his connection with science fiction, and the influence of literature and cinema on his figurative formulations.

Of particular significance was the interest shown by Zurich gallery owner Bruno Bischofberger<sup>10</sup>, who published and exhibited his early works. This immediately caught the attention of critics, as Bischofberger was and is one of the most important figures in the city, and the fact that he took notice of Giger was very significant at the time. "H.R. Giger is one of the few young artists who, with their first exhibition immediately start out in an international contemporary art gallery," wrote Erika Billeter.

Subsequently, the Swiss press closely followed Giger's activity as he presented new works in galleries and received commissions from various groups. At this time, numerous articles about Giger appeared in the Zurich newspaper *Tages-Anzeiger*<sup>12</sup>.

From the outset, Giger enjoyed a good relationship with the publishing world and knew how to network with art galleries and printing houses that disseminated his works throughout the world. Thanks to these relationships, Giger has published a considerable number of books and catalogues that provide information about his life and include most of his works. The publication and impact of his illustrated books were a decisive factor in his artistic career and key to his arrival in the world of cinema, as a result of which his commercial orientation became more evident and present in his career.

## The 1970s

In 1971, the first catalogue of illustrations of Giger's work appeared, entitled *ARh + [A]*, an abbreviation of the artist's blood type, published by the Swiss publishing house Walter Zürcher. This book, without text, collected most of Giger's work to date. On its cover was the *Birth Machine* (*Gebärmaschine*), one of the most emblematic works of the period. The press reported on the event and spoke of Giger's *vampiric surrealism*, which was already spreading throughout Switzerland with the widespread distribution of his posters and biomechanoids. The

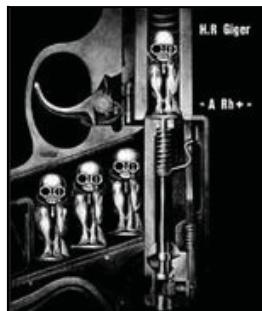
<sup>10</sup> Bischofsberger is considered one of Europe's most important gallery owners. He was the one who brought Andy Warhol's work to Europe. His gallery had the largest space at Arco 2003, which was dedicated to Switzerland.

<sup>11</sup> BILLETER, Erika. Die Elle-Galerie stellt H.R. Giger vor. *Elle*, 27-2-1970.

<sup>12</sup> See H.R. Giger beschert uns neue Schrecken. *Tages-Anzeiger*, 25-2-1970 and BAVIERA, Silvio Riccardo. Mutierte Wesen. *Tages-Anzeiger*, 27-2-1971.

*Giger's style* was beginning to become known, his *anti-design* and his science fiction graphics and plastic works. They also commented on the psychological relationships of his works with birth, existence and death.

Three years later (1974), a new catalogue was published by the Chur Art Museum<sup>13</sup> entitled *Passagen*, in which, in addition to illustrations, we find texts on his work, notably those by Frizt Billeter (art critic) and Sergius Golowin (writer and mythologist), who offer new readings of Giger's work, provide new perspectives and open the way to suggestive interpretations. Billeter, as a critic for the Swiss newspaper *Tages-Anzeiger*, has followed Giger's work practically since its inception, commenting on it on numerous occasions, and can therefore be considered an authority on the subject. Both Billeter and Golowin are great connoisseurs of his art from its beginnings. In addition, the artist documents the creation of some of his works through memories and dreams.



[A]



[B]

In 1976, the Sydow-Zirkwitz Gallery in Frankfurt held an exhibition that included an important commission<sup>14</sup>, with the publication of its corresponding catalogue

[B] which featured an extensive text by German professor Horst Albert Glaser, entitled *Intrauterine Technology for the Year 2000*<sup>15</sup>, which delved into Giger's motivations for creating his paintings and drawings, such as his relationship between traditional dream motifs, such as the fear of castration or intrauterine fantasies, and certain objects from the industrial era.

<sup>13</sup> Chur is the city where Giger was born.

<sup>14</sup> The creation of an environment composed of four large paintings, entitled *The Temple of Passages (Passagen-Tempel)*.

<sup>15</sup> In our opinion, it is one of the most profound works ever written about Giger.

Artistic recognition in Zurich and Switzerland came in 1977 with an exhibition in the hall of the Zurich Art Museum (Kunsthaus), which is the most important museum in Switzerland and one of the leading museums in Europe. Previously, the Kunsthaus had shown his work in group exhibitions, such as the 1st Swiss Art Biennial in 1972 and the *Tagtraum* experiment in 1974 alongside painters Claude Sandoz and Walter Wegmüller. In 1977, works from 1975 and 1976 were presented, and the documentary *Giger's Necronomicon* on the artist's life and work was shown daily.

In 1977, Giger published his first large-format book, *H.R. Giger's Necronomicon* [C], translated into French and English with the aim of giving it wider distribution beyond the Germanic sphere. It is his best-known and most important book. It contains airbrush paintings from the 1970s, which represent the artist's heyday. It includes literary quotations from Eliphas Levi and Gustav Meyrink and autobiographical texts that help to understand his work. Later editions include an introduction by writer and filmmaker Clive Barker (1991). Thanks to this publication, he joined the production team for the film *Alien*. The book served as an iconographic source for the making of the film. Ridley Scott and other collaborators on the project used it as a reference for most of the film's visual design. The book has even been used as a reference in other film projects such as *The Mirror*.

It was distributed in several countries and served as a showcase for his work around the world, which was already known thanks to the widespread distribution of posters in underground culture. A text by Billeter appeared in the book *H.R. Giger's Necronomicon* (1976) entitled *The Environments of H. R. Giger*, in which he comments on the paintings from the period 1972-1977, focusing on the series *Temple of Passages* (1974-1975) and *The Spell* (1973-1977).

With the help of critic Gert Schiff, Giger presented his work in New York in 1977 as part of a group exhibition entitled *Images of Horror and Fantasy*, the first in which he participated in the United States. In November 1978, Omni magazine published an extensive report on Giger's art (the first in the USA). After winning an Oscar for his work on

the film *Alien*, a cultural phenomenon ensued, with consequent coverage in the press and magazines, which began to delve deeper into his creations. At the same time, many wanted to know more intimate and personal details about the artist who had created so many monstrosities and macabre elements.

### The 1980s

Throughout the 1980s, American magazines specialising in fantasy and science fiction cinema published numerous articles on *Alien* and Giger's various film projects, which occupied his creative activity during this decade.

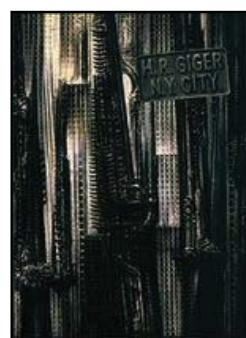
In the prologue to the book *H.R. Giger. N.Y. City* [D], dedicated to the series of paintings about New York, Harvard philosopher and professor Timothy Leary writes about Giger's work.



[C]



[D]



[E]

The second part of *Giger's Necronomicon* was published in 1985 [E], featuring many of his most notable airbrush works, again in large format, as well as mentioning some works from earlier periods. It is worth noting the repetition of images in his books, as if he were continually revisiting his work. In 1987, the catalogue of Giger's exhibition in Japan, organised by the Seibu commercial consortium, was published. The main themes were his designs for the films *Alien* and *Poltergeist II*, as well as original furniture (including the *Harkonnen* chairs). Giger painted several pictures under the title *Japanese Excursion*. A fan club was created and several projects were generated for Giger, such as the design of a bar in Tokyo, designs for a

Japanese film (*Teito Monogatari*), specifically his monster Goho Doji, as well as Japanese editions of his books 1 and 2 of the Necronomicon. Giger became a cult artist in Japan.

In 1988, Edition C published the third large-format book, *Giger's Biomechanics* [F] (later reissued by Morpheus International) with an interesting introduction by Harlan Ellison. He revisits his career since 1964, arriving at his projects in Japan with photos of the bar in Tokyo. It includes a large number of designs and paintings for the film *Poltergeist II*, as well as an interesting article by Michel Thevoz entitled *H.R. Giger or the faces of identity*.

It seems that in Switzerland, Giger is more highly regarded in the French-speaking part of the country than in the German-speaking part. Michel Thevoz is one of the few Swiss academics who has clearly championed Giger's work. He comments that "Giger's paintings depict the ambiguous and polymorphous figures of the subconscious. They give us the feeling that the psychic relationship takes place more directly than through words, behind which psychoanalysis hides"<sup>16</sup>.

## The 1990s

Since the 1990s, there has been a timid but constant revaluation of his work, which has become more pronounced in recent years, partly as a result of the great impact his art is having. In this decade, information about Giger has increased considerably due to the information boom fostered by new technologies and the media. In March 1996, Giger's official website, [www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com), was launched, structured into several sections according to his artistic facets, with regular updates of content and announcements of events and projects in which Giger is involved. The website also serves as a forum for discussion and exchange of information between Giger and his fans and admirers. It has an information search engine that links to a micro website, which is very important for consulting data from any terminal.

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<sup>16</sup>THEVOZ, Michel. *H.R. Giger or the faces of identity*. In *H.R Giger's Biomechanics*. Edition C, Zug, 1988.

It also has a portal for the sale of Giger products, such as sculptures, portfolios, posters and books.

There is a second official website, [www.giger.com](http://www.giger.com), sponsored by the Los Angeles gallery and publishing house Morpheus International, which represents Giger in North America. This site provides additional information on news and projects generally related to the United States. In turn, a multitude of unofficial websites have sprung up, created mainly by fans and admirers, which sometimes provide erroneous information about the artist and his work.

In 1991, Taschen published a new version of Giger's first book, *Arh+ [G]*, thus inaugurating a line of collaboration with Giger that continues to this day. With a foreword by Timothy Leary and the rest of Giger's writings and memoirs recalling his childhood curiosities and some of his obsessions, it is an interesting document for assessing the artist's personal opinions.



[F]



[G]

In 1991, a book edited by Giger himself was also published, entitled *700 Jahre warten auf CH-1991*, commemorating the 700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation. It is a portfolio of 50 original lithographs bound in accordion form, numbered and signed in an edition of 300 copies. In 1992, the Baviera gallery-museum in Zurich published a catalogue,

*H.R. Giger Skizzenbuch*, which contains 56 pencil, pen and ink drawings made in 1985.

In 1993, a catalogue was published of the exhibition that Giger showed in Burgdorf (Switzerland) and New York entitled *H. R. Giger's Watch Abart*, which

featured designs, a line of surrealist watches and other curious items, conceived from a grotesque and critical point of view and reminiscent of some of Dalí's ideas.

That same year, Giger published his book on the *Baphomet Tarot, The Tarot of the Underworld* (AG Mueller, Neuhausen am Rheinfall, 1993), with a series of images of Giger's paintings, whose art is interpreted by the philosopher-magician Akron, revealing interesting symbolic readings in relation to magic.

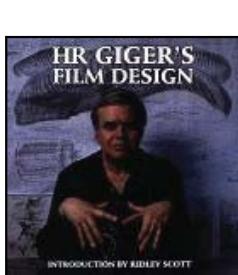
Edition C published *H.R. Giger Filmdesign* in 1996 [H], the most important book in terms of his relationship with cinema, which is complemented by two books on his most important film collaborations, *Alien* and *Species*. Subsequently, other editions appeared, such as the deluxe edition by Morpheus International, numbered and signed, with texts by Ridley Scott and H.R. Giger himself. In addition to reviewing all his collaborations with the world of cinema, we find new, little-known designs, such as those he created for the third Batman film, *Batman Forever*, as other designs were gradually published in his illustration books, such as *Necronomicon II* and *Biomechanics*.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the recovery of his work from various fields. Several important facts regarding the continuing interest in this artist are worth analysing. In 1996, a major retrospective dedicated to the work of H.R. Giger was organised in Milan in the form of an exhibition entitled *HR Giger: Visioni di fine millennio*. The catalogue for this exhibition includes, in addition to a documented graphic reproduction of the works presented, texts by the Italians Ferruccio Giromini, Gianfranco de Turris and Gianni Canova, which highlight the interest in Giger in this country.

In 1997, the book *Biomannerism* was published in Japan, analysing this movement, a product of cybersculture, as an expression of technophobia, the fear of mutation. A group of seven artists who share a 'Kafkaesque' vision of the human condition leads them to distort and disintegrate the forms of the human body. Among them, Giger stands out as the pioneer of a new

aesthetic of erotic metamorphosis and as the creator of a new *mecano-erotic* genre. He is considered the most representative explorer of this postmodern style, which has created the label '*gigeresque*' for those who imitate his style.

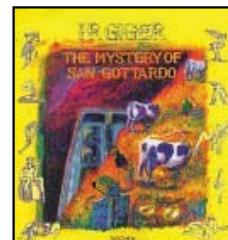
The most important book published by Giger in the 1990s, [www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com) (The Book of My Life), appeared in 1997 [I]. It contains interesting personal writings by Giger about his childhood and memories. It includes unpublished photos, such as the series of people sitting in the *Harkonnen* chair and the introduction to biomechanical tattooing. It contains reproductions of early drawings and publications. It presents the ambitious project of his museum in Gruyères, which has been one of his main occupations in recent years.



[H]



[I]



[J]

A new book appeared in 1998 that is a rarity. *H.R. Giger The Mystery of San Gottardo* [J] is a mixture of storyboard and illustrated novel for a possible film project with the same title, an idea that Giger has been considering for a long time and has not yet realised. It compiles a multitude of illustrations that Giger has created and published over decades. It was presented that same year at the Frankfurt Book Fair and was well received by the German publishing world.

In 1998, Mark Dery's work *Escape Velocity: Cyberculture at the End of the Century* (1995) was translated into Spanish, becoming an essential work and a basic reference for understanding the socio-cultural events and transformations brought about by the emergence of computer culture and the

consequent digital revolution that took place in the final decades of the 20th century, known as *cyberculture*. Dery provides a skilful and effective analysis of the cultural events that surround us and are currently taking place, thus creating a guide to the new digital culture. Dery includes Giger in his study and highlights him by pointing out that "Giger's lack of consideration in the art world is compensated by his omnipresent influence on cyberculture (...) it is the ease with which Giger's images adhere to the overlapping, and sometimes opposing, meanings of technoculture that explains the artist's popularity among cyberpunks"<sup>17</sup>. Dery thus provides a new and modern perspective on Giger's work, placing it at the centre of the current debate on the impact of new technologies and the role that the human body is playing in this cultural and social revolution.

In the mid-1990s, a great deal of information appeared (in Switzerland, but never in Spain) about the Giger Museum in Gruyères, as well as about his new major film project, the creation of the alien protagonist of the film *Species* (Roger Donaldson, 1995).

## 21st century

In 2000, a thematic exhibition was held in Germany entitled *Phantastik am Ende der Zeit (Fantastic at the End of Time)*, organised by the Erlangen Museum in collaboration with the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, which addressed the fantastic themes that have been of outstanding importance throughout history, such as German Expressionism, Surrealism, the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism and Fantastic Literature. Works by Alfred Kubin, Edvard Munch, Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí, Ernst Fuchs, and James Ensor, among others, were on display. Alongside these artists, Giger exhibited four paintings from his *Passagen Tempel (Temple of Passages)* series. The catalogue dealt with fantastic mythology in a chapter on Dracula, the Golem, and *Alien*. In one of the texts, Professor Christine Ivanovic discusses Giger as a continuator of Goya's mode of representation, of a certain

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<sup>17</sup> DERY, Mark. *Escape Velocity*. Siruela, Madrid, 1998, p.306.

"fantastic terror" representing the contemporary horror of war in his paintings, as the Spaniard did in his series of engravings.

In 2002, he published his latest book, *Icons*, with a text by Stanislav Grof, *H. R. Giger and the Soul of the 20th Century*, which offers a new interpretation of H.R. Giger's work, in this case from a medical point of view, highlighting the multidisciplinary nature of Giger's work.

### **Giger and censorship**

Since its inception, Giger's work has caused controversy and scandal among certain sectors, and has been censored on several occasions. The first controversy arose in Switzerland at the beginning of his career.

At the end of 1969, a minor scandal erupted when an exhibition by Giger and three other artists was censored. It took place at the Migros art gallery (one of the most powerful companies in the country) during a group exhibition alongside Swiss artists Mario Comensoli, Hugo Schumacher and Mario Roffler. Six paintings were accused of being obscene and immoral and were forced to be removed (five by Schumacher and one by Giger). Later, the president of the delegation corrected himself and pointed out that only three were obscene. The artists decided to withdraw all the works and even the gallery curator resigned. The event appeared in several press articles defending freedom of expression<sup>18</sup>. The controversy continued in Germany following the poster he designed for the Swiss rock group Floh de Cologne, which depicted a penis.

Giger's work has also been attacked, mostly branded as pornography due to its content. There are two relevant moments in this regard: the publication of one of his landscapes as part of the album "*Frankenchrist*" by the American punk band Dead Kennedys and the exhibition of drawings in a restaurant in Saint Gallen, Switzerland.

Giger sold his 1973 *Penis Landscape* to the leader of the Dead Kennedys, Erich Boucher, alias "Jello Biafra", who published a reproduction in

<sup>18</sup> See HEINZ HOLZ, Hans. Kunst beruhigt nicht. *National Zeitung*, Basel, 6-11-1969 and STABER, Margit, Tatbestand: Obszönität. *ZW Sonntags Journal*, 15/16-11-1969.

one of his albums. Biafra was charged with pornography by a California court. The charge was brought in 1987, under "representation of material harmful to minors" (in the United States, those under 21 years of age), for making pornographic material available to them. In California, obscenities without literary, artistic, political, educational or scientific intent were considered pornographic. Since 1985, there had been a crusade against rock music in the United States by various private anti-pornography organisations and the Ministry of Justice with its *National Obscenity Enforcement Unit*. The charge was eventually dropped; the 12-member jury found no reason to convict him (7 votes in favour, 5 against)<sup>19</sup>.

In the 1990s, the restaurant "Haus zur letzten Latern" in Saint Gallen had several lithographs from the series *700 Jahre warten auf* on display. Two customers reported the restaurant owner for exhibiting such works. The trade and industry commissioner intervened, forcing the drawings to be removed. The owner of the premises, Urs Tremp, who was a friend of Giger's, planned to go to the Strasbourg court to defend his case. Giger had to self-censor his drawings by painting over them to avoid further problems.

In a text reproduced in the [bookwww.hrgiger.com](http://bookwww.hrgiger.com), which refers to a letter, Swiss art professor Michel Thévoz comes to the defence of Giger and his art, accusing those who misinterpret his work through their obscene gaze. But there have been other cases of censorship. The cover of Blondie's album *Koo Koo*, designed by Giger, was censored in England, and the promotional poster could not be displayed in the London Underground. His designs for the *Alien* egg initially had a vaginal shape as an opening at the top, which was eventually modified to a cross-shaped opening because the producers thought it would be considered scandalous and censored in Catholic countries.

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<sup>19</sup>See Gemälde von HR Giger beschäftigt US-Gerichte. *Bündner Zeitung*, 25 August 1987; LÜTSCHER, Michael. Kreuzung gegen die Rock-Musik in den USA. *Tages-Anzeiger*, 24 August 1987; Acusée d'être porno, *Le matin*, 25 August 1987.

## Spanish bibliography

The first news about Giger reached Spain with the release of *Alien* and the translation of the book about the film in the early 1980s, which discussed aspects of the film's production and its creators. Previously, his work was known only to a small minority in certain underground circles related to rock music, who might have seen his posters and album covers, and among comic book fans<sup>20</sup>, as the French magazine Heavy Metal had published illustrations by Giger related to *Alien* and one of its issues featured one of his covers (June 1980).

Spanish literature has approached Giger's work timidly, with few writings in Spanish citing his work. We highlight the articles by Javier Martínez de Pisón and Carlos Plasencia, as they approach his work from fields other than cinema: the former in relation to medicine and science, and the latter in relation to fine arts. In *H.R. Giger, a visionary of our time*<sup>21</sup>, Martínez de Pisón highlights the futuristic vision of man within Giger's aesthetic, exposed to the dangers of science, particularly the risks and possibilities opened up by genetic engineering. This New York-based writer and journalist previously published two other articles in Spanish on the occasion of Giger's exhibition at the Alexander Gallery in New York in 1993, when he interviewed him. Professor Plasencia, on the other hand, speaks of Giger as one of the artists who studies organic forms, "from a particular sense of beauty"<sup>22</sup> and comments on his relationship with anthropomorphic creations.

Film critics have taken a number of approaches that can basically be reduced to Giger's relationship with *Alien*. Various publications on this film highlight Giger's work. Antonio José Navarro devoted a monograph to *Alien (directed by)* and an article in *Imágenes* magazine. There are also two monographic publications, one on the series of

<sup>20</sup> In Spain, Totem magazine published a special issue on *Alien* after the film's release. <sup>21</sup> MARTÍNEZ DE PISÓN, Javier. H.R. Giger, a modern visionary. *Medico Interamericano*, June 1998, vol. 17, no. 6.

<sup>22</sup>PLASENCIA, Carlos. *Art, Science and Nature*. In *Nature as a Source of Innovation*. U.P.V./Department of Drawing, Valencia, 2000.

Alien (the four films) entitled *Aliens* by Lorenzo F. Díaz (Alberto Santos, Madrid, 1997), which mentions his work on the first film in the series, and another on the film *Alien* published by the Valencian publishing house Midons.

It is significant that in Spain only this film is mentioned and his collaborations on the dozen films on which Giger has worked are often forgotten. Therefore, neither his designs for fantasy cinema nor his contributions to the contemporary horror genre have been studied in depth. From another field, Gus Cabezas contributes his knowledge of rock culture and its graphic image, as we can see in *Las mejores portadas de discos en 1996* (The Best Album Covers of 1996). He highlights Giger as one of the best graphic designers whose covers have set a precedent within the genre. He describes him as "the inimitable Swiss painter and illustrator HR Giger, creator of visionary, hellish, and deeply sexual biomechanical worlds"<sup>(23)</sup>.

News about the Giger Museum reached Spain in early 2002. The special section *Espacios de arte (Art Spaces)* in *La Vanguardia* featured our article *Museos de artistas* (Artists' Museums), which discusses the museums of Dalí, Fuchs and Giger, establishing connections between them and their museums, which share interesting commonalities<sup>24</sup>. The book *La Nueva Carne: una estética perversa del cuerpo* (The New Flesh: A Perverse Aesthetic of the Body), jointly published by Valdemar and the Sitges Film Festival (2002), has recently been released. It explores various end-of-century cultural phenomena related to the human body and the figure of the monster, in which various authors assess Giger's contribution and influence in the postmodern context. The book also includes a text by us dedicated exclusively to the artist, entitled *H.R. Giger: Visions of the New Flesh*, which is to date the most extensive article in Spanish on the Swiss artist's work, focusing on his relationship with this new postmodern sensibility and his pioneering nature.

<sup>23</sup>CABEZAS, Gus, *Las mejores portadas de discos (The Best Album Covers)*. La Máscara, Valencia, 1996.

<sup>24</sup>ARENAS, Carlos. Artists' Museums. In ARCO Special Supplement of *La Vanguardia*, 15-2-2002.

# **Chapter 1**

## **BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY**



## 1.1. Childhood and youth: origins (1940– 1961)

The biographical data for this period is mainly concentrated in the autobiographical texts that appear in Giger's books, basically in two, which are precisely those that have been translated into Spanish: *H.R. Giger. Arh+* published by Taschen in 1991, and *www.HRGiger.com*, also published by Taschen in 1996. Based on these books, we will formulate our reflections to describe the world that surrounded Giger during his first twenty years, the environment in which he grew up and was educated.

### 1.1.1. Family environment

Hans Rudi Giger<sup>25</sup> was born on 5 February 1940 in Chur (Coira in Spanish), into a family consisting of his parents Hans Rudolf and Melly, and his sister Iris, who was about six years older than him. Chur, which currently has a population of around 30,000, is the capital of the canton of Graubünden, located in the east of the country, in German-speaking Switzerland, one of the most mountainous areas in Europe. This city is one of the main access points to the most important Alpine passes. It is surrounded by mountains and has a landscape full of forests, valleys, rivers and waterfalls. It can be said that it is a place with little sunlight for most of the year.

Giger spent most of his childhood and youth in Chur and its surroundings until the early 1960s, when he moved to Zurich. World War II broke out during those years, and Giger's childhood coincided with the post-war period.

His parents wanted their son to train as a doctor or pharmacist so that he could one day take over the family business, the pharmacy, or at least pursue higher education and obtain a degree. His father owned a pharmacy located in the old town of Chur, at 17 Storchengasse. Above this pharmacy was the Giger family home, where little Hans Rudi lived with his

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<sup>25</sup> From now on, we will use his initials (H.R.) together with his surname.

sister Iris and his parents. Giger's parents were quite permissive with him, giving him a lot of freedom for his games and hobbies, despite him being a poor student and causing them constant upset for this reason. Giger describes his house on Storchengasse as a "dark house". The house had three floors. The ground floor housed the pharmacy (his "playground"); the first floor was the main living area; and the second floor was the black room (which he would later convert into a *darkroom*). Inside was an interior courtyard where he would set up his ghost train (between the ages of 7 and 12 approximately), described by him as a "place of darkness".

His father, a doctor and pharmacist by profession and well regarded in his community, is described by Giger as severe<sup>26</sup>: "I knew my father very little. He was very reserved, very honest, helped anyone who had fallen on hard times, and was highly respected as a doctor and pharmacist and also as president of the Pharmacists' Association and the Alpine Rescue Guard (...). Mine was one of those authoritarian fathers, but a good man who never hit me, except for that one time. In his place, I probably would have killed him"<sup>(27)</sup>. Giger refers to one of his many pranks caused by his games and chemical experiments, melting lead and tar in the basement, which filled everything with smoke and nearly set the pharmacy on fire. "I never saw him like that again, so inflamed with rage. Through thick, soot-filled smoke, which I had only ever seen in the form of London fog in Edgar Wallace films, I saw a white pharmacist's apron lunging at me. It took me only a second to understand what was happening, and I ran for my life. A couple of slaps caught up with me as I fled. I spent two days in hiding"<sup>(28)</sup>. The entire pharmacy was filled with smoke, everything was black, and it took several people and many hours of work to restore the place to normal. These games were common during his childhood. He used to mix substances and experiment with new objects and elements.

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<sup>26</sup>[www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com) (The Art of the Alchemist). Taschen, Cologne, 1997, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup>H.R. Giger A Rh+. Taschen, Berlin, 1991, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Giger recalls: "I often noticed that my father, when he had gone through moments of terrible agony worrying about me, would have preferred to see me arrive half dead or at least bleeding, rather than appearing cheerful and bursting with health"<sup>29</sup> . From childhood, he always felt closer to his mother, who constantly encouraged and supported him in his youthful projects, buying him paints and modelling materials (plasticine). For this reason, from an early age, Giger cultivated his skills in inventing and building things, even though during his youth he never considered art as a profession or way of life, but rather as a game or one of his many hobbies.

His liberal, middle-class family enjoyed a good reputation in their community and had sufficient financial means to enable Giger to attend private schools and enjoy a good academic education and a comfortable family environment. Between the ages of 5 and 6, Giger attended two religious kindergartens: the Catholic one in Mariesheim and then the Protestant one run by Aunt Grittli (thus beginning his education in religious institutions). Giger recalls that at the Catholic kindergarten he attended, when he misbehaved, he was punished and made to pray in front of a crucifix, reminding him that they were guilty of his pain and that Christ had shed his blood for them. Later, when asked by art critic Fritz Billeter why he liked to depict spilled blood, he replied that it was for this reason, because of the memory of Christ.

Giger has fond memories of those years: "When I was in kindergarten, I met some girls who I thought were beautiful, and I would spend hours standing in front of their houses. But talking to girls was frowned upon (...). On sunny days, we would walk hand in hand to the rose hill, where thieves from Chur used to be hanged. Once there, Aunt Grittli would give each pair of children horse tack and a whip. Of course, the girls were always the horses. Very rarely was it the other way around, and I enjoyed the abuse and whipping in advance... it was a shame that hitting her was frowned upon

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

the girls"<sup>30</sup>. We value these comments as sincere memories of his childhood.

When he was five years old, Giger spent his time playing, listening to music and modelling. His mother had bought him different types of plasticine and, together with chopsticks, he made the Basel carnival troupes. As a child, Giger dreamed of becoming an architect of castles and palaces and of being able to build trains. His fascination was such that at school he drew palaces, fairground trains and railways. In a park near his home was the Villa Caflish, a kind of haunted house, which attracted him with its sense of mystery and reminded him of images from the film *Beauty and the Beast* (*La Belle et la Bête*, Jean Cocteau, 1946).

Primary school was not a difficult time for him, as he recalls with nostalgia: "It was wonderful [school]. During those six years, there was never any homework"<sup>(31)</sup>. He spent his time at primary school constantly playing and having fun, devoting his time to the strange things that attracted him. "I had a wonderful childhood, full of secrets and romantic places. My parents let me play. The only annoying thing was a couple of silly maids, their educational attempts and their desire for order."

Secondary school would be tougher, as he recalls, because he had many exams and was not particularly interested in his studies. He attended the cantonal school in Chur. It would be a shock, a sudden change, with lots of homework and difficult subjects such as Latin and mathematics, in addition to the typical problems of puberty. At that time, he played the saxophone to escape from school and began to develop a keen interest in jazz, which was in vogue in Europe at the time. There were six girls in his class and him: "The girls always invented games that involved kissing. At the time, I found that terribly embarrassing, and I made sure before each game that I wouldn't have to kiss anyone"<sup>33</sup>. Giger comments that in the 4th and 5th grades he had a wonderful tutor, Professor Wieser, who taught him how to model, draw and build sets. With this knowledge, he would build a train set in his room

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<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

modelling room at school, which his classmates and teachers would use to 'train' during their extended breaks. Giger fondly recalls these moments: "Once Wieser proposed something funny: it consisted of starting two locomotives at the same time in opposite directions and making them collide just as the string ran out... Sometimes, when the locomotives were about to collide, we all shouted with excitement, and our teacher more than anyone else"<sup>34</sup>.

Those wonderful times came to an end when he reached sixth grade, as exams began and Giger did not like studying at all. His father tried to teach him Latin by any means necessary, thinking that he would take over the pharmacy in the future, but it did not work, while he remembers his mother crying when she saw that hopeless situation. Giger kept changing specialisations so as not to repeat the year. Finally, in the fifth year, he failed mathematics and, in order to avoid repeating the year, he had to go to Lausanne for a year, to the Haute Rampe secondary school. There he had his first English lessons: "Knowledge of English is the only thing that, in hindsight, I would not have wanted to do without. Without English, there is no *Hollywood*"<sup>35</sup>.

During the school holidays, which he used to spend in Mammern with his uncle Otto Meier, who was a painter, the latter introduced him to the art of lead casting and working with wood and metal, as well as bird hunting. He combined his childhood games and adventures with drawing and modelling: "I have always drawn and modelled. For this reason, my mother believed in me and provided me with painting utensils and modelling materials."<sup>36</sup>"For a while, I was making masks with which I composed reliefs. I also forged swords using old files and cast wrestler's rings in lead using the wax casting technique"<sup>37</sup>. From childhood, Giger developed a certain dexterity and skill for manual work.

During these years, problems also began with his father, from whom he would gradually distance himself due to his studies. His father could not conceive of his son becoming an artist, because he wanted him to take over the pharmacy in the future, or at least to pursue a respectable profession and maintain the

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> [www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com), *Op.cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

family name and reputation. Although Giger was a poor student, his father tried to send him to several schools in the hope that he would change. He eventually realised that Giger had no interest in his studies and that he would neither study pharmacy nor take over the family business. He understood that his son's profession should be connected to drawing, the only thing he excelled at. Giger comments on this: "During my school years, I always stood out as an illustrator of pornographic fantasies"<sup>(38)</sup>.

### **Childhood obsessions**

Various obsessions inhabited the corners of his imagination and provide interesting insights into his childhood, as he retained his experiences and anecdotes and grew up with these tastes and preferences, according to his autobiographical notes. These themes and hobbies are very important because they would have an impact on his personality. Childhood memories left their mark on Giger's mind, and he would unconsciously draw on them when creating. He was a child with many fantasies, who enjoyed sadistic games and was attracted to the sordid and macabre aspects of life. During his early childhood, Giger was a shy and introverted child, attracted to strange objects and fantastic stories. The fairground, his father's pharmacy, and the nature of his geographical surroundings (mountains, rivers, forests) were his playgrounds. Shortly after, at around the age of 11 or 12, his favourite place to play became the so-called *ghost train* (*Geisterbahn*), an extension of the fairground train, which he built himself in his own home and designed and decorated to seduce girls and have fun with his friends. Giger took refuge in the darkest places he could find (he acknowledges his shyness and his passion for dimly lit or poorly lit spaces, such as the spaces under tables<sup>39</sup> . He also played at being a scientist and experimented with alchemy and chemistry. In the basement of the pharmacy, he used to carry out alchemy experiments, creating a small smelter and testing various materials.

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<sup>38</sup>H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon*. Sphinx Verlag, Basel, 1977, p. 10

<sup>39</sup> As an adult, he preferred artificial lighting to natural light.

He was a child who played constantly and sought to make the games of his imagination believable, to bring them to life, to animate them, as in the myths of the Golem or Frankenstein. His reading fed his imagination, and his world grew and expanded. He played with trains, puppets and weapons (bows, arrows and daggers). These objects would be reflected in his adult paintings, constantly using iconographic elements from childhood (weapons, Indian feathers).

We can group his childhood hobbies into several categories. They constitute an important point of reference as they form the basis of the world that will take shape in his imagination and will mark his artistic creations. As we will see when studying his work in Chapter 2, many of the themes he works with are rooted in childhood.

#### Machines: trains and weapons

Trains and locomotives are one of his great fascinations: as a child, he eagerly awaited the arrival of the fair and the "witch's train" attraction, and then he built it in his own home, as we shall see. He has always been designing trains in different materials and with different concepts, and he has even recently built a train with rails in his home, recalling his childhood hobby for these vehicles. "I used to draw palaces, railways and fairground trains non-stop. All the essays I was set at school are dedicated to one of these themes"<sup>(40)</sup>. Machines in general appeal to him because of their sinister appearance, from which Giger develops his own fantasies, often related to macabre stories about failures or malfunctions.

Along with trains, weapons are another of his great fascinations, especially firearms. As a child, he was already attracted to a Mauser his father owned, and from around the age of 14 he began collecting pistols and revolvers, such as Colt and Pumpex models, as well as rifles of all kinds, including a double-barrelled shotgun with a pistol grip. "From

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<sup>40</sup> [www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com), *Op.cit.*, p.6.

puberty, I started collecting weapons like crazy, although I limited myself to revolvers. *Gölischmied*, an elderly man who was considered crazy and whom I always had to bring something from the pharmacy, taught me how to repair handguns. That's how I learned to weld and install and temper springs.<sup>41</sup> Giger bought weapons from him in return for his services and claims that by the age of ten he could have armed at least 20 people. Giger states: "People either think very negatively about pistols and revolvers because they bring death, or they are fascinated by them, as I was when I was eight years old. I was particularly captivated by my father's Mauser. Pistols are dangerous because you can never tell from the outside whether they are loaded or *not*."<sup>42</sup>

His passion even led him to give school talks on revolvers when he was at secondary school in Chur, choosing "the origin of the revolver" as the topic for his class presentation. Giger has also taken part in shooting practice on several occasions, as can be seen in the graphic documentation. In his works, weapons are often depicted in great detail, demonstrating his knowledge and attraction to them. However, he confesses that his interest in weapons disappeared while he was doing his military service in Winterthur as part of the mortar corps, but they would reappear in his subconscious and in his adult work. As an anecdote, Giger recounts that "I must actually have a good guardian angel, because, to date, four people have shot at me and I have shot at someone once. In two of the cases, the bullets were defective, and in the other three, the bullets grazed my hair, even though they had aimed very well and believed, of course, that the weapon was not loaded"<sup>43</sup>. Giger considers himself a lucky man in this regard, but he distrusts his luck and confesses that with age he is becoming more fearful and does not believe that he will always be so fortunate.

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<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup>*ARh+*, *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

### Sex and death (*Eros and Thanatos*)

These are undoubtedly two of the issues that have most troubled him throughout his life. As a child, the female sex was already one of his greatest attractions, but his shyness made it difficult for him to approach girls. Sex became an obsession, from which he developed themes marked by Freudian fears (such as castration). From a young age, he tried to impress the opposite sex with his creations and his sinister look. He always dressed in black, a habit he has maintained to this day. He was a shy and elusive child, hiding to play in basements and dimly lit places, sometimes distancing himself from the girls he tried to win over with his inventions and macabre games. He comments that "when we played cowboys and Indians, I was always the chief and dreamed of saving beautiful ladies from the hands of evil men. But when I actually came across a pretty girl, I felt so perplexed and embarrassed that I couldn't even speak. Therefore, I limited myself almost exclusively to impressing them from afar" <sup>(44)</sup>. He recounts that at the age of 14, he kissed a girl for the first time, and with this event, he began to forget his old hobbies, such as trains and haunted castles, and started to think obsessively about sex. "After my experience with kissing, I had already tried to take some girls to bed, but they resisted incredibly. To get rid of my constant arousal, I masturbated during high school classes. I usually sat at the back on the left, hoping that no one would notice my <sup>activity</sup>." Another key age was 21, when he began to have sex with girls while studying in Zurich. His main interest during these years was focused on girls: "At 21, I slept with a girl for the first time, but from then on I couldn't stop...Later, at the Zurich School of Industrial Arts, I made love to different classmates during breaks on the stairs, behind the curtains, in the basement or on the carpenter's bench, where I was once almost caught by my father, who had come to take a look around the school. All my interest was focused on Eros, whom I could not associate with school. Perhaps, at

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>45</sup> [www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com), *Op.cit.*, p. 7.

at most the toilets, places that smelled of forbidden sex and therefore often appeared in my dreams"<sup>(46)</sup> . Undoubtedly, the theme of death has been an obsession for Giger, which he will address throughout his work, as will his penchant for the morbid. During those years, his father received a skull from a pharmaceutical company, and Giger immediately appropriated it. He recalls that "it was my first contact with death"<sup>(47)</sup>. Since then, he has maintained an intense relationship with bones, as they constitute one of his essential artistic elements, in addition to the numerous connotations they imply, related to the afterlife, the transience of life and the representation of death. In this regard, he points out that the Egyptian mummies on display at the Municipal Museum of Chur also made an impression on him.

### Reading

Giger has always read extensively since childhood. His fascination with the mysterious and the hidden led the young Giger to become fond of Gothic and horror novels, vampire and ghost stories, macabre tales, the stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Gaston Leroux, and the noir genre. He has been an avid reader since childhood, and his artistic approach is closely related to his literary universe. As he grew up, he expanded his literary universe and discovered new authors and works.

### Fetishism

Giger was attracted to and fascinated by various unusual objects such as braces and the guillotine, and by materials such as bones and skulls. He was also seduced by macabre stories of murders and deaths, such as that of the Romanian prince known as "Vlad the Impaler" who impaled his enemies and whom legend turned into a bloodthirsty vampire in which

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<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

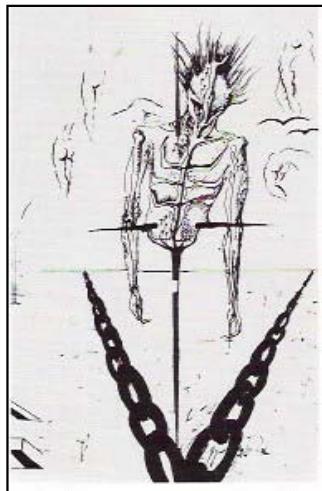
<sup>48</sup> Giger was a passionate collector of braces, "which is undoubtedly subliminally related to my disgust for worms and snakes". He comments that he was forced to wear leather braces, but he exchanged them for rubber ones that looked like squashed worms, eels or snakes.

is based on Bram Stoker's character Dracula. Although he comments that "the first impalement that fascinated me was a living scarecrow from a folk tale that my mother had to read to me over and over again. I think that life, determined and pierced by a stake, for which the only redemption was a quick death, taught me the senselessness of existence. An existence that would have been better to renounce. Many of my works reflect this impotence, which denies any possibility of religious belief" <sup>(49)</sup>. The representation of pierced and mutilated bodies is a constant theme in his art, for which he uses needles, pins, spikes and sharp objects such as razor blades [1]. For this reason, he has even been interested at times in the popular game of table football, in which the players are pierced by an iron bar. To this we can add his fascination with the guillotine, as from a young age he was well acquainted, through reading, with the story of Madame Tussaud and her waxworks. Giger recounts: "I once got hold of a plastic guillotine to assemble. But it wasn't enough for me. I wanted one in original size. So I commissioned a carpenter to make all the necessary parts, which I had designed in the original proportions. All that was missing was the blade. My father thought I was crazy. However, I never assembled the guillotine because I suddenly found it boring to decapitate the mannequins I had in my darkroom. Since they were made of plastic, after cutting off their heads, I could have put them back <sup>on</sup>" <sup>(50)</sup>. The guillotine has been depicted in his works on numerous occasions, and in one of his latest works, he has even made one out of aluminium that cuts off a plastic penis.

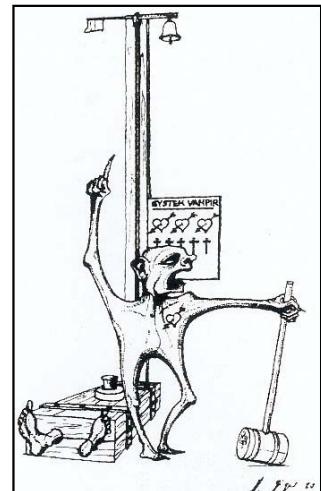
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<sup>49</sup>[www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com) (*The Art of the Guillotine*), *Op.cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid*, p. 22.



1-Untitled (1961)



2-Series *We, Atomic Children* (1963)



3-Katarakt (1977)

## The Fair

He used to go to the fair and look at the strange things and curiosities. Among them, what excited him most, apart from the shooting galleries, was the witch's train or ghost train. He also showed an interest in wax figures (as we shall see when we look at certain sculptural figures) and the fairground game 'Hit Lucas'<sup>51</sup>. The circus world also caught his attention, with its grotesque appearance, trapeze artists and puppets: "the circus was one of the most beautiful events in my life. The smaller and more intimate the circus, the more excited I was by the child performers. The trapeze and the tightrope seemed to me to be the most exciting acts. I found it admirable how well the athletes could hide their sexual organs, so much so that they looked like girls"<sup>52</sup>. Giger's fondness for the circus and carnival tradition is evident throughout his work.

## Nature

was another of his passions. He thought that valleys were "magical places" and was also seduced by the mystery of the forest. Some of these formations and features, such as mountains, rivers and lakes, can be seen in his later paintings, such as *Katarakt* (1977) [3]. The Alpine environment offered many possibilities for Giger's imagination, places inhabited by myths and legends. He also spent time in ski resorts.

Giger has always been very interested in the organic world and living beings, which is why he frequently consults natural science books. We see in his work the interaction of the organic world with the technological, defining his artistic style. His works include things that fascinate him, but also things he fears or dislikes, such as certain repulsive animals. In

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<sup>51</sup> The game consists of a box with a pivot, which, when struck with a mallet, causes a weight to rise up a four-metre-high rail. If struck hard enough, the weight hits a bell. This motif is reflected in a drawing from the *Atomic Children* series [2] and in another from 1986.

<sup>52</sup>[www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com) (*The Art of the 20th Century*), *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

During his childhood, he developed a strong aversion to worms and snakes (animals that would be a constant presence in his works).

### The fantastic

Giger often refers to his first encounter with fantastic art. It happened when he was five years old, spending the winter in a house in the mountains in Flims-Foppa, in the Graubünden region, learning to ski. Some American soldiers wounded in the war were in Switzerland recovering from their injuries and used to visit the Gigers in search of warmth and comfort, offering chewing gum and American magazines such as *Life* in exchange. In one of the issues of *Life*, Giger found photos that fascinated him. They were stills from Jean Cocteau's film *Beauty and the Beast*, which made a big impression on the young Giger. Giger notes: "I can still vividly remember the long corridor with candelabra on the walls, the animal-headed creature dressed in brocade sitting on the throne at the end of the table, the virginal appearance of Beauty, who seemed to be made only of gauze, walking through the castle, and the white horse silhouetted by the dim moonlight against the castle wall decorated with a stone eagle" <sup>53</sup>.

He was so fascinated by these images that from then on he would make many drawings at school with macabre themes such as ghosts, skulls, monsters, hanged men and skeletons. At that time, they played and walked on a hill that was said to be the place where the ancient thieves of Chur were hanged, a fact that greatly intrigued him. It is interesting to see how Giger reflects these experiences in his schematic childhood drawings. From childhood, he was very interested in the fantastic aspects of existence and the marvellous.

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<sup>53</sup> H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon*. *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

### 1.1.2. Early youthful creations

Giger recalls: "Every year in May, the fair came to Qualerplatz in Chur, with a merry-go-round, shooting galleries and a ghost train. I used to help set up the latter and spent all the money in my pockets riding the train. I would have stayed at the fair all day, and when the ghost train was dismantled after three weeks, I was left with such a feeling of loss that one year I decided to build the ghost train in the hallway of my own house, which, due to its length and numerous nooks and crannies, was ideal for my purpose. In this way, I could combine my two hobbies (my enthusiasm for trains and my penchant for the morbid and the fantastic) into a single object, the ghost train. I built human skeletons out of cardboard, wire and plaster and illuminated them with coloured lights from a pocket torch..."<sup>54</sup>.

All these curiosities led to the creation of the *ghost train*, one of his first inventions. It was basically a monorail with a small carriage that travelled through different rooms in his house, arriving at a dark passageway populated by skeletons, monsters and corpses made of cardboard, wire and plaster, with eerie, ghostly lighting<sup>55</sup>. It also had a gloomy setting with hanged men, sarcophagi and sounds made by his friends. Little by little, he improved it by introducing changes. His intention was to invite girls, scare them and seduce them. After a few years, he found this space insufficient and too primitive, due to his early readings that introduced him to new worlds, increasingly complex and developed. At around the age of 13, he began reading Karl May's adventure books and Edgar Wallace's detective novels. Later, he discovered Gaston Leroux's mystery novel *The Phantom of the Opera*. The young Giger's early initiative in devising and designing this dark space as a place to play is striking.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* p.8.

<sup>55</sup> *ARh+.* *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

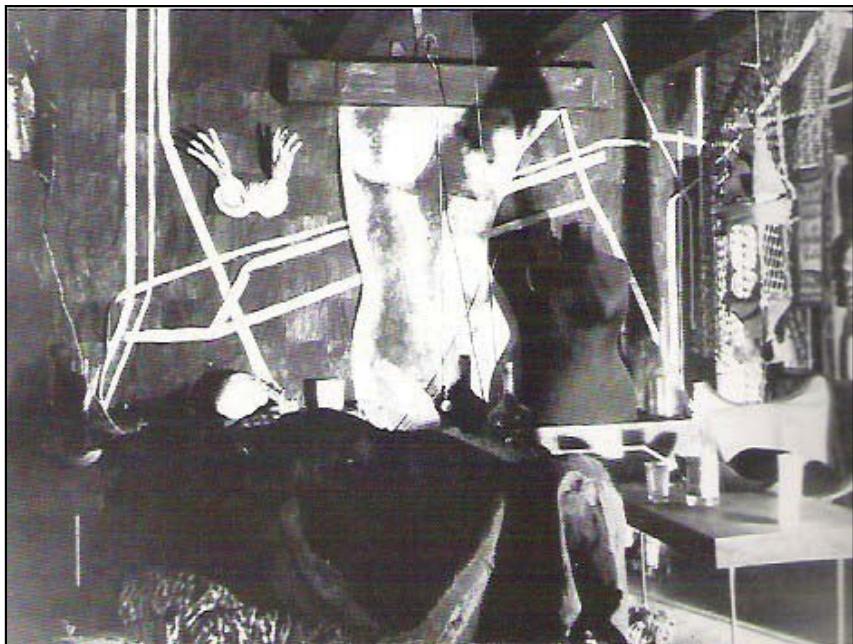
The next step after the train would be the *darkroom* [4-6], with which he would seek to expand his imaginary universe, which was growing during those years. At that time, he would opt for Gothic literature and horror novels, genres that would greatly influence his early works, as he would take different iconographic elements and incorporate them into his world. Impressed by wax figures, ghosts, vampires and necrophilia, ancient Egypt and fantastic stories, Giger built an entire space to decorate his room with macabre iconography composed of skulls, pierced and crucified human bodies, mutilated hands, masks, furniture and walls with symbols that formed a place of dark and sinister fantasy. In some photographs from this period, he can be seen playing music with his friends or meditating in this space. At first, it was decorated like a bar, and later he used it mainly to play music. It was something like a haunted house, like the ones sometimes set up at fairs or in cities, but located in his own home. He began to learn music, playing the saxophone and piano. During these years, he only thought about having fun, music and picking up girls. For this reason, he soon began to devise ways to attract the opposite sex, trying to get their attention, and as soon as he could, he began to dress in black.



4-The Dark Room (1960)



5-The Dark Room (1960)



6- *The Dark Room* (1960)

### Early drawings and youthful hobbies

His first contact with art supposedly came during his high school years. He was not particularly interested in this discipline at that age, since what concerned him most in his childhood was playing, and in his adolescence, jazz and sex. "The music of Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Erik Dolphi was still the most important thing for me"<sup>56</sup>. The truth is that he did show a talent for inventing things and surrounding himself with objects that appealed to him, as well as for building small recreations of his dream worlds, as we have seen in the *ghost train* and the *dark room*.

Giger's father had no sympathy for the art world and never accepted that his son should train as an artist, which he considered a "thankless and disreputable profession". "My father was opposed to art. He said you'd starve to death. My father's negative attitude, as well as the fact that I had an exemplary sister, six years older than me, who excelled in all her school subjects, gave me

<sup>56</sup> [www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com). *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

the strength to prove that I was not as useless as is commonly thought of bad students" <sup>(57)</sup>. Giger recounts that in his city, it was frowned upon to devote oneself to art: "artist is a bad word in Chur; it means drunkard, fornicator, vagrant and weak, all at the same time" <sup>(58)</sup>.

Whenever Giger went to an exhibition with his parents, he constantly heard that art was a profession with no future. Furthermore, in his town, saying you were an artist was synonymous with being crazy or an insult. Despite everything, Giger decided to focus his academic training on art and design. Between 1958 and 1959, he studied pre-baccalaureate drawing at the Alpina School in Davos. At the age of 18, he began working as an unpaid draughtsman with architect Venatius Maissen and building contractor Hans Stetter in Chur. They received numerous commissions from churches in the canton of Graubünden, and Giger drew all kinds of religious elements. He also designed ironwork and graffiti. It was here that Giger began to develop his talent for drawing and a certain discipline in this field. He worked with them for three years until 1962, when he enrolled at the Zurich School of Arts and Crafts. He thus gained a great deal of practice in sketching and constructing elements.

We have a self-portrait that Giger made during his time at the institute when he was 14 years old, but to glimpse any aesthetic quality in his work, we must wait until 1959, when we find a series of drawings and illustrations in which his early ideas can be appreciated. He published some of these in the early 1960s in underground magazines such as Schoengeist and Fallbeil. They reveal his youthful fascinations with horror novels, Gothic iconography, monsters and grotesque beings, and fantastical forms and figures. He also reflected his fascination with the female figure in the series *Medias*.

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *ARh+*. *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

## 1.2. Apprenticeship and training (1962– 1965)

### 1.2.1. Academic studies

After three years of practising technical architectural drawing in the studio of architect Meissen in Chur and completing his military service in Winterthur in the mortar corps, he enrolled at the Zurich School of Industrial Arts in 1962. He was 22 years old at the time and already showed a certain predisposition to study in order to learn the profession and, at the same time, obtain an academic degree, which was what his father wanted. His parents supported him throughout and financed his studies in Switzerland's cultural and economic capital. As the years passed, Giger's interest in art as a means of earning a living grew, and he combined it with his love of music and his obsession with sex.

During those years, this study centre enjoyed a certain prestige in Switzerland. Some renowned artists taught there, which is why it was considered a high-level centre<sup>59</sup>. It also had a library and a museum to support study and enable students' work to be exhibited in public. The studies consisted of four courses: there was a preliminary course (*Vorkurs*) to learn the basics and fundamentals of the different subjects taught at the School. This consisted of four compulsory subjects: Colour, Modelling, Geometric Drawing and Writing. In addition to these subjects, there was a special course (*Sonderkurs*) on the History of Culture and Reflection on Art, which sought to bring students up to date on trends in contemporary art, literature, theatre, music, painting and architecture. Giger chose to specialise in Interior Design (*Innenausbau*), which lasted three years. It was led by Professor Willy Guhl. In the first year, students took the *Vorkurs*; in the second, Architectural Drawing, Materials Science, Projects, Industrial Drawing, Calculus and Sketching; in the third, they worked on practical assignments; and in the final semester, they completed their diploma project, which consisted of designing and developing a model of an industrial product or a

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<sup>59</sup> The information on the Zurich School of Arts and Crafts was gathered from brochures about the centre during the compilation of information at the SIK in Zurich.

construction. For his final project, Giger chose to design a railway station with rest areas and toilets.

At this centre, he would receive intellectual and artistic training, perfecting his technical skills and broadening his creative horizons. He would continue to experiment with materials and new forms. Little by little, he would become involved in Zurich's artistic circles and learn about European aesthetic movements and art history. After these four years, Giger would obtain a comprehensive education as a designer, also educating his sensitivity for the appreciation of fine arts, composition, colour, forms and proportions. In short, he would develop his creativity, his capacity for observation and analysis and, above all, his ability to draw, which would evolve during these years. He also acquired theoretical knowledge for solving spatial problems, which he would apply in his architectural designs and three-dimensional compositions. This training was aimed at enabling the artist to create a functional and pleasant environment for living. However, Giger did not specialise in this task, but rather in the representation of the distressing, the macabre and the most sordid aspects of life. Some of his teachers at this centre had a profound influence on him, such as Professor Mattmüller, for whom Giger felt great admiration and respect. Quoting enthusiastically in his book [www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com) (*The Art of the Future*), the classes and charisma of this teacher made him understand the main guidelines of modern artists. Mattmüller was in charge of the preparatory course: "He cared about each of us individually, highlighting the seeds of each person's personality and then showing them similar examples in art history to encourage them (...). Mattmüller made us feel that we were special and supported every unorthodox attempt"<sup>(60)</sup>. He discovered new materials such as polyester, which he would work with very often. Giger often comments that this was the most important thing he discovered at this school: polyester and its characteristics. From this point on, Giger began to establish himself as an artist, starting his uninterrupted production and gradually developing a personal and characteristic style that would become his trademark.

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<sup>60</sup>[www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com) *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

unmistakable in his work. One of his fellow students, Vreni Voirêt, says of Giger: "He was someone very special. I was fascinated by the contrast between his personality, which was endearing and not at all aggressive, and his drawings, which were the complete opposite, as if they were two different people. I remember above all that he was very funny and entertaining."<sup>(61)</sup> His stay lasted four years, during which time he obtained a diploma in industrial design and interior architecture, which was what his father had wanted for him, that he at least pursue some kind of career. Curiously, no one has called Giger in more than 30 years about interior architecture, although he has done work of this type (in nightclubs). In other words, although the diploma did not open any doors for him, not even to obtain a scholarship despite trying on several occasions, the training did serve him intellectually. He has largely developed his career as a self-taught artist, which can be seen in his work, which has evolved through experimentation and the search for new forms of expression. In fact, he managed to exhibit his first creations in public himself, and commissions came to him through his contacts, not because he had a degree.

### **First encounters with art**

For Giger, *Panderma* magazine was a revelation, and through it and its editor, Carl Laszlo, he delved a little deeper into the world of art. "My interest in art was awakened by the Basel collector and editor Carl Laszlo, whose magazine *Panderma* was a revelation to me (...). At his home, I saw works by Schröder-Sonnenstern and Oelze for the first time, which I found extremely mysterious"<sup>(62)</sup>. He also discovered Arman's assemblages. Laszlo had spent five years in concentration camps, so it is likely that he told Giger about his experiences. "Carl Laszlo was, for me, the most knowledgeable person in art. He knew, for example, ten years in advance what would become fashionable and wrote some essays, which are the best I have ever <sup>read</sup>."<sup>63</sup> Giger met *Panderma* through a friend, Markus Schmidt, guitarist with the band Floh from Cologne. Laszlo also published a magazine called Radar, when

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Vreni Voirêt, Zurich, 18-8-2003.

<sup>62</sup>[www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com). *Op.cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*

he participated in the Basel art fair with New York figures from Burroughs' circle. According to Laszlo, the artistic task for which Giger was suited was to make films and models of funerary monuments for wealthy Americans. He claimed that painting was insignificant and that cinema was the medium of the century.

### **Professional beginnings and early series**

In 1966, after receiving his diploma and spending the summer at his father's country house in Poiana in Ticino, he was hired in the autumn by Swiss designer and artist Andreas Christen to work in his studio and collaborate on various projects. From that moment on, he settled permanently in Zurich. Christen spoke<sup>64</sup> of his cordial relationship with Giger and the work he did for him during those years; he drew plans and industrial elements, was "very technically gifted in the construction aspect," with a great "feel for the design of pieces and objects." For approximately two years, he worked with Christen drawing and sketching architectural structures and designs for office furniture for the company Knoll International. At the same time, Giger designed and drew his own furniture and structures, already using the technique of brushing and scraping with a blade to retouch his ink drawings. During these years, Giger also developed his personal works, mainly drawings and illustrations that would constitute some of his most original and interesting proposals, through which he gradually delved deeper into the study and development of forms and figures with a already defined theme and iconography. He grouped these drawings into different series, such as *Los niños atómicos* (The Atomic Children), *Una comilona para el psiquiatra* (A Feast for the Psychiatrist) and *Pozos* (Wells). These are small-format illustrations in A4 size that he published in underground magazines such as Clou and Agitation between approximately 1964 and 1966. They clearly show the literary inspiration of the horror genre and mystery stories such as *The Phantom of the Opera* and the tales of Edgar Allan Poe. He developed an iconography full of grotesque and fantastical figures, tunnels and labyrinths, and dreamlike experiences, also influenced by his readings of Freud.

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<sup>64</sup>Interview with Andreas Christen, Zurich, August 1999.

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### **1.3. First artistic period: experimentation (1966- 1971)**

#### **1.3.1. Biomechanical beginnings**

After his years of training and preparation at the Zurich School of Fine Arts, Giger had developed his technical skills and was now capable of producing independent works in larger formats. He sought to intellectualise his drawings in search of a more symbolic meaning than in his previous series. It should be remembered that he began by drawing as a hobby, before going on to publish some of his work in local magazines and journals.

Through his readings of Freud and his theories on dreams, he developed more in-depth studies with the intention of penetrating new worlds of creation, thus shaping his own repertoire. In addition to the world of dreams, a broad field and a frequent source of inspiration for Giger that had attracted him since childhood, his other important source was the present world, in which he observed human beings undergoing a profound transformation as a result of major changes to the natural habitat and ecological activity. These changes are mainly due to the enormous impact of the industrial revolution and the unstoppable technological development that are causing changes not only in mentality, but also constituting agents of transformation of our reality, starting with the physical, the first field of action of every being, and reaching social and urban reality. Artists from other eras had complex concerns and developed fantastic worlds that harbour the solution to the problems of their time, from Leonardo da Vinci, who studied in depth the structure and composition of the human body and its mechanical meaning, to Bosch, who painted the human beings of his time surrounded by monsters, grotesque beings and fantastic objects, to artists of this century such as Dalí, creator of surreal worlds, and Bellmer, who investigated various plastic solutions in the representation of the human body. In these artists and many others, Giger saw some of his own concerns reflected, and following some approaches

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sketched by those artists, he will attempt to continue this research into the expressive possibilities of the human body and everything that surrounds it. It is understandable that Giger cites artists such as these, as well as Kubin and Bacon, as some of his references, since he sees himself as a follower of the artistic doctrines they professed, such as surrealism and fantastic art.

#### Drawings and sculptures from 1966 to 1968

During these years (1966-1968), he produced a multitude of drawings, which logically reflect his artistic concerns and preoccupations during this period. These creations contain the seeds of his biomechanical style, which he had already been developing since his first illustrations around 1962. Many of these works were included in his first solo exhibitions, which mark the beginning of Giger's artistic career, as he became aware of himself as an artist. An old acquaintance from Chur named Basilio Schmid, nicknamed Pascha, convinced Giger to leave his job with Christen as a designer and draughtsman and devote himself entirely to art (around 1968). He eventually did so. Giger immersed himself fully in the world of exhibitions and galleries. Among the most significant works from this period are two drawings entitled *The Voice of America*, a series dedicated to vampire themes (*Vampire*, 1967 and *Hell Angel's*, 1968), women (*Mädchen* and *Hexe*), organic landscapes and, especially, his drawings dedicated to science fiction (*Atomkinder*, *Astreunuchen*, *Woman with child and Alpha*).

At this time, he produced a work that was fundamental to his oeuvre, the *Birth Machine* (*Gebärmaschine*), an emblematic work from his early creative period. He had already addressed the theme a year earlier in a first *Birth Machine*, within the series *A Feast for the Psychiatrist*, but now he perfected it. With this work, he created one of his most striking icons, the bullet children, and artistically captured a work of profound social criticism, graphically alluding to the problem of overpopulation. His knowledge of weapons, and specifically of

the pistols, lends solidity to the work, to which he would return mentally in 1999 to produce it as a sculptural relief, using aluminium.

During the summers of 1966 to 1969, taking advantage of the holiday period, Giger made some sculptures using polyester as raw material. During these summer periods he also produced watercolour works, but what is interesting is that the plastic works have formal characteristics similar to those observed in his drawings. He returned to the theme of biomecanoids, which would become his emblematic construction, creating this being in three dimensions with organic and mechanical characteristics, an electricity tube and highly erotic symbolism, such as the shape of a penis fused with the skull like organic glasses. During this period, he also created sculptures that would become famous, such as the *Baby Suitcase* and the *Beggar*, to which he would return at various stages of his career, and commissions from Fredi Murer for the film *Swissmade*, Giger's first collaboration in the film industry, such as the dog suit and the plastic parts of the alien suit in polyester and vinyl.

### **1.3.2. First exhibitions**

In 1966, he decided to exhibit his work, consisting of illustrations, drawings and sculptures, in public. He decided to take the plunge and try his luck in the art world, trying to make his way and earn enough to establish himself as an artist.

During those days, he had tried to publish his illustrations in a magazine, with the idea of being hired as an illustrator. After visiting the offices of the publishers *Du* and *Diogenes* without success, he decided to try his luck at the Benno gallery, which was located near the aforementioned publishers. He reached an agreement with the owner, who rented him a small space in the basement for 300 Swiss francs a month, where he would exhibit his works for the first time. Giger placed his drawings in the gallery among African sculptures, postcards and books. Not a single work was sold, despite the low prices, but he felt morally like an artist for the first time because he had held an exhibition. The positive reaction of his friends led him to try to exhibit his work more often.

an artist for the first time for having held the exhibition. The positive reaction from his friends led him to try to exhibit his work more often.

He would later hold another exhibition at the Klostermauer gallery in Saint Gall at the end of the year. The exhibition received positive reviews from the Swiss press<sup>65</sup>. Drawings from the *Pozos* series, plastic art and drawings from the period between 1966 and 1968 were shown, such as *The voice of America*, with clear political content, as some journalists pointed out.

He also participated in a collective exhibition with 21 artists at the Stummer & Hubschmied gallery in tribute to Che Guevara. For the occasion, Giger contributed his drawing *Máquina paridora* (Birthing Machine), which was already well known in Zurich's artistic circles. As we can see, Giger had clear political involvement at that time.

### 1.3.3. Li

During those years, Giger lived at the home of actor Paul Weibel on Rindermarkt Square, located in the heart of Zurich's old town. There he met theatre actress Li Tobler, with whom he immediately fell in love. She became his artistic muse, and thus began a long relationship with the actress that would last nine years<sup>66</sup>. He saw her for the first time in a restaurant with his friend Paul Weibel in the autumn of 1966<sup>67</sup>.

The year 1967 was a key one for HR Giger, as he began living with Li and also strengthened his ties with Zurich's intellectual and artistic avant-garde. He met Sergius Golowin, writer and mythologist, and filmmaker F.M. Murer. He moved with Li and Paul Weibel to an abandoned attic in Zurich's Rindermarkt, which Giger described as "incredibly romantic and cosy". The house was in a state of disrepair

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<sup>65</sup> See Gigers Surrealismus, Galerie vor der Klostermauer. *Fursteländer*, 8-11-68, and TRÜB, Fridolin. H.R. Giger in der Galerie vor der Klostermauer. *Volksstimme*, 5-11-1968.

<sup>66</sup> "I met Li in 1966 when she was studying theatre at K. Rellstab's workshop in Zurich. She was beautiful and was my partner until her death in 1975." *ARh+*. *Op.cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>67</sup> "Li was 18 years old and beautiful. She was about to leave drama school. She seemed to radiate an aura of freshness and had an air of purity and honesty that I have rarely encountered in another human being. She was the fairy from my dreams come true." *H.R. Giger's Necronomicon*. *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

demolish it, and the owner was no longer carrying out renovations, which caused problems with bad weather, such as leaks, damp and cold. The wooden floor was cracked and insects came out of it, climbing up the walls and sometimes falling onto the bed. The house was also dark and somewhat gloomy. Despite all these disadvantages, Giger found the atmosphere very charming due to its sloping ceilings and small windows. When Weibel had long-running performances that required him to leave the house for long periods of time, Giger and Li fell in love. "I fell deeply in love with Li. She had enormous vitality and a great appetite for life. She wanted her life to be short but intense"<sup>68</sup>.

Li was so enthusiastic about things that if they did not go well, he suffered periods of intense depression and complete apathy. Giger and Li moved to another flat in the same neighbourhood. While Giger worked with Christen during the day, at night he worked on his own ink drawings, which gradually gained in format. "Li started working at the Neumarkt Theatre and, to practise her voice, she read my favourite books aloud to me. In this way, my works were unconsciously influenced by these magical writings, and the images I created were produced in a kind of dreamlike trance"<sup>69</sup>. This idyll was short-lived. In 1969, Li was hired by the theatre in St. Gallen, and Giger could only visit her on weekends. His relationship with Li was one of abandonment and return on her part. Sometimes due to her theatre performances in cities throughout Germany, other times due to other relationships, she constantly distanced herself from Giger, who ended up feeling more camaraderie towards her after intense periods of concern about her attitude. "I admired Li very much: I was amazed at how she was able to perform the same play 130 times, when I was incapable of repeating the same painting" <sup>70</sup>. Li went to San Francisco for a year with a friend. "She was young and wanted to enjoy life. Spending time with a painter who worked from dawn to dusk was not the best thing for someone of her temperament"<sup>71</sup>. A month later, she returned very depressed and reconciled with Giger. Li's influence on Giger's personality would be significant. Her

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

Her influence is very present in his work from the 1970s. Her face, features and body merge with Giger's aesthetic ideal of women and can be seen in many of his paintings. When he lived with her, he even painted her body on several occasions, in a biomechanical exercise of *body art*, exploring the application of his style and its effects on the human body [8].



7-Giger and Li (1969)



8-Li, painted by Giger (1973)



9-Giger on the cover of Hotcha magazine (1968)

#### **1.3.4. Zurich's underground culture: contacts and sociocultural environment**

His relationship with the counterculture of the late 1960s is important, as this was the environment in which he developed during those years and where we can place the beginnings of his career. During his time at the School of Arts and Crafts, he met other students, such as Fredi Murer, and future artists who would form the Swiss artistic avant-garde in the late 1960s. His contacts with these groups were very intense, and he became friends with the painters Friedrich Kuhn and Hugo Schumacher and with the hippie-psychedelic movement led by Urban Gwerder. For these reasons, his involvement and presence in the Zurich counterculture scene was notable. He began to receive commissions from various fields, such as the world of music (album cover for the group Floh de Cologne), cinema (designs for the film *Swissmade*) and theatre.

(*Early Morning*). His relationship with the publishing world (printing posters since his early days) and gallery owners (Bischofsberger) also played an essential role, allowing his work to spread relatively quickly from 1967 onwards through press reviews, articles and the subsequent publication of catalogues. Zurich had been the cradle of the most groundbreaking avant-garde movements, as the Dadaist movement was born there in 1916. This city welcomed various intellectuals and artists from different European countries who led a significant break with the artistic and literary trends of the time. From that Zurich has become a benchmark for European culture.

The 1960s played a particularly important role in Switzerland. Traditionally, this has been a neutral and liberal country, and cultural trends have usually passed by without making a dent in the social foundations. As filmmaker F.M. Murer says, "For the last 700 years, Switzerland has been a kind of sleepy paradise. However, 1968 had a powerful impact here: there were pitched battles, constant clashes with the police, street riots, disturbances... it was a real war against the police, fought through <sup>autonomous</sup> youth centres." This atmosphere had a strong socio-cultural impact and artists were identified with and committed to the movement, which was triggered in part by external events such as the Vietnam War and the strong countercultural movement that was shaking North America. At the same time, the hippie movement, flower power and experimentation with drugs were developing, which had a strong impact on the artistic scene. It should also be noted that the Swiss travel a lot, given the country's economic wealth, and that many Swiss artists are based in capitals such as Paris or New York, so the influence from abroad is evident.

The movement of 1968 led to a politicisation of the cultural scene, which was evident in the themes used by filmmakers, painters and poets and translated into a vigorous artistic landscape. The political spirit was anti-capitalist and the hostile sentiment stirred up by the artists was very extremist, guided by communist ideas. The artists were united and stood in solidarity against the enemy.

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with F.M. Murer, 18 August 1999.

common cause against capitalism. They were enemies of bourgeois capitalist profit, deeply rooted in the Swiss mentality. This common cause united poets, filmmakers and painters who often worked on joint projects, with inter-artistic relationships being very favourable for the younger generations who lived in an environment of cultural and creative effervescence during those years. The energy gradually faded over the years. In the 1980s, a second youth movement emerged, but with different objectives. Art in the 1960s was politically committed to opposing the arms race, the Cold War and the division of the world into blocs. The threat was latent in the face of the atomic danger, and Giger had previously produced his series of drawings, *The Atomic Children*, in which he satirically denounced the serious problem of atomic energy and its impact on man and nature. This series was disseminated through underground newspapers and magazines such as *Clou* and *Hotcha*. On a cover of *Hotcha* [9] we see a photomontage with Giger himself, wearing one of his necklaces and the superimposed photo of his design for Fredi Murer's film *Swissmade*.

Giger was very concerned about the state of the environment and particularly affected by the problem of overpopulation, as he saw the unbridled and uncontrolled growth of the population as a deadly threat to nature, with plants and animals dying because they had nowhere to live. It is necessary to place Giger in Zurich in 1968 and comment on the background surrounding this moment. It was one of the most important cities in Europe and had a specific climate, in which various currents coexisted: existentialists, bohemians and anarchists mixed, creating a turbulent and agitated atmosphere. We should also remember that in Zurich<sup>73</sup> cafés such as the *Odeon*, the *Select* and the *Malatesta* played a fundamental role, as meeting places with a long tradition in Switzerland (Canetti, Max Frisch).

Giger participated in the *Poëtenz Schau (Power Exhibition)*, a show orchestrated by Urban Gwerder, a prominent urban figure in the "movement" of the time (countercultural movement, hippies). *Poetenz* was one of the first

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<sup>73</sup> As in other Germanic capitals such as Prague and Vienna.

multimedia shows in Europe, with the participation of many artists, which had a provocative and anti-conformist tone. Gwerder called himself "the wild king of poetry", had a reactionary and rebellious attitude, and uttered phrases such as "there are windows you can spit at even though they are closed". Between 1966 and 1967, there was a tour of various Swiss and German cities. The show featured experimental films, rock music, poetry, image projections and art exhibitions. There were dialogues with the audience, who interacted with the artists' work. The spectators were part of the staging. During those years, Gwerder created the magazine Hotcha. Giger's participation consisted of making two short films with Murer, entitled *High* and *Heimkiller*. The first shows drawings by Giger, while *Heimkiller* is a macabre paranoia with strident music, depicting the motif of an hourglass with a bleeding human head embedded in it. Giger also designed the poster for the show, depicting Gwerder as a guru and enigmatic figure.

In 1968, he collaborated with the film industry for the first time, creating designs for the Swiss film *Swissmade* [10]. The film's director, F.M. Murer, commissioned Giger to design the alien that stars in the film, who arrives on Earth to collect and record information about humans, as well as armour for a dog. Giger created his first three-dimensional alien, making the costume out of white polyester. His focus as an artist continued to grow until he devoted himself fully to this task a year later.

In 1969, he participated for the first and last time in a theatrical production, creating the costumes and masks for Edward Bond's play *Early Morning*, directed by Peter Stein at the Schauspielhaus in Zurich. In Chur, during his internship with Meissen, he had designed masks and sets for a performance. The experience in Zurich was not at all satisfactory, and Giger promised himself never to work with the theatre again, due to the complications that arose in this collaboration. He had to design and build prosthetics, false limbs, bodies and skeletons in a short time. He did so using polyester, leather and latex. He took moulds of the actors to make the added limbs

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Some actors played the role of Siamese twins joined at the waist; constructing the limb that joined them was the most complicated part. He also took part in a *happening* at the Jörg Stummer gallery. All these events show his tremendously active and participatory nature in the Zurich art scene.

His diploma from the School of Arts and Crafts did not serve him well in his career. Perhaps it would have been useful for working with Christen, but Giger carved out his own future. He did this by visiting different magazines to offer his drawings and illustrations or trying to convince gallery owners to exhibit his work. Through his contacts, he received numerous commissions. Little by little, he gained fame and entered the art world. He never received any official support. In fact, he applied four times for scholarships (between 1967 and 1971) and never obtained them. "He was always eliminated in the second round of voting, even with paintings such as *Phalelujah* and *Birth Machine*, of which around 50,000 posters were sold and which were printed as the centre spread in the UNESCO guide, *UNESCO Courier*, in November 1970, distributed worldwide"<sup>74</sup>.

In 1970, Giger moved with Li to a house with a garden that he had just purchased in Oerlikon (on the outskirts of Zurich). Here he set up his studio and workshop. Giger discovered that the more perfect the studio was, the more difficult it was for him to work. He has lived there ever since.

In 1969, he had met the artist Friedrich Kuhn at a friend's house, and they became close friends until Kuhn's death in 1972. In this context, Kuhn stands out as an exponent of Swiss Fantastic Realism. Friedrich Kuhn (1926-1972) is considered by Giger to be "the best Swiss painter" and a "purebred painter"<sup>75</sup>. He is also a key figure in the artistic context of the 1960s, influential in the Zurich scene and of great importance to Swiss art, despite not having been given his due recognition. For Giger, "he was unique in the Zurich art scene. The stories I know about him could

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<sup>74</sup> H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon*. *Op. cit.* p. 38.

<sup>75</sup> ARh+. *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

fill a book"<sup>76</sup>. Kuhn was, in a way, the leader of the fantastic realism movement in Switzerland, which received a strong boost from other countries such as Austria, where the Vienna School of Fantastic Art was well established. This artist had a tortuous and turbulent life marked by alcoholism, which would end his life in 1972.

### The *Biomechanoids* series

Gallery owner Bruno Bischofsberger purchased a series of Indian ink drawings and oil paintings and advised Giger to number and photograph all his works. In 1968, Giger published a portfolio of prints featuring eight 100 x 80 cm drawings screen-printed on silver plate, which he titled *Biomechanoiden*. He collaborated with Bruno Bischofsberger, a famous Swiss gallery owner of international renown, on the publication of this series. Giger had already been working formally with strange creatures and mechanical elements, developing encounters and morphological fusions of organic parts and elements from industry. He also calls works such as *Beggar*, in which a hand and arm are joined to a leg and foot, forming a monster produced by the technique that allows the union, *biomecanoids*. He comments on biomecanoids: "I understood them as a harmonious fusion of technique, mechanics and creature. Genetic research still has a couple of horrors in store for us. Cloning is already a nightmare in itself. Siamese twins working as labourers, one belly, two heads, four arms."<sup>77</sup> Throughout his career, he has continued to title many of his works as *biomechanoids*, so we will study the term in greater depth.

#### 1.3.5. Transition: from drawing to painting. Early oil paintings

During these years, Giger conducted experiments in the field of painting that led him to work on simplifying forms and

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<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

greater presence of figures. He first tried oil painting in his search for new technical solutions to capture his ideas.

### Oil works

These were produced between approximately 1969 and 1971, with the *Homages to Beckett* and some landscapes. These works mark the beginning of a period of transition, which will culminate in his two series entitled *Pasajes*, as oil painting represents a brief interlude between his ink drawings and airbrush works, which bring together all the experiences and technical procedures he had employed during his formative years as an artist and his early works, which show a significant stylistic evolution.

Giger was unfamiliar with this technique because he had not learned it during his academic training, so he improvised and experimented. His lack of knowledge led him to try unsuitable components, such as using petrol as a solvent, but the truth is that some of the paintings created using this technique are of great quality (some of them have been purchased by banks and museums). He produced three versions of his particular *Homage to Samuel Beckett* (1969) and other interesting works such as *Humanoid I* (1970) and *Phallelujah* (1968-69).

### The two *Passages* series

Giger had his first nightmares in the house he had just moved into and, as a result, painted works such as *WC*, *Kitchen with Sink* and *Bathtub*. "My nervous system was out of control, I felt pain all over my body, I even thought I had cancer, and I felt desperate and miserable as I continued to paint the objects in the bathroom"<sup>78</sup>. After the Beckett paintings, he began to work with material objects treated in a surrealistic manner, recreating

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<sup>78</sup>H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon*. Op. cit., p. 30.

metaphors. He paints them as a cure, as therapy for the nightmares that torment him at that time, thus exorcising himself from his dreams.

Around 1970, he began working on the second series of Pasajes, based on a geometric motif he picked up on a trip through Cologne: the emptying of rubbish by a collection truck. He produced around thirty paintings, already applying the airbrush technique he would begin working with in 1972. In 1971, filmmaker Fredi Murer decided to shoot the documentary *Passagen*

[11] about Giger's pictorial world, which had a certain impact as it won the award for best documentary film at the Mannheim Film Festival in 1972. During these years, Giger remained very committed to political action and, together with Golowin and the painter Walter Wegmüller, signed a manifesto calling for political asylum in Switzerland for Timothy Leary, the 'drug prophet', in which they set out their political ideas [12].

With the publication of his first catalogue, *ARh+* (1971), his work became more widely known, along with continuous exhibitions and the distribution of posters by publisher HH Kunz (in the early 1970s, print runs reached 12,000 copies). The Swiss press titled some articles on the publication of *ARh+* as follows: *Today he is known in Switzerland for his vampiric surrealism, No Air to Breathe*<sup>79</sup> or *The Atmosphere of Horror*. By 1971, Giger had already achieved prestige in Switzerland and recognition for his work, which is described as dark and horrific and is associated with the underground due to his work in cinema, rock music, theatre and the hippie movement. The manipulation of man through machines and the media concerned Giger during these years: "They see nothing, they are blind, they are being used, that terrifies me"<sup>80</sup>. He sought to address this impact through his works, which aim to overwhelm the viewer with their sinister forms, empty spaces devoid of human figures, organic landscapes and uncomfortable spaces such as toilets and kitchens. His inspiration came from a variety of sources: "My craziest ideas and representations come to me mainly in the

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<sup>79</sup>Keine Luft mehr zum Atmen. *Luzernes Neuste Nachrichten*, 26-6-71.

<sup>80</sup>THIEL, Hans. H.R. Giger andere Wirklichkeiten. *Annabelle Journal*, January 1971.

theatre, because it bores me a lot. In the end, I would go crazy when it was over and leave. Not because of the theatre itself, but because it stimulated my world of ideas. I also get ideas in cafés, where there are lots of people talking, or with music”<sup>81</sup>.



10- Filming of *Swissmade* (1968)



11- Giger working in his studio. Image from the documentary *Passagen* (1972)

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<sup>81</sup>H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon*. *Op. cit.*, p. 30.

## Asilo para Timothy Leary!

3. 7. 1971

El intento de criminalizar y poner fuera de la ley de Timothy Leary aduciendo «delito de drogas» no es válido según el criterio de eminentes juristas de los EEUU. Él como médico y profesor de sicología, promotor de una asociación que consta de cientos de científicos como miembros, poseía el derecho de «experimentar libremente». Quien lo designe como «profeta» de la droga LSD, desarrollada en Basilea, debe saber que él y sus amigos son quienes más condenan la utilización de la droga y exigen un año de física y anímica preparación para experimentos en el propio cuerpo. Nadie se ha opuesto tanto como Leary al consumo legal de barbitúricos, anfetaminas, etc, en algunos países. A través de sus llamados ha salvado a cientos de miles de las drogas más fuertes (morfina, heroína, etc).

Sus enemigos en los EEUU han escrito abiertamente, sin embargo, el verdadero motivo de su odio y lo han declarado «enemigo del estado»: el hecho de que gracias a sus llamadas el 15% de la juventud blanca de los EEUU se oponga a la destrucción del medio ambiente, a la guerra del Vietnam, a la opresión de los indios y los negros, ha llenado de ciega furia a determinados grupos.

Como miembros de acciones artísticas de los años sesenta, sabemos qué poco es lo que hay en Europa en música, pintura, poesía, sicología, en la búsqueda de un nuevo estilo de vida que vaya a ser ligado con el apellido Leary en los próximos años. Es gracias a él que se ha conocido en los EEUU la obra de C.G.Jung y Hesse. Participó ejemplarmente en el redescubrimiento de las culturas hindú e indígena a través de toda una generación – y con eso participó en la confrontación de la juventud moderna con el mundo de una nueva religiosidad.

Hugo Ball escribió una vez que hasta ahora todo los portadores de ideas innovadoras habían encontrado asilo en Suiza y veía la función de nuestro país en el lugar del libre encuentro y difusión de las nuevas ideas. ¿Somos acaso menos generosos que los confederados del siglo XIX?

Haremos todo lo que esté a nuestro alcance, para que no se lleve a cabo la traición a los principios suizos – y para que después no se laven las manos libres de culpa. En una democracia no puede existir una mayoría callada y menos aún una minoría acallada.

Por el «Grupo Asilo para Leary»:

Sergius Golowin, escritor, Berna  
Hansruedi Giger, pintor, Zúrich  
Walter Wegmüller, pintor, Basilea

12- Manifesto *Asylum for Timothy Leary!* (1971)

## **1.4. Second artistic period: consolidation and international recognition (1972– 1989)**

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This second stage is characterised by the predominance of pictorial work, with which he reached the peak of his art and his most important period. We can observe the evolution of his style, which was enriched by the contribution of the airbrush technique and other factors such as his ongoing collaborations with the film industry. His style cannot be understood without his earlier works, in which many of the basic components of his art are already evident: the creation of biomechanoids and the concept of biomechanics, the contrast between beauty and horror, the representation of monsters and the symbolism of his figures. This period includes practically all of his pictorial work, with the exception of his early attempts at oil painting. It lasted from 1972 to 1989, 17 years that constitute the central part of his work and his most important creations.

### **1.4.1 The airbrush. Early works**

In February 1972, his friend, the artist Hugo Schumacher, introduced Giger to the airbrush technique, which would become his main creative tool from that moment on. This instrument had been used mainly for advertising and photo retouching, and some artistic movements, such as hyperrealism, had also used it at some point<sup>82</sup>.

Giger developed his own meticulous freehand technique with this instrument, creating a unique style that would leave a distinctive mark on all his work from that moment on. The style he had been carving out since his beginnings would now develop to its full potential, influenced by new elements that Giger would gradually introduce. His compositions would grow in format, with new, very colourful structures, populated by a multitude of figures and iconographic elements, towards a more

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<sup>82</sup> Specifically, the American hyperrealists, most of whom started with photographs and then emulated them using an airbrush.

figurative and fantastical in nature, delving deeper into many of the aspects and themes outlined in his previous creations. He began experimenting with the airbrush, which allowed him to generate expressive resources, perfect his use of the instrument and channel its artistic possibilities towards a more faithful representation of his worlds, seeking to 'make the invisible visible' and represent his fantasies in a realistic way, a goal he would achieve over the course of the decade.

Giger bought the necessary equipment for airbrushing, a spray gun, inks and a compressor, and immediately set to work, experimenting directly, without sketches, on the paper he usually worked with and sticking it onto boards that would gradually decorate the walls of his house. He even painted the doors (kitchen, bathroom) with his airbrush. During those years, he was immersed in the creation of his second series of *Pasajes*, which he completed using this tool. He thus managed to perfect the leather-covered appearance of his paintings in the first series of *Pasajes*, in works such as *Bañera* (Bathtub) and *Lavabo* (Sink), and in elements such as pipes and metal appliances. The motif chosen for the new passages was inspired by the rubbish truck he saw and photographed in Cologne. He worked on the motif based on these snapshots, copying the basic lines and varying the colour tone in each painting<sup>83</sup>.

From 1972 onwards, the occult and esoteric themes in Giger's paintings became more pronounced. His work reflects this shift, becoming more dramatic, more baroque, more oppressive and sinister. This magical and mysterious world emerged in his paintings partly due to his use of the airbrush as his main working tool. His work gained in quality and richness. He began by experimenting and improvising, using the surrealist method of automatic writing and letting himself go, drawing art from his gut, in a visceral way. In a couple of years, he perfected a complex and personal technique, with which he would create his most important works. But during these years, he had encountered new aesthetic trends and new artists who would have a profound impact on him. They would alter his knowledge and influence his art from then on. These were mainly the *Vienna Fantastic School* of *fantastic realism* and Ernst Fuchs, its leading figure

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<sup>83</sup> In addition, in the *Passages*, he deals with themes such as the fear of castration and women as trash.

most representative, which would have a notable influence on him, introducing him to Kabbalistic studies that would allow him to gain a new spiritual dimension in the works of this decade [13]. These artists practised figurative painting with fantastical themes, executed with a realistic finish in their compositions. In addition, Fuchs' theories on celestial architecture would have a profound effect on Giger, who from then on would delve into texts on Kabbalah and occult subjects such as magic and the Tarot. Giger realised that there were already painters who executed their works with much greater skill and technical perfection than his own, which he saw as insurmountable. Painters such as Mati Klarwein, Rudolf Hausner and Erik Brauner, in addition to the aforementioned Fuchs, would become technical models to emulate. At the same time, he would revisit painters who were key to him, such as Dalí, Bacon and Bosch. From this point on, he would investigate contemporary Austrian art in greater detail, as well as some of its representative figures such as Alfred Kubin, Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele and Fuchs himself. The impact of these influences on his style would be significant, with his paintings taking on a colder and more mysterious tone than in previous periods. He would embark on a path of no return in the creation of new, more stylised and meticulously crafted forms, creating increasingly complex compositions. His figures now took on greater plastic presence and sculptural force. The elements would be crafted with greater precision thanks to the use of the airbrush. Giger delved into specific themes and developed an original iconographic programme, with an aesthetically innovative and highly personal treatment.

The pictorial space is too small for his artistic aspirations. Therefore, he joins large panels together by screwing them together. This is how he produces works such as *Aleph*, whose title introduces us to the world of Kabbalah in the Hebrew mystical tradition and to a universe of fantastic figuration full of symbolic connotations. The Aleph corresponds in the tarot to the figure of the magician, that is, the first of the major arcana. In 1972, the artist Friedrich Kuhn, his close friend, whom Giger considered one of the best Swiss artists of the 20th century, passed away. Giger painted two pictures in homage to Kuhn, taking as his starting point and reference a photo of him in his armchair at home. That same year, Giger carried out a psychedelic experiment that consisted of collaborating with two other artists.

Swiss painters Claude Sandoz and Walter Wegmüller. The three locked themselves away in a house in the mountains for two weeks to create four paintings together, with each artist painting a section and adding their own style to the composition. In 1974, the resulting works were exhibited at the Bündner Kunstmuseum in Chur. The experience was recorded by J.J. Wittmer in a documentary about what happened in the house entitled *Tagtraum (Daydream)*.



13- Giger and Ernst Fuchs (1984)



14- The band Emerson, Lake and Palmer visiting Giger's studio (1973)

### *The cover design for Emerson, Lake and Palmer*

In 1973, Giger was commissioned to design the cover for the new album by British band *Emerson, Lake & Palmer*, entitled *Brain Salad Surgery*, the fifth album by the famous band that topped the charts in Europe and North America [14]. This trio, which debuted in 1970, was considered one of the giants of progressive and symphonic rock alongside bands such as *Yes* and *Genesis*, who contributed to the definition of this musical style with the addition of keyboards and the influence of classical music and jazz, blending these influences into sound experiments that were at the forefront of the artistic avant-garde of the time. The success of this cover, which went around the world thanks to the band's fame, catapulted Giger to fame as a graphic designer of album covers. The band contacted him again in the 1980s, and their latest album, *Then & Now* (1998), a compilation of the band's career, features a composition by Giger. Since then, Giger's contacts with the world of rock and pop in some of its different manifestations, such as punk, heavy metal, industrial techno and experimental rock, have been constant and fruitful, a fact acknowledged by many musicians influenced and inspired by Giger's visionary world.

#### **1.4.2. The great triptychs: creative and stylistic maturity**

In 1975, Giger created the *Passagen-Tempel* (*Temple of Passages*) series, produced for an installation at the Sydow-Zirkwitz gallery in Frankfurt. The work was previously exhibited at the museum in Chur. Giger created a pictorial space similar to an installation consisting of four panels forming a square enclosure, which was accessed through an opening in one of them in the shape of a sarcophagus. The ensemble responds to an ambitious iconographic programme in which the entry into the womb is symbolically detailed. The work appears in the documentary *Giger's Necronomicon* and as the backdrop in a music video by Debbie Harry.

That same year, Li opened her own gallery, encouraged by fellow gallery owner Jorg Stummer, and held exhibitions by artists such as Manon, Pfeifer and Klauke. The last exhibition held there, entitled *Schuwerke (Footwear)*, was featured in the documentary *Giger's Necronomicon*. Attendees were required to wear extravagant shoes. Giger made his own out of two loaves of bread. Shortly afterwards, Li committed suicide by shooting herself, as a result of her depression and complex character. For Giger, this event was terrible, even more so when the police thought he might have killed her, until a letter Li had written appeared and they realised it had been suicide. She had attempted suicide several times before. Their relationship lasted nine years, and for Giger she was always a source of inspiration. It is very likely that, albeit unconsciously, she influenced Giger's aesthetic and symbolic conception of women and his ideal of female beauty. In fact, her features can be seen in many of the women he paints and draws, such as in *Playmate* (1967), and he has two portraits of her done in a biomechanical style. With these airbrush portraits he dedicated to her, he wanted to immortalise her. On the occasion of Li's death, Giger also created a funeral mask and a *happening* in her memory, which was captured in a documentary entitled *The Second Celebration of the Four*, with a sinister and demonic setting.

During these years, we find the darkest, blackest and most occult works in Giger's oeuvre, related to magic and esotericism. He recreates satanic representations with many iconographic elements taken from these sciences, the result of his readings and his attraction to the aesthetics of the demonic, such as the medieval image of the Antichrist, represented as a goat.

Between 1973 and 1977, Giger produced a series of paintings entitled *Spell-Tempel (The Temples of Spells)*, which we will analyse in detail in the section on painting, as they are among his most emblematic works.

This stage, in which he reached artistic maturity, was one of his most productive due to the large number of paintings he produced. During these years, he created some of his most interesting works in terms of quality and content, as well as their interpretative richness, as they suggest varied

interpretations and readings from different points of view. From around 1972-73 onwards, Giger achieved technical mastery in representing his worlds and unfolding his universe. Forms and themes appear intermingled time and again. Organic and inorganic elements merge to create a new aesthetic that reveals an interest in the fantastic and mysterious, the morbid and deformed, the human and the extraterrestrial, nature and death, sex and torture, in a wide range of possibilities that arise from the artist's mind and are quickly executed with an airbrush. The photographic quality of the works enhances their enormous visual appeal, and the realistic finish evokes dreamlike worlds that become accessible to us.

Giger's mode of representation is very direct and forceful, presenting figures in close-up and various expressive elements such as exaggerated and deformed anatomies, the female body and a wide variety of iconographies that he makes his own by incorporating them into his art.

Between 1974 and 1977, he created many of his most iconic paintings, which are constantly reproduced in his books and catalogues and have inspired other contemporary artists. These include his series *Green Landscapes* (1975), *Mordor* (1975-76), *Necronom* (1976) and *Biomechanical Landscapes* (1975), as well as his panels *Chidher Grün* (1975), *Aleister Crowley* (1975), *The Master and Margarita* (1976), *Homage to Böcklin* (1977), *Dance of Witches* (1977) and *Spiegelbild* (1977).

#### 1.4.3. Contacts with cinema: *Dune* and *Alien*

##### ***Dune***

Since the early 1970s, the multifaceted avant-garde artist Chilean Alejandro Jodorowsky, known at the time for directing the psychedelic western *El Topo*, was fascinated by the idea of adapting Frank Herbert's novel *Dune* for the big screen. In 1966, this work had won the prestigious Hugo and Nebula science fiction awards, and since then it has been one of the most acclaimed and important works of literature in this genre. *Dune* is the result of the fusion of two stories, *World of Dunes* and *The Prophet of Dune*, written by Herbert in 1964.

With a certain air of innovation within science fiction, this important mythological work describes a distant future with dark and hopeless societies, a tradition continued in the 1980s by the emblematic work of cyberpunk literature, William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. In this society, as is the case today, there is a fear of intelligent machines.

Jodorowsky assembled an ambitious production team to recreate Frank Herbert's novel on the big screen. Pink Floyd would be responsible for the soundtrack, the cartoonist Moebius for the production design (he created a multitude of characters, sketches and designs), and Chriss Foss would design the spaceships. Dan O'Bannon would be in charge of the special effects. Salvador Dalí would play the role of Galactic Emperor Padishah Shadam IV. H.R. Giger would create the designs for the planet of the Harkonnen, a world ruled by the forces of evil, perversion and black magic. He would also design costumes, masks, etc. Based on his designs, a team of 30 specialists would bring his ideas to life. The project's budget would be around \$20 million, which was enormous for that time.

Salvador Dalí, who was to be one of the stars of the production, had introduced Jodorowsky to Giger's work and recommended him as a designer. This film would be his first opportunity in Hollywood. Giger learned about the project through a friend, the American painter Bob Venosa, who lived in Cadaqués and frequented Dalí's house. Giger travelled to Cadaqués in 1975 to meet Dalí [15] and interview Jodorowsky, but upon his arrival, the Chilean had already left. It was not until December 1975 that Giger met Jodorowsky in Paris. Giger was attending the opening of an exhibition on the devil at the Bijam Alaam Gallery, for which he had designed the poster, and visited Jodorowsky in his studio to show him his previous work on *Dune*. The Chilean filmmaker decided to commission Giger to design the planet Harkonnen, including props and costumes. Giger liked the idea and set to work to satisfy Jodorowsky, producing various designs and paintings [16]. Finally, due to a lack of funding, the project, in which many hours of work had been invested, was shelved and not resumed for four years.

For Jodorowsky, the project did not find support in Hollywood because it was a very attractive European idea and not an American one. For other critics, it was because in those years a film was being developed in Hollywood that would capture all the attention and financial support, *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977).

In 1977, Giger travelled to New York for the first time to participate in the exhibition organised by Professor Gert Schiff, *Images of Horror and Fantasy*, at the Bronx Museum. At the end of that same year, Giger's first large-format book, *Giger's Necronomicon*, was published, featuring the highlights of his work to date. He sent one of the first copies to Dan O'Bannon in Los Angeles, with whom he had become friends through the *Dune* project.



15- Dalí and Giger in Cadaqués (1975)



16- Giger airbrushing one of his designs for the film *Dune* (1976).

### *Alien*

The origins of the film *Alien* date back to 1975 with the gestation of the film project *Dune*<sup>84</sup>. After the failure of this project, the ideas were abandoned and the designers dispersed. Dan O'Bannon had been struck by Giger's surreal paintings and visions. Shortly afterwards, he received one of the first copies of Giger's first book, *Giger's Necronomicon*. At that point, he already had in mind the idea of writing a story around one of Giger's monsters.

O'Bannon was working on a script titled *Memory*, in which astronauts found an alien spacecraft with a dead pilot inside. His friend Ron Shusett collaborated on the story, and the script was renamed *Star Beast*, adding the figure of an alien creature that attacked the crew inside the ship. The originality of the story lies in how the alien enters the ship, through a human being whom

<sup>84</sup> DÍAZ, Lorenzo F. *Aliens*. Alberto Santos, ed., Madrid, 1997.

had attacked by introducing its seed into it. To conceive the appearance of the monster, Shusett and O'Bannon took Giger's work as a basis.

Once Brandwyne and Fox had agreed to back the project, O'Bannon's idea for the visual concept of the film was to represent three different cultures, and to do so he had in mind three designers he had worked with on *Dune*: Ron Cobb, Chriss Foss and H.R. Giger.

Despite the producers' reluctance to hire Giger as a designer, O'Bannon got his way and phoned Giger to tell him about the project and the idea of designing a Gigerian alien. After Giger's experience on *Dune*, he was hesitant, but agreed to do preliminary designs for the creature's initial forms.

One of the determining factors in the film's final outcome was Ridley Scott's involvement in the project as director, who was able to orchestrate the film's large technical team. Scott was also very detail-oriented in terms of visual appeal, as he had extensive training and experience as an illustrator and advertising filmmaker. He made corrections and contributed ideas for the construction and appearance of the spaceship designs. But the big problem Scott faced was the appearance of the monster protagonist, as he was looking for something original and radically different from the monsters in other films. His decision was to hire Giger, after leafing through *Giger's Necronomicon*. Scott recalls Giger's involvement in the project: "When Giger got to work, he went to the production secretary to ask for bones. One day I saw a whole procession of lorries loaded with boxes arrive. They had been scouring medical supply stores, slaughterhouses and who knows what other places, and the next day the studio was overflowing with a wide variety of bones and skeletons. There was a long line of human skeletons in perfect condition, three very well-preserved snake skeletons, a rhinoceros skull... Everything. It was what Giger needed, and he set about modelling using the bones and plastic material (...). When you entered Giger's workshop, you found yourself face to face with a kind of Count Dracula dressed in black leather,

with a pale face, dark hair and fiery eyes. Surrounded by bones and frantically carving a block of plastic"<sup>85</sup>.

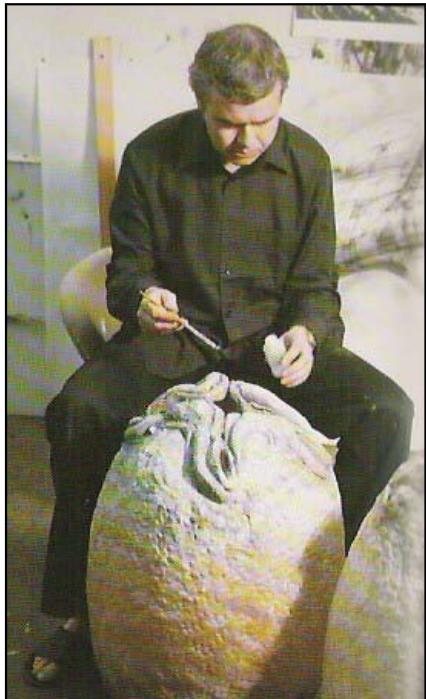
Giger conceived the *alien* according to his own biomechanical theories in its three evolutionary phases: small, with an arachnid appearance (during filming it was called *a face hugger*); medium, like a large worm (called *a chest burster*, due to its entrance on the scene); large, the adult alien (*Big Alien*). Giger was inspired by his earlier paintings, such as those in the *Necronom* series, creating a monster with retractable parts such as its killer tongue and equipped with a penis-shaped skull and a long reptilian tail. The adult alien was composed of several mechanical parts such as exhaust pipes and cables combined with more organic parts. Giger also designed all aspects related to alien culture, such as the planet where the Nostromo lands and the alien ship where the alien eggs are found. This ship displays all of Giger's imagery on a large scale: vaginal entrances to the ship, biomechanical passageways, and the fossilised space pilot embedded in the ship's cockpit chair. It also creates a nightmarish atmosphere that sets the stage for the appearance of the alien creature.

Giger not only designed, but was also involved in the production of the film, as he believed he was the best person to translate his ideas into three dimensions. He thus spent several months at Pinewood Studios in London, where *Alien* was produced, sculpting, modelling and giving instructions to the technicians working there [17-18]. These pieces can therefore be considered his works in the strict sense of the word, from conception to the materialisation of the designs. Normally in this type of film production, a team of technicians translates the designer's ideas and drawings. The collaboration and rapport with Ridley Scott was total, which was a decisive factor in the final look of the film. The film was released in 1979 and was an immediate critical and commercial success, catapulting *Alien* and Giger to fame. The consequences of this success marked Giger's future career and produced ambivalence, on the one hand spreading his art and work throughout the world, and on the other, institutional and

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<sup>85</sup> NAVARRO, Antonio José. *Alien/Los inconquistables*. Libros "Dirigido", Barcelona, 1995.

museums to hold exhibitions about him. Since then, he has been associated with film design and labelled as a painter of the macabre.



17 and 18. Giger working on *Alien*. London (1977).



19-Giger and Dan O'Bannon (1978).

#### 1.4.4. The Oscar and the leap to fame

Giger participated in the promotion of *Alien*, as stipulated in his contract. He travelled with Mia to the European premiere in Nice, then on to London and Paris. The tour ended in New York, from where they travelled to Los Angeles. They stopped in Dallas (where they were accompanied by Timothy Leary and his wife) to give interviews to the media and talk about the film, which made him somewhat averse to questions about *Alien*<sup>86</sup>. His sketches and paintings for the film were exhibited in Zurich, Lausanne and New York. He also produced five paintings inspired by his work for *Alien*.

In April 1980, the Hansen Gallery in New York presented Giger's first major solo exhibition in the United States. Giger had been nominated for an Oscar and was already famous. Thirty-one original paintings created for *Alien* were exhibited, along with the paintings that made up the *Alien* and *Erotomechanics* portfolios<sup>87</sup>. At the exhibition opening, he met Debbie Harry, lead singer of the band Blondie, with whom he would later work [20-21]. The official premiere of *Alien* took place at the Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood. For the occasion, the *Space Jockey* sculpture was installed at the entrance to the venue, brought over from England (later destroyed by fire). *Alien* was nominated for an Oscar and on 14 April 1980 won the award for visual effects. The interviews continued for three more days and after returning from this stressful trip, Giger and Mia got married. From that moment on, Giger had a huge impact on the press, magazines and television, and his commissions multiplied. In the USA, he began to be referred to in magazines such as Horror Rex as the king of horror, due to his initials H.R.<sup>88</sup>. Giger's work on *Alien* would mark his subsequent career. Back in Switzerland, he was once again hounded by the press. He was the second Swiss person to win an Oscar, after Richard Schweizer won the statuette in 1948 for his screenplay for the film *Die Gezeichneten (The Search)*, Fred Zinnemann, 1947). His

<sup>86</sup> Because he gave hundreds of interviews in a few days and they always asked him the same thing.

<sup>87</sup> After collaborating on *Alien*, and as a result of the influence of his new partner, Mia, he produced the *Erotomechanics* series of paintings in 1979. They were published a year later as silkscreen prints in a portfolio of the same name.

<sup>88</sup> The Swiss press echoed these descriptions. See Oscar für Schweizer Künstler. *Tages-Anzeiger*, 16-4-1980, and Horror Rex unter Druck. *Die Woche*, 23-4-1982.

name will be associated primarily with cinema and less with art. Furthermore, there will be more talk about his personality or gossip than about his actual creations. Giger believes that this had a negative impact on his career as a visual artist, as he thinks that many institutions dismiss him for having worked in cinema.



20 and 21. Giger and pop star Debbie Harry at the Hansen Gallery in New York (1980)

## The second *Dune* project

Between 1979 and 1980, the rights to *Dune* were acquired by Dino de Laurentis, who approached Ridley Scott to direct and Giger to do the production design. The project eventually passed into the hands of David Lynch, who wrote and directed the film in 1984 without Giger's collaboration. The film was criticised at the time and was a commercial failure due to its high budget, leaving the question of how it would have turned out and what it would have looked like with the contributions of Giger or Moebius. Despite everything, the film is now considered a cult classic and an ambitious production with great attention to visual detail and a monumental conception of space. The *Harkonnen* costumes reflect more than a debt to Giger, and the pustular face of their evil leader is reminiscent of landscape paintings with children's heads.

For this second project, Giger painted the *Dune* worm with an airbrush, in his dark style with erotic connotations. He also managed to include a clause in his contract stating that the copyright of his designs would belong to him if the film was not made. He thus created an airbrush painting in which he visualised the *Harkonnen* throne in his peculiar biomechanical way. This sparked his interest in designing and building furniture, and over time he developed a furniture design programme that would crystallise with the construction not only of the *Harkonnen* chair, but also of a table, a bed, a mirror frame and a wardrobe. Some of these elements would influence his interior designs through repetition and the creation of new forms.

## *New York City*

Giger dedicated this series to the captivating and fascinating city of New York in 1981. The idea arose from his five stays in the city, following his Oscar win from the Hollywood Academy. To create this series, he introduced a slight modification to his airbrush technique by using lead stencils. He discovered these tools

by one of his assistants while searching through computer and electronic component scraps. With them, his paintings take on a new plasticity. They depict pieces of the architecture of the big city in which Giger projects his memories and creates demonic scenes surrounded by skyscrapers and biological forms.

One of Giger's collaborators brought the templates to his studio, and he immediately began experimenting and searching for new forms of expression with these tools. He used them for the first time in the work *Anima mia* (1980). He produced 22 works in total, most of them in a vertical format measuring 100 x 70 cm, and some in a landscape format measuring 140 x 200 cm. The stencils were used to create an *anti-Giger* effect within the painting itself. Once again, tubes, bones and masks appear, but this time they slide into infinity. In this way, the artist attempts to visualise the incomprehensibility of this attractive city. A city that appears orderly but which Giger presents as disorder and chaos, full of protuberances and disturbing elements. In the series, Giger plays with this contradiction: the confrontation between the technical and systematic and the biological-organic.

#### Commissions from Debbie Harry (Blondie)

While working on *Alien* at Shepperton Studios in England, Giger learned about Blondie and punk. During those years, he had made some safety pin sunglasses, which he often wore in articles published at the time, as a symbol of this new aesthetic sensibility. Years later, after winning the Oscar, he was commissioned by Debbie Harry <sup>(89)</sup>, then considered the queen of American punk, known artistically as Blondie. Giger was asked to design the artistic concept for the cover of *Koo Koo*, the singer's new album, and decided to represent her as the queen of punk. *Koo Koo* was the debut album in her solo venture, in which Harry wanted to move away from her previous image in Blondie, so she sought out Giger with the idea of having him design the cover and give her a makeover. For this reason

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<sup>89</sup>Debbie Harry was a very influential singer in pop culture in the late 1970s and early 1980s, becoming a pop sex symbol. She connected the iconic image of Marilyn Monroe and Jane Mansfield with that of rock. She has influenced singers such as Madonna.

Giger transformed the safety pin, a symbol of punk attitude, into an acupuncture needle, symbolising electricity and power coming from the air.

The album cover was aesthetically reinforced by two music videos directed by Giger for the songs *Backfired* and *Now I Know You Know* [22], which were full of references to Egyptian iconography, such as sarcophagi, and acupuncture. Some of his works from the *New York City* and *Passagen Tempel* series served as the backdrop for the music videos, which were shot in Giger's studio at his home in Zurich. These music videos, together with images from the film *Alien*, helped to spread Giger's biomechanical and futuristic aesthetic in the visual imagination of the mass media through such influential channels as cinema and television.

This, together with the photographs that appear in *Giger's first Necronomicon* and the book *New York City*, positions him as an artist who has experimented with *body art*, with his desire to transfer his ideas and bodily architectures onto the human body itself, painting it and adapting his motifs to anatomical forms, which in fact fit very well given Giger's characteristics. All of this would have a decisive influence on the development of *technotattooing* or *biomechanical tattooing*.

In 1982, Giger and Mia divorced. Rumours appeared in the tabloid press that Giger was living with Debbie Harry, a story denied by both and unlikely, given that the singer was living in Toronto at the time and Giger in Zurich. This story is evidence of the sensationalist news stories spread about Giger.



22. Giger and Debbie Harry during the filming of the music video *Now I Know You Know*

(1981).

#### 1.4.5. Furniture design and new pictorial series

The furniture programme arose in connection with the second failed *Dune* project, in which Giger secured in the contract the right to build his own designs if they were not used for the film. In collaboration with his assistant Cornelius de Fries, he brought his designs to life. He would manufacture furniture with anatomical and erotic designs due to the application of the concept of biomechanics to furniture design. His first piece of *furniture* was the *Harkonnen chair*. He thus developed the idea of creating furniture that was comfortable and at the same time could be admired for its aesthetics and beauty as works of art, as he believed that much of today's furniture was constructed as anti-design and was not very functional. He later expanded the furniture programme with a table, a wardrobe, a chair variant and a mirror.

In the early 1980s, Giger created new series of biomechanical landscapes characterised by the mark of the stencils on which he paints with an airbrush, which differ from his previous series of landscapes. During these years

(1983-84), Giger created two new series entitled *Victory*, a set of paintings partially created with an airbrush and bright colours, and *Bombs*.

With the *Victory* series, he introduced new shades, predominantly red. At the same time, he produced the *Totems* series, which consisted of phallic poles crowned with screaming heads in destroyed landscapes. The *Bomb* series began with a lithograph he titled *The Mexican Bomb Couple (Das mexicanische Bombenpaar)*.

In 1984, the Seedam cultural centre in Pfäffikon (Switzerland) dedicated a large retrospective to him, promoted by private initiative, which shows the restrictions imposed on this artist by the public authorities<sup>90</sup>. Around 120 paintings were exhibited.

That year, he was commissioned to design the poster for the film *Future Kill*, thus creating the quintessential cyberpunk prototype, half robotic, half futuristic and half mohawk. In 1985, he also collaborated with Swiss artist Martin Schwartz, producing 15 paintings. These works were exhibited at the Silvia Steiner Gallery in Biel (Switzerland). Both are surrealists with an evident inclination towards the macabre.

#### 1.4.6. Film projects from the 19 nd 1980s

During these years, Giger devoted much of his energy to film design. In the mid-1980s, Giger became involved in various film projects with mixed results, which kept him very busy, leaving him no time to devote to his more personal work (which is why he produced less work than in the 1970s). However, only his work on *Poltergeist II* can be seen on the big screen, even though Giger was not pleased with the result of this collaboration. The other projects did not come to fruition due to various problems, but at least we have important graphic documentation that allows us to speculate and get an idea of the visual and thematic aspects of what the films could have been like.

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<sup>90</sup> See Alpträume eines Malers. *Aargauer tagblatt*, 18-4-1984.

### *The Tourist*

*The Tourist*, along with *Dune*, is the most important unrealised project in which Giger was involved. It was his next collaboration with cinema after *Alien* and came at the height of science fiction cinema following the success of *Blade Runner* (1982). It was a large-scale production, in which many characters would have to be created.

Clair Noto, inspired by the film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, 1951), wrote a screenplay based on the idea of a normal person who is actually an alien but does not appear to be one. She titled the *screenplay* *The Tourist*. She planned to make a film with a new wave structure that would be influenced by the cinema of Antonioni and Fellini. It would therefore be a non-commercial film. The pre-production of the film was plagued by a multitude of problems and difficulties that made it impossible to complete the film.

Giger was brought into the project and created numerous aliens for the corridor sequence. During the pre-production phase, he designed all kinds of aliens in different poses: hanging, flying, lying in the water. The original idea was to hire several designers to create the aliens and recreate a version of the famous cantina sequence from the film *Star Wars*, emphasising the different styles and creatures.

The project passed through several Hollywood studios, encountering fierce opposition as well as some support. Today, the film rights remain with Universal, and the original script has been rewritten several times. In the 1990s, well-known Hollywood producer Joel Silver (*Die Hard* and *The Matrix*, among others) offered large sums of money to acquire the rights, and it is possible that the project will be revived one day.

Brian Gibson, who was to be the film's director, contacted Giger to request his designs. Giger created 11 airbrush paintings and 70 sketches to support the concept of his designs. The project, which was in the hands of Universal, had a budget of \$15 million, a very high figure for the time. Giger thought that a creative team

creative team to his liking. Specifically, he was confident that Carlo Rambaldi would create the special effects. But the film was never made.

### *The mirror*

Genre filmmaker William Malone, author of films such as *Feardotcom* (2002) and *The House on Haunted Hill* (1999), has attempted on several occasions to make a film based on Giger's paintings. Malone achieved a certain status as a B-movie director in the early 1980s thanks to films such as *Scared to Death* (1982) and *Creature* (1985), which were heavily inspired by Giger's work. Fascinated by *Alien*, his idea was to make better use of the images that appeared in the book *Giger's Necronomicon* and adapt them for the cinema. His film was to be called *The Mirror*, and he had already hired leading special effects technicians to bring Giger's imagery to the big screen. Ultimately, he was unable to secure sufficient funding for his idea, as the film would have been very complex from a technical standpoint and some producers were reluctant to finance it because its content would be very strong and they feared censorship.

### *Poltergeist II*

The film *Poltergeist*, released in 1982, became a classic of contemporary horror cinema and a huge commercial success. Three big names in postmodern cinema were involved in the film: Tobe Hooper as director (who had made *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, among others), Steven Spielberg as screenwriter and producer, and special effects master George Lucas. The film's story offered an immersion into the world of the supernatural, with numerous incredible special effects. The film features some of the most famous scenes in the horror genre and was also surrounded by strange events, such as the death of a cameraman.

Due to the success of *Poltergeist*, a sequel was prepared in 1985 at Boss Studios in Los Angeles. Giger would have preferred to work on *Aliens*, the sequel to *Alien* that James Cameron was making at the time, but

director Brian Gibson, for whom Giger had already done designs for *The Tourist* project, insisted on hiring him. The screenwriters had outlined a ghost story in which Giger could use his talent. Giger sent his sketches to Los Angeles and showed airbrush paintings to the director, who visited him frequently in Zurich. However, the specialists found the sketches difficult to understand and the final result was not what Giger had hoped for. Finally, in 1986, Giger travelled to Los Angeles, but it was too late to make changes, and he had to give his approval to everyone working on the project, even though he did not agree with what they had done. Although the film was well received by the public, it did not meet Giger's artistic expectations.

#### **1.4.7. Projects in Japan. Works at the end of the 19 .**

In 1987, a major exhibition was held at the Seibu Museum of Art in Tokyo, featuring designs for the films *Alien* and *Poltergeist II*, a *Harkonnen* chair and a wealth of original graphic work. For this exhibition, Giger painted the works entitled *Japanese Excursion* (1986). Several projects were studied in Japan, the result of the 'Giger phenomenon', a veritable *Gigermania*. A fan club was created, his books were published in Japanese and posters featuring six of Giger's designs were printed.

Giger was commissioned to create the monster Goho Doji for the film *Tokyo, the Last Megalopolis* (1987) by Japanese director Akio Jitsuosji. He produced two airbrush paintings. Perhaps the most important project carried out in Japan was the design and subsequent construction of a bar in Tokyo, the first *Giger Bar*. Due to strict Japanese building regulations, not all of the original designs could be realised, but a striking and daring bar with a futuristic design was built, which years later had to close due to problems with the Yakuza. This bar in Tokyo only partially reflects Giger's ideas.

In 1986, he received a new commission from the rock band Emerson, Lake and Palmer to design the cover for their new album. He painted

12 airbrush paintings for the occasion. Around this time, he was also commissioned by a Swiss television station to design an award, the *Prix Tell*, for which he created a small metal sculpture representing a crossbow.

During these years, he continued to paint series on *Biomechanical Landscapes*, seeking new formal solutions in which figures disappear to give way to compositions that tend towards abstraction.

### Expanded drawings

In 1988, an exhibition was held at the Art-Magazin gallery in Zurich, showing drawings from his diaries, such as photocopied sketches repainted with wax crayons, oil, neocolor graphite and lithographic chalk.

The themes of these drawings were guillotined female bodies, embryos, a foosball table with penises and vaginas, representations of phalocracy and sexual obsessions. He titled this series *Expanded Drawings*. He calls them this because they are related to previous ideas and works. This technique of drawing over other works or photographs was already used in the 1950s by the Austrian artist Arnulf Rainer, whom Giger admires.

During this period, works by A. Crowley, Lovecraft, and T. Leary were published with illustrations by Giger. The book *Biomechanics* (Edition C, Zurich) was published, the third large-format book in a bibliographic trilogy alongside *Necronomicon I* and *II*. That same year, an exhibition was held at the Petersen Gallery in Berlin, using one of his paintings for the poster, specifically *Satan's Bride* (1988).

His activities in the late 1980s consisted of creating comics such as those he made in 1989 for Strapazin magazine, in which he illustrated Pier Geering's surreal story *Robofok*, published in colour. He also created a poster for the 10th International Hell's Angels Rally in Switzerland and held talks with Ridley Scott about a new film project to be titled *The Train*, which was never realised. In 1990, he turned 50, which, in our opinion, marked the end of one stage and the beginning of a new one, in which he would continue to combine his personal projects with commissions.

## 1.5. Third artistic stage: new ideas, other facets (1990-2004)

### 1.5.1. Abandoning the airbrush

After almost two decades of airbrush painting, Giger abandoned this practice, having exhausted all its expressive and stylistic possibilities, to focus more on other artistic facets such as sculpture and architectural design, fields he had already cultivated throughout his career but which he would now explore in greater depth. Until this point, painting had been the facet in which he had worked most, developing the biomechanical style to its fullest. His pictorial production ended here, although in 1991 he would produce his last airbrush creations, once again for a film project. From this decade onwards, he would focus more on solving spatial problems, either through architecture or sculpture, adapting his figures to three dimensions, a problem he had always had in mind when creating his airbrush paintings.

He continued his career as a designer for the film industry, receiving new commissions for films such as *Alien 3* and *Species*, as well as architectural projects such as the bar in Chur and the VIP room at the Limelight nightclub in New York. In parallel with these commissions, he also worked on personal projects, producing new series of drawings such as the one dedicated to the anniversary of the Swiss Confederation entitled *700 Years Waiting for...*, and sculptures for his *Zodiac Fountain*. He has also developed his skills as a writer. He has expressed an interest in storytelling, basing his stories on utopian ideas that allow him to develop discourses such as the story of the biomechanoids in *The Mystery of San Gottardo*, halfway between utopia and science fiction, which he has tried to adapt for the cinema, so far without success. At least he managed to present the project in the form of an illustrated comic-novel, which was well received at the Frankfurt Book Fair. He also developed his surrealist visions in the irreverent exhibition of imaginary

and fantastic watches exhibited in Switzerland and New York during the *Watch Abart* exhibition, in which he reflected on texts in the corresponding catalogue.

Without a doubt, the most important project in recent years has been the design and installation of his own museum in Gruyères, a town in French-speaking Switzerland, an idea that, due to funding problems, has been developed in several phases from 1998 to the present. In 2003, he opened a café adjacent to the museum and has plans to build a rail system for guided tours through the different floors of the museum. The lack of interest in this cultural project on the part of public institutions demonstrates the low regard in which Giger is currently held in his own country by the official cultural establishment, which continues to ignore the work of this internationally renowned Swiss artist and his career spanning the last four decades. However, Giger's work has been recognised and valued on several continents and in countries such as the United States, Japan, Germany, France and Italy, where he is revered as a cult artist in the most avant-garde circles of underground culture<sup>91</sup>.

The numerous commissions he received from the film industry leave no doubt as to his importance and influence in this field, to such an extent that his other works are sometimes overshadowed by his contributions to the design of fantasy films, due to their impact in the media<sup>92</sup>. His most important work during this decade was *Species*, to which he devoted a year and numerous sketches, drawings and models.

Another fact that catches our attention about Giger is that throughout this decade he has significantly promoted his commercial side, as can be seen after visiting his museum and official website. In addition to the artist's original work, all kinds of items based on Giger's creations and motifs applied to watches, pins and skateboards can be purchased at these locations.

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<sup>91</sup> We will look at the impact of his work in detail in chapter 3.

<sup>92</sup>In this sense, his work for *Species* has had a greater impact than, for example, his biomechanical sculptures for the *Zodiac Fountain*.

In 1990, he held important exhibitions such as the one at the Carré Blanc Gallery in Nyon, which showcased Giger's monsters, the one dedicated to him by the Chur Art Museum on the occasion of the artist's 50th birthday, for which he displayed pieces from his collection, and the one that would have the greatest significance, *Alien dans ses meubles*, at Gruyères Castle, as he had been thinking of establishing his future museum there since then. That same year, he parted ways with his manager of more than a decade, Uli Steinle. Shortly afterwards, his friend Leslie Barany from New York took over the task of promoting the artist. The year ended with the opening of the *Giger Library*, a space housing the artist's work and bookshelves located in the Science Fiction Museum in Yverdon-les-Bains (Switzerland).

One of the most frequently reported stories in the Swiss press during these years was the censorship of some of Giger's drawings on permanent display in a restaurant in Saint Gallen, Haus zur letzten Laterne. Numerous articles and texts in favour of freedom of expression and Giger's creations were published in the early 1990s.

### **1.5.2 New projects and film**

In the early years of the decade, he participated in three important film projects, albeit with little success. As already mentioned, he worked on a film to be titled *The Train*, which was to be directed by Ridley Scott, but which was ultimately never made. Secondly, the third instalment of *Alien*, which would end up being titled *Alien III*, in which, despite his enthusiasm and dedication, his ideas and designs did not make it to the screen. A year later, he worked on *Dead Star*, a project by screenwriter and director William Malone, which ultimately failed to secure funding to make the film.

### *Alien III* (1990)

After the success of the second instalment of *Alien*, *Aliens*, made in 1986 by director James Cameron, a new instalment was to be expected. The third chapter of the saga created by O'Bannon, Giger and Ridley Scott in 1979 continues the adventures of Ripley and the alien race.

In July 1990, director David Fincher and the producers of what was to be the new film in the series, *Alien III*, visited Giger at his home in Zurich. The commission would involve developing the alien forms that Giger had created for the first *Alien* film. Giger's idea was to develop his designs along the same lines of collaboration and exchange of ideas that he had enjoyed with Ridley Scott on the first film. After the success of *Aliens* in 1986, the aim was to expand the world of *Alien* in this new film, drawing on the ideas of the creator of the central character in the saga, namely the extraterrestrial creature.

In *Alien III*, the pre-production phase encountered various problems, such as delays in writing a satisfactory script, which led to the creation of up to eight drafts (with the participation of writers such as William Gibson), and the hiring of a suitable director after Ridley Scott's refusal (due to his heavy workload and the lack of a defined script). David Fincher was finally chosen to direct the film. Fincher had trained at the special effects company *Industrial Light and Magic* as a *matte painter* and had worked in the world of advertising and music videos, developing a distinctive and sinister visual style<sup>93</sup>.

The budget shortfall was another problem added to a complicated production, but despite this, the film was intended to be related to the designs of the first film, so Giger was considered.

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Films such as *Seven* (1995) and *Fight Club* (1999) have established this director as one of the most innovative filmmakers of the 1990s, with a very dark and sophisticated personal visual style.

Giger's task was to redesign his 1978 creation, introducing new alien morphologies. Giger enthusiastically threw himself into the project, producing numerous sketches and developing new concepts with the aim of improving on his previous creature.

Ultimately, Giger's ideas were disregarded, carrying less weight than those of special effects creators Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff, who were responsible for bringing the monster to life. Giger was astonished to see that his name did not appear in the film's credits, ignoring all the work he had done, and he embarked on a legal battle for his copyright, which continued in the fourth film in the series, *Alien Resurrection* (1997), in which he was not involved and did not appear in the credits. Since then, a legal battle has been waged by Giger and his agent Leslie Barany against Fox, which would have a significant impact among specialist film critics.

### *Dead Star* (1991)

After the frustrations and non-participation in *Alien III*, Giger was visited by Bill Malone, one of the few film directors who openly admits to having been inspired by Giger's work. In 1985, they had already planned to make a film based on *Giger's Necronomicon* paintings, *The Mirror*, which, despite the interest it aroused at the time, did not materialise as a film. On this occasion, Malone had a new film in mind, *Dead Star*, which was an ambitious science fiction production. He had written the script himself, which revolved around the discovery of *the Thanatron*, a huge machine capable of opening a door to hell. A group of astronauts started up the machine, releasing Satan on board the ship. The story was influenced by Clive Barker's *Hellraiser*. Giger produced two folders of drawings and sketches and, at Malone's request, painted two airbrush works showing details of the *Thanatron* and the figure of the Prince of Darkness. Ultimately, the project did not go ahead. The airbrush painting he created for this film is one of the last works he painted using this technique and was reproduced as an advertising poster

announcing the imminent production of a film entitled *Supernova*, which no longer bore much relation to the first project in which Giger participated.

In parallel with his sculptural and architectural designs, his collaborations with the film industry continued with new commissions to participate in film projects, partly due to his fame and prestige in the field of creature and object design for fantasy films. Once again, Hollywood called on the designer to ensure the success of its new productions. Over the next four years, Giger was involved in four major projects: the third instalment of the *Batman* saga, Metro Goldwyn Mayer's new fantasy film *Species* and its sequel *Species II*, and, for the first time, a European project, the German-produced *The Killer Condom*.

#### *Batman Forever* (1994)

In March 1994, he received a call from director Joel Schumacher, who was interested in having Giger design the *Batmobile* for the new *Batman* film. Giger had never been particularly interested in designing cars or vehicles and was also immersed in work for the film *Species*, but he accepted the challenge. He had only a week to conceive a vehicle that was more organic and more bat-like in appearance than previous incarnations. Giger sent several sketches with a new and radical design compared to the Batmobiles that had been seen before. But due to the lack of time and Giger's unwillingness to make modifications, the idea was rejected.

#### *Species* (1994)

Giger was visited by director Roger Donaldson and producer Frank Mancuso Jr. to enlist his services in designing the alien creature that stars in this film, to create its visual appearance. *Species* tells the story of a female being named Sil, genetically engineered from an extraterrestrial formula, who escapes from the laboratory where she was created in search of males.

with whom to mate and procreate their species. The scientists who created the species will try to find Sil and destroy her before panic spreads among the population. Donaldson was familiar with Giger's work from the book *Giger's Necronomicon*, recognising that his paintings contain elements and forms similar to those that Sil would adopt. He was presented with the film script, which, according to Giger, bore many similarities to the *Alien* saga, something Giger wanted to avoid at all costs, such as the ending in flames, just like in *Alien III*. Giger did not want to work on a remake of *Alien* and intended to contribute his own ideas to enrich the story, given his extensive experience in the field. After reading the script, he developed various concepts for the design and inserted his own opinions, even though he knew that Hollywood does not usually accept this type of suggestion. His idea was to eliminate the similarities between *Species* and the *Alien* trilogy. These suggestions were not accepted, even on the basis of the logic of the designs themselves. The film was an unexpected success and plans for a sequel were soon made. The artistic results were questioned by Giger, who felt that his name and his connection to the world of *Alien* were being used as a selling point for this new film. In fact, the cover of the film's video release in Spain highlights Giger's figure instead of the director or actors, as is more common. It reads "Special effects by H.R. Giger", which is false, as he was only responsible for the designs.



23- Giger working on *Species* (1994)



24- Sil, Giger and actress Natasha Henstridge (1995)

### *The Killer Condom* (1996)

This is the story of condoms created in a laboratory that roam the city's underworld in search of victims. It is the only European film in which Giger has collaborated to date, as a creative consultant. He undertook his work with dedication and great interest, as is usual for him. In the end, he was dissatisfied and pointed out that his suggestions were not taken into account. The film was inspired by the comic book of the same title by German author Ralf König, full of macabre detective stories set in gay environments. Juerg Buttgereit, a well-known gore film director, also worked on the production. Giger designed the condoms and the laboratory where they were produced.

### *Species II* (1997)

Due to the commercial success of *Species*, the producers prepared the second instalment in an attempt to commercially exploit the phenomenon. Giger had accepted the commission to participate in the film to improve on the original designs from the first instalment and had already produced a multitude of drawings and sketches for the film, such as the new male alien, revisiting designs not used in *Alien III*.

Giger had many ideas for the film, as acknowledged by its director, Peter Medak. He sent loads of sketches and drawings (around 150) with ideas about the creature's appearance and the transformation that takes place when the two alien creatures meet and copulate. He also had ideas about the chrysalises that form on the ceiling, creating a backdrop of cocoons. Giger also thought about transforming hair into tentacles for the love scene.

The specialist in charge of putting Giger's designs into practice was, as in *Species*, Steve Johnson, one of the most prestigious special effects artists in Hollywood. In fact, he was hired before Giger came into the picture, so he contributed his own ideas. Thus,

Giger had to adapt to Johnson's "Gigeresque" designs in order to develop his own ideas, which limited his work. For Giger, his ideal when designing is to start with a blank sheet of paper and develop his own ideas according to the requirements of the script. The producers' idea was to maintain a design style similar to that of *Species*, so they thought Giger would help with this task as he was the creator of Sil. Although Giger's ideas did not prevail for *Species II*, a dynamic was created to resolve the visual issues relating to the fantasy scenes and the aliens. In any case, many aspects of *Species II* follow the genuine ideas of Giger's style and his film designs.

Giger suggested that Sil's new form, Eve, should have longer limbs. He designed sketches for the new male alien, Patrick, based on designs for the monster in *Alien III* that were not used in that film. It is basically the male adaptation of Sil's design. The Gigeresque atmosphere is noticeable in some scenes of the film, but its final appearance is of lower quality than that seen in *Species*, being more gory and less poetic. Without a doubt, Giger's alien design, with slight modifications, is the most attractive aspect of this project. After viewing some footage, Giger decided not to take part in the credits of this film, as he felt that his ideas had been ignored.

### **1.5.3. Three-dimensional designs: sculptures and architectural ''**

After these two failed film projects, Giger became involved in new ventures. He combined his creative work in the field of architectural design and decoration, which culminated in the construction of a bar in Chur where he developed his furniture programme, which he had been working on since 1980, with his writings and expressions of utopian ideas, such as the exhibition of watches and other pieces entitled *Watch Abart* and the project for Swiss communications of the future. In 1993, he also created designs for pins that reproduced his biomechanoids, as well as other motifs from his imagination. He continued his work as a multidisciplinary designer and

embarked on the creation of the *Zodiac Fountain*, a project culminating in sculptures that reinterpret his biomecanoids once again.

### Bar de Chur (1992)

Following his experience designing the bar in Tokyo, he is once again designing a bar, this time in Chur, his own hometown. The bar was initially conceived as a café bar to be located in New York. This time, he will draw on previous furniture designs, such as the cupboard doors he will use for the main entrance and the *Harkonnen chairs*, combining and developing them spatially and aesthetically to create a new *Giger* space or *atmosphere*. Among the new designs he will create are an oval mirror, wall lamps, chairs and a special coat rack. The bar is also a special design for this bar. He will work with various materials, including once again polyester, aluminium and glass. The influences of modernist design are palpable in most of the objects that make up the bar space [25].

Giger turns his furniture into aesthetic objects and groups and combines them to create a unique space in which the viewer is immersed, able to contemplate the pieces as if in a museum. The furniture has a function, and Giger, as a designer, always thought about its functionality, so the bar would be the ideal setting to interrelate his furniture, which has been transformed into sculptural works. This bar is configured as the prototype of a Giger space in the architectural sense, in the same way that his airbrush series of temples created a two-dimensional pictorial space in which the Gigerian atmosphere was present.

This space can be considered a mixture of a bar where people meet to have a drink and exchange ideas, and a fantasy temple, creating a fascinating futuristic space that is visited as a place of worship by fans of science fiction and the fantastic.

### Giger's Watch Abart (1993)

In this exhibition held at the Bertram Gallery in Burgdorf (Switzerland) and the Alexander Gallery in New York, Giger displays his fascination with clockwork devices and Dalinian surrealism. Watches are a typical Swiss product, and Giger ironises about their relationship with the passing of time and life, as Dalí did with his paintings of watches melting like cheese. Giger's clocks are objects with no real function, as they have double straps and different peculiarities, such as the so-called alarm clock, the orgasmic clock or the suicide clock.

For the exhibition, he also created busts with human faces trapped behind metal masks covered with clocks, alluding to the fear of the corrosion of being and, poetically, to death, suggesting a dramatic tone with a medieval air. One of these sculptures, made of aluminium and entitled *Watch Guardian V*, served as the main iconographic motif for Japanese rock singer Hide's music video entitled *Hide your face*. A rubber mask was created from Giger's sculpture, which the rock star used in his music video and on his tour of Japan, so Giger's design appeared on numerous posters and billboards.

The Swiss company Swatch commissioned Giger to design some watches, but ultimately rejected his ideas because they did not fit with the company's philosophy. Giger continued with his ideas and designs, creating sculptures of watches as Dadaist-style provocations, throwing useless and unheard-of objects at the viewer.

In this project, Giger once again displays the dark humour that has been present since the beginning of his work, with his satirical view of things, in this case taking as a reference a very familiar object that is present in our lives: the clock. He thus addresses the theme of the passing of time and its profound relationship with life and death. He produces deformations of clocks, creating unusual objects. His gallery of absurd products ranges from the *constipation watch* to the *slap watch, with a long strap for hitting yourself*, which fascinate the artist because of their variability. His peculiar vision of the watch is that "it is a

metaphor for life in cyberspace".<sup>(94)</sup> He believes that in the future it will be a product that will be implanted in the wrist.

### Swiss Transit Tunnel (1993)

In this project, he expresses a utopian and imaginary idea to solve Switzerland's future problems. He invents a system of underground tunnels that form a five-pointed star, connecting the five most important transport hubs in Switzerland. Giger, affected by Switzerland's communication problems, proposes an original solution that also aims to solve the problem of waste storage and disposal within the country and in neighbouring countries. To this end, he believes that the construction of five pyramids as access points to the tunnels could serve for waste recycling and also as a place of residence for immigrants who will arrive in Switzerland in the coming years. The project is a new exercise in humour and irony.

Communication is carried out by freight trains travelling through the Swiss subsoil at 600 kilometres per hour, running through the five tunnels of equal length, each consisting of two parallel tunnels that allow two-way traffic. These three-storey magnetic trains can transport columns of vehicles.

Giger sent the project to the Swiss president along with a letter. President Adolf Ogi replied, thanking him for his sketches and ideas, praising Giger's inventiveness and humour regarding the future.

### Zodiac Fountain (1992-95)

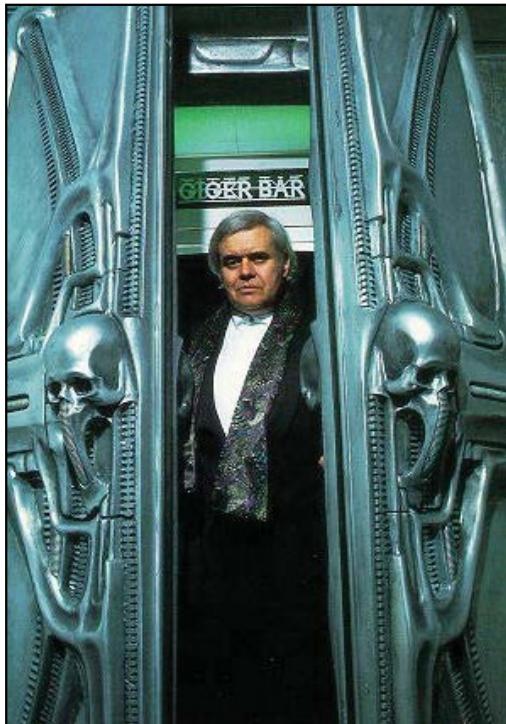
He designed this ensemble to represent the signs of the zodiac through 12 sculptures that symbolically allude to the cycle. These are biomechanoids (also protagonists in *The Mystery of St Gotthard*). They are headless organisms reduced to an arm and a leg, joined without any sutures. At their junction

<sup>94</sup> [www.HrGiger.com](http://www.HrGiger.com), *Op. cit.*, p.152.

They internally harbour a brain based on computers powered by electricity and nutrient solutions. They communicate with each other through streams of thoughts and with humans through gestures and signs, like deaf-mutes. They were once normal men who were dismembered into three beings, with the torso being the worst off, as it has to live amputated to a wheelchair. The limbs are happy because they feel free and not enslaved by the brain.

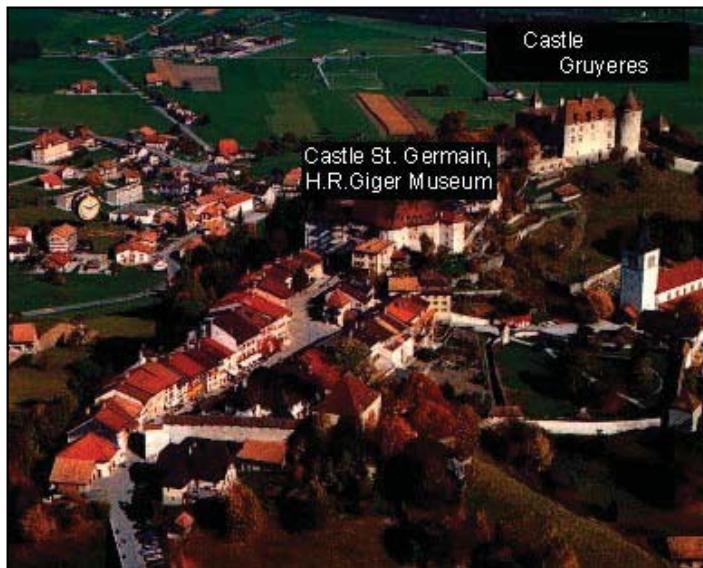
For the centre of the fountain, he thought of a female aluminium torso with an elongated neck. The fountain works with a hydraulic system of wheels that rotate the figures around the central torso.

Initially, the fountain was to be located in front of the Chur bar, but due to funding problems, it was not installed there. Currently, some Swiss town councils are interested in acquiring the fountain, but nothing has been finalised. Many of these zodiac figures have been captured in lithographs and drawings.



26-Logo for the VIP room of the *Limelight* nightclub in New York (1998)

25-Giger at the entrance to the *Giger Bar* in Chur (1992)



27- Aerial view of Gruyères and location of the HR Giger Museum (1996)



28- Facade of the HR Giger Museum (2000)



29- Giger and the *Birth Machine* sculpture (2000)



30- Giger and Carmen during the opening of the museum's Giger Bar (2003)

#### 1.5.4 The H.R. Giger Museum

Since the mid-1990s, Giger's most important project has been the installation of his own museum. This arose from Giger's need to show his work to the public for two reasons: the lack of space in his home-studio to store his work and the demand from his fans to see his works in person, which Giger received after launching his website in 1996 and receiving numerous emails to this effect. The truth is that this idea connects with the work done by other surrealist artists in building their museums, such as Dalí, a pioneer in this regard, and Fuchs.

The H. R. Giger Museum was inaugurated on 20 June 1998. Located inside the medieval castle of Saint-Germain in the town of Gruyères, it brings together the artist's most important works, including paintings, sculptures and designs. It also exhibits part of his private collection focused on fantastic art and hosts exhibitions by other artists, such as the recent exhibition dedicated to Ernst Fuchs and, previously, François Burland, Claude Sandoz and Gunter Brus.

The museum conceived by the artist has undergone various phases since its opening, modifying its structure and incorporating new spaces. It currently has three floors housing different rooms, including one dedicated to his designs and paintings for the film *Alien* and another featuring *The Spell* series, one of the most important in his artistic production. The artist's designs can be seen at the entrance, at the ticket office, on the furniture and, above all, in the museum bar, the result of an original design that adapts the biomechanical style to a Gothic space. His designs blend in with the structures of the castle, integrating themselves into it. The museum is in its final phase of construction, which was completed in 2003 with the opening of the bar designed by Giger. This bar follows the patterns of his previous architectural constructions. In them, he applies his concept of biomechanics, achieving a suggestive futuristic aesthetic, in which the expressiveness of bones and modernist ornamental lines play a prominent role. The museum combines the artist's surreal aesthetic with a sinister

and striking atmosphere which, together with the beautiful medieval setting surrounded by hills and mountains, takes on a romantic tone.

The museum has not been without controversy, as some residents of Gruyères initially opposed its installation. In addition, financing has been complicated, as support from Swiss institutions has been scarce. For this reason, one of his projects, to install a rail for visitors to travel by trolley through the three floors of the building, has not yet come to fruition.

#### **1.5.5 Latest creations. Sculptures, spatial designs and writings (1998-2004).**

Over the last four years, Giger has been combining the decoration and modification of his museum in Gruyères with commissions and personal projects and exhibitions in galleries and museums that are currently rediscovering the importance of this artist.

##### *The Mystery of San Gottardo (1998)*

This year he published the story he has been working on for the last 10 years in the form of a novel-comic-storyboard for subsequent filming. The book tells the story of biomechanoids living in a future Switzerland in different chapters. It is a fantasy comedy with a lot of black humour and Kafkaesque influences, in which Giger mixes different projects he has worked on over the decade, such as the *Swiss Transit Tunnel* and the *Zodiac Fountain*. The work was presented at the Frankfurt Book Fair to very favourable reviews.

Since 1994, he had been drawing beings with mutilated limbs and creating *Frankenstein-style* unions by sewing arms and feet together. Many of the drawings are also in comic book format, a field that Giger had rarely explored until then.

### Limelight VIP Room (1998)

Giger designed a space or environment for the VIP room of the Limelight nightclub in New York, which has been named *the HR Giger Room*. He found the dark atmosphere of this place (formerly a Gothic church) ideal for redecorating the space with his lithographs and sculptures. Giger had previously held several exhibitions here, one of them in 1984, entitled *The Dune you will never see*, about his designs for the *Dune* project.

The venue is a haven for night-time visitors and a space for exhibitions and special events, such as the 1999 *New York Tattoo Convention* and the *Scream* magazine party.

### Aluminium sculptures: *Birthmachine Baby* and the *Bullet Children* (1999)

His interest in three-dimensional figures and spatial problems led him to create sculptures based on works he had already worked on in the 1960s, in his early years as an artist. Specifically, one of his first important works, *The Birth Machine* (1967), addressed one of the issues that most obsesses him, overpopulation, which he sees as one of the great problems of our world. He drew a gun carrying children armed as bullets about to be fired, metaphorically alluding to the continuous destruction caused by births that bring potential adversities such as death and violence into the world, personified here in the figure of children and the army they could form.

For this occasion, he will take that work and turn it into a sculpture, choosing aluminium as the material. He saw the sculptural quality of many of his works, particularly some of those painted with an airbrush, as an opportunity for his figures to move in space. He later confirmed this when they transcended into the medium of film and came to life through digital animation and cinema.

The sculpture was installed at its presentation at the entrance to the Giger Museum [29] and has travelled to other locations for exhibitions (New York and Switzerland). The

motif of the bullet boy has also been transferred to sculpture, perhaps for more commercial reasons.

*Cyborg Frictions* was a conference held in Bern (Berner Dampfzentrale) between November and December 1999, at which cybernetic artist Stelarc performed a piece entitled *Exoskeleton*. This exhibition focused on the theme of the relationship between man and machine. The aim was to organise and represent a *cyborg* world, for which pieces by Giger were requested (specifically, the aluminium sculpture of the *Birth Machine* was located at the entrance to the venue). There was also a symposium on the subject and the latest advances in computer science.

#### *Virus* sculpture and microphone stand for Korn (2000)

Giger continues to produce commissioned sculptural works such as *Virus*, for the Orbit computer fair in Basel (Switzerland) in 2000, and the microphone stand for the rock band Korn. The leader of this band confesses to being a great admirer of Giger's art and commissioned him to design a stylised biomechanical woman to take on his concert tour.

#### Works in the 21st century

Over the last four years, Giger has continued to produce works and shows no sign of stopping. His latest works revolve around new drawings based on old ideas that he plays with again, suggesting new interpretations and readings. His creative activity shows no sign of waning, quite the contrary, and he will surely continue to receive commissions requesting his designs and ideas.

In 2000, he produced a new series of drawings, some with erotic themes related to Sade, others with Kafka in small format, and a new series entitled *The Professionals* in 2001 with biomechanical figures in work situations mixed with Giger's surrealist touch and drawn with a great deal of black humour.

Between 2001 and 2002, snowboards and skateboards printed with some of his airbrushed images, such as *Li II* and *Lilith*, were displayed on his website. Giger returned to exhibit his work in New York eight years later (since *Watch Abart* in 1994). On this occasion, he inaugurated the Fuse Gallery with an exhibition of his recent sculptures and lithographs (from 17 March to 28 April), such as the microphone stand designed and created on commission for the band Korn and various silver lithographs based on drawings from the period 1967-1969, such as *Alpha*, *Underground* and the *Biomechanoids* series.

During 2002, he created the sculptures *Guardian Angel*, *Biomechanoid 2002* and *Reina Nubia*, working once again with aluminium. He also continued with the development of the *Zodiac Fountain*, to which he added a new sculpture, that of the sign corresponding to Gemini, constructed by intertwining two biomechanoids. In April of the same year, he published his book *Icons*, in which he presents his latest creations and artistic concerns with a very interesting text by Stanislav Grof, as well as his own writings on the motifs and development of some of his creations.

His biggest project in recent years has been the design and installation of *the Giger Bar* in the Gruyères museum, which finally opened on 12 April 2003. He produced sketches, supervised the work and sought funding for the project. It has been a complicated job that has kept him very busy. This bar has a more Gothic feel than the previous ones, as it is located in front of the old castle of Gruyeres, for which Giger has adapted his ribbing and biomechanical forms. The bar is small, measuring 7 x 10 metres and 4 metres high, with a capacity for around 70 people. The ceiling structure is made of fibreglass; the floor is covered with tiles designed for his previous bars, but now made of cement. Giger thus completes his bar designs, a task he began with the bar in Tokyo, and hopes that it will serve as a prototype for future *Giger bars* around the world. To mark the opening of the bar, he made two drawings which were engraved using a printing process on 12 April. One of them depicted an erotic scene; the other showed two aliens eating *fondue* (a typical dish from Gruyères) with a great sense of humour. At the same time, he has developed

decorative elements such as sculptures and new furniture. The bronze sculpture *Kondor* and the biomechanical woman's head, repeating a sculptural model from the 1960s. He has also made a drawing in homage to Ernst Fuchs and another to the German hard rock band Rammstein.

2003 was an intense year for Giger: from 21 March to 6 April 2003, he exhibited his work at the Black Dog rock club in Paris, where he also signed books. He also worked on two film projects: a Swiss-produced film and the concept for a television commercial for the Levis jeans brand. The advert features a young Amazon riding a horse in a rocky desert, riding on top of a train. Giger worked on various elements that make up the scene, such as the design of the train, the saddle and a tunnel through which the train passes.

The latest information we have processed relates to his participation as production designer on the Swiss film *Gloria*, directed by Swiss filmmaker Marco Lutz and featuring a cast of German, Swiss and Austrian actors.

He currently has important exhibition projects underway. On 15 September, a major retrospective opened at the Le Halle de Saint Pierre museum in Paris, in the heart of the Montmartre district. The exhibition has been very well received by the public, who have packed the venue in the first few days of the exhibition<sup>95</sup>.

The exhibition will then travel to Prague in the middle of next year. These exhibitions, together with other tributes to his work, could contribute to relaunching his figure in the art world, from which he has been absent since he began collaborating with the film industry.

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<sup>(95)</sup> Given its success, the exhibition will be extended until February 2005.

## **Chapter 2**

### **STUDY OF THE WORK**



## 2.1. Sources

### 2.1.1. Literary sources

One of Giger's main sources of inspiration is undoubtedly literature. The novels, stories and essays he has read throughout his life have greatly influenced him and clearly shaped his tastes and artistic orientation. Giger's reaction to these readings has led to the creation of images and works that express his fascination.

Giger uses a combination of different resources: personal experiences (memories, dreams and feelings about situations or events) and books and literature that stimulate and develop his imagination. He uses art as a vehicle to express his concerns and externalise his thoughts.

The use of literary references is prominent in Giger's work. Since childhood, he has been an avid reader, so the influence of literature has marked him as much or more than artistic references. His literary tastes allow us to trace an intellectual personality that we will use as a working tool. He comments that: "Books have always given me a lot. The gift of a book has always made me happy, whether it was an art book or a novel. I have always been interested in the person behind a book, and I compare the lives of authors of books or films with my own" <sup>(96)</sup>. Giger has a large library and a vast literary culture that he draws on when working for inspiration or to develop an idea. In many of his works, it is possible to trace an author who influenced him at a particular moment or a book he was reading while he was working. His education was more literary than artistic, partly because in his hometown of Chur he did not have access to major museums or art exhibitions and divided his time between games and reading. Later, in the 1960s, he studied various artists and movements.

There are authors and books that Giger quotes verbatim that we will highlight in our study. On other occasions, he drops a name

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<sup>96</sup> [www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com). *Op. cit.*, p.4.

during interviews or in his books. We will also include writers who may have influenced him due to the parallels that can be observed with his work.

The readings that have always interested Giger most are those related to fantasy literature, which is his favourite genre, in keeping with his art. In his childhood and adolescence, he was very fond of crime novels and horror literature. Among his favourite authors are Franz Kafka, Edgar Allan Poe and H.P. Lovecraft, among others. Giger's work is often associated with Lovecraft's stories. The two most important books Giger has published are entitled *Giger's Necronomicon*, highlighting the connection between the two authors. Many of his airbrush works from the 1970s show similarities with Lovecraftian descriptions. Due to Lovecraft and his interest in occult themes, his work takes on a characteristic sinister tone, dominated by claustrophobia, existential angst and pure terror.

It is significant that, alongside Lovecraft, Giger cites three writers closely linked to the esoteric in *Giger's Necronomicon*: Aleister Crowley, Eliphas Levi and Gustav Meyrink, including photographs and excerpts from some of their texts. These authors influenced him in his artistic prime around 1974, when his work developed a marked occult and satanic accent, so their influence may be more important than others who have influenced him at specific moments.

In addition to fantasy, Giger's paintings sometimes seem to provoke scientific interpretations and comment in a personal way on the ideas of Charles Darwin, Marshall McLuhan, Timothy Leary, and the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, authors whom Giger has read at certain times and who have also influenced him.

In addition to the occult and horror stories, a genre that has always interested Giger, he has been particularly fond of science fiction, with Philip K. Dick and William Gibson among his favourites. Giger also frequently consults numerous scientific works, such as books on medicine, mainly anatomy and genetics, and books on industrial engineering in which

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<sup>97</sup> In the documentary *Passagen*, his girlfriend Li reads aloud an excerpt from Darwin's *The Origin of Species* while Giger works.

machines, robotics and orthopaedics, which has allowed him to keep abreast of scientific and technological advances<sup>98</sup>.

The number of writers who may have influenced him is abundant, as our sources show, and we will try to see in a certain way what kind of influence the works he has read have had on him in terms of concepts, iconography and the creation of atmospheres. In addition to the aforementioned genres, Giger has mainly read German and French literature. He has commented on several occasions that he likes to read writers linked to surrealism, such as the Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Ducasse), author of *Les Chants de Maldoror*, the stories of the Marquis de Sade, and also the French poet Alfred Jarry, author of *Ubu roi* in 1896. In fact, he is fascinated by everything related to surrealism, such as the writings of André Breton and, above all, Dalí, as well as biographies of artists (Dalí and Buñuel).

Throughout his career, Giger often paid tribute to his favourite authors, either by honouring them with a creation or by including portraits of them in the composition of his works, as he did with Lovecraft, Timothy Leary and Crowley.

Literature plays a fundamental role in his creative process, as the aesthetic elaboration of forms and the scenography of his works are based on the literary references that Giger uses when expressing his ideas and concerns. Literature is therefore one of his main sources of inspiration. Through his reading, he develops mental images that he will somehow pour into his works.

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<sup>98</sup> In his videos, he can be seen regularly consulting this type of book.

### 2.1.1.1. 's childhood novels

In his childhood he had read novels about adventures and action. At around the age of 13, he began reading books by Karl May and Edgar Wallace. He later became interested in detective novels through books such as *The Cabinet of Wax Figures* and *The Phantom of the Opera* by Gaston Leroux.

Karl May is a well-known author in the Germanic world, mainly for his travel and adventure novels aimed at a young audience. The action usually takes place in two geographical areas: the American West and the Near East. One of his best-known characters is the Apache Indian Winnetou. Giger read May's novels with interest, given his fascination with Indians and their struggle for freedom. For many years during his youth, he was preoccupied with the idea of the struggle between white men and Native Americans. For him, Native Americans were an example, a symbol of freedom. White men represented school, parents, reality and boredom<sup>99</sup>. During his youth, he was influenced by a book entitled *The Brave in Deerskin Trousers*, which became one of his main sources of inspiration.

Edgar Wallace became famous as a writer of detective novels, mystery novels and short stories. Among his best-known titles are *The Mysterious House* (1917) and *The Angel of Terror* (1922). Wallace's novels have been extraordinarily popular, both in print and in their film and television adaptations. The Surrealists considered riddles and enigmas to be a springboard to a new vision of reality, and among them Magritte and Dalí had a predilection for Wallace's novels, whom they considered to be the creator of the modern thriller. Giger shared this passion for mysteries, riddles, enigmas, disappearances, transformations and the creation of disturbing worlds beyond reality.

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<sup>99</sup>Jane and Michael Stern, in their study of 1960s popular culture, *Sixties People*, write, "Hippies liked to see themselves as new Redskins, living in harmony with the universe, fighting against the perverted white man's society based on pollution, war, and greed." *H.R. Giger's Necronomicon*, *Op. cit.*

In 1957, John Knittel's play *Blue Basalt* and a detective novel entitled *Waxworks* led him to transform his ghost train hideaway into an Egyptian tomb (*darkroom*).

In 1966, Giger made two drawings based on the character of *The Phantom of the Opera* [31-32], one of the best-known works by French writer Gaston Leroux. The influence of this character is evident in his early drawings, in which he develops the creation of spectral figures and ghosts. Giger was attracted to detective and horror novels. This translated into an obsession with depicting masks, deformed faces, tragic and tormented characters, and monstrous beings, such as Erik, the protagonist of Leroux's novel, who hides his deformed face under an expressionless mask, tormented by his ugliness. Giger frequently worked with cursed characters. Another aspect of the novel that interested Giger was the description of the underground, the labyrinthine subterranean passages, closely related to the *Pozos* series of drawings. The Phantom of the Opera follows in the footsteps of other mythical characters from fantasy literature such as Dracula and Frankenstein.



31-*The Phantom of the Opera – Tribute to Gaston Leroux* (1966)



32-*The Phantom of the Opera - Tribute to Gaston Leroux II* (1966)

### 2.1.1.2. Horror

One author that Giger frequently cites is Edgar Allan Poe. Giger's fascination with the macabre and death led him to the Gothic genre, in which Poe excels.

Edgar Allan Poe is considered the first master of the short horror and mystery story, as well as the precursor of the modern detective novel. Death and the macabre are recurring themes in his narrative work, in which he explores the dark and sinister side of the soul and probes the limits of human pain and suffering. Among his abundant output, we highlight his harrowing tales *The Pit and the Pendulum* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*.

In *The Pit and the Pendulum*, Poe brilliantly explores anguish and claustrophobia, aided by the use of infernal symbolism (figures of menacing demons and skeletons painted on the walls) and torture (the pit made of metal plates, the rats, the blade). Giger frequently uses all these elements, and this story may well have inspired the painting *Scythe* (1980) [33], with its moving biomechanical forms and sharp blades, as in the story. Giger also depicts the human body as a victim.

*The Fall of the House of Usher* is one of the clearest examples of Poe using all the Gothic iconography to create a gloomy and sinister atmosphere (melancholic mansion, spectral trunks, dark passageways, ghostly trophies) to which Giger would frequently resort, especially when developing his illustrations and drawings in the 1960s. Also interesting is the description of Roderick Usher (cadaverous complexion, spider web hair, spectral pallor), which Giger would apply to some of his figures.

The most recurring themes in Poe are spiritual and emotional collapse and stories of characters obsessed with death and morbidity. In this sense, it is interesting how he describes the appearance of death, as in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*: "The face had become horribly yellow, and the eyes bulged out of their sockets. The tongue was bitten and partly cut off...The

The mother's body was horribly mutilated. All the bones in her right leg and arm were fractured to varying degrees... Her entire body was terribly bruised and yellowish <sup>100</sup>. This type of forensic analysis will be used by Giger to create his cadaverous creatures, documented with medical books and inspired by this type of literary description. In Poe's works, mysterious and baffling murders sometimes occur, atrocious and without apparent explanation. Little by little, the enigma will be unravelled. With Poe, the Gothic turns inward and begins a systematic exploration of the extreme states of psychological disturbance. Similarly, some of his characters will show an obsessive fascination with necrophilia. In this sense, Giger will carry out studies of decomposing forms and bodies.

In *The Masque of the Red Death*, there are interesting descriptions of the disease, the *red death*, in this case the plague. At the beginning of the story, we find his description, which will preside over the entire narrative: "Blood was its incarnation and its seal: the red and horror of blood. It began with sharp pains, sudden vertigo, and then the pores bled and death ensued. The scarlet spots on the body and face of the victim were the plague's proclamation, isolating her from all help and sympathy" <sup>(101)</sup>. At the end of the story, a figure appears who will lead to the dénouement: "The attendees seemed to feel deep down that the stranger's costume and appearance revealed neither wit nor decorum. His tall, thin figure was wrapped from head to toe in a shroud. The mask that hid his face resembled the countenance of a corpse already stiff, so that even the most detailed scrutiny would have had difficulty discovering the deception... but the masked man had dared to assume the appearance of the Red Death. His shroud was spattered with blood, and his broad forehead, as well as his face, appeared stained with scarlet horror.

His works reveal his interest in death, the occult, the diabolical, cruelty and torture; he is a creator of chilling and melancholic atmospheres. He is

<sup>100</sup> POE, Edgar Allan, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue and Other Mystery Stories*. Valdemar, Madrid, 1996.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

undoubtedly one of the most influential authors in literature and art of the last two centuries. He was one of Giger's favourite writers in his youth and apprenticeship, which included many figures typical of his works. The Gothic style of some of Poe's stories was a reference point used to create atmospheres of unease. Giger incorporated Gothic iconography into his style, and this type of novel was a constant reference point. On an iconographic level, the use of skulls and bones was of interest to both Poe and Giger.

### **Vampirism**

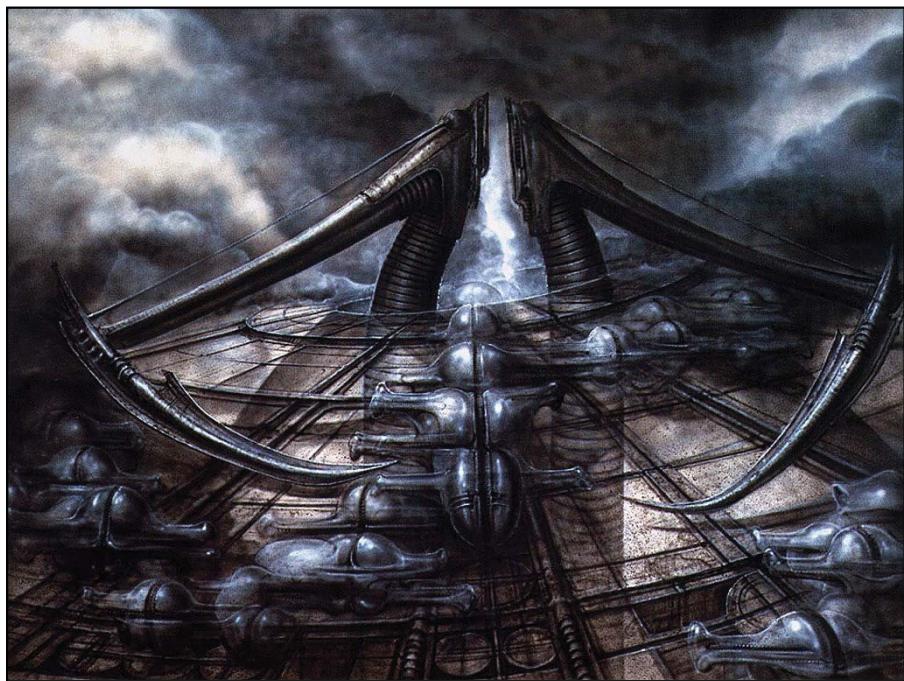
In May 2003, the German publisher Festa Verlag released a book entitled *H.R. Giger's Vampiric*, which consists of a selection of 23 vampire stories chosen by Giger. These include classics of the horror and fantasy genres with which Giger is very familiar, such as Guy de Maupassant's *Le Horla*<sup>103</sup> and stories by Leohard Stein, Mary Wilkins-Freeman and Lafcadio Hearn, alongside modern authors such as Nancy Kilpatrick and Basil Copper.

In the prologue, Giger writes: "I had never been aware of it before, but now it is obvious: there are many vampires in my paintings, in fact they abound. And blood is often seen"<sup>104</sup>. At the end of the foreword, he makes a very interesting observation, suggesting that deep down, we are all vampires, as we always take advantage of others for our own purposes, especially when there are relationships between people. Giger continues to read a lot today, especially prose.

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<sup>103</sup> In addition, Maupassant's macabre stories, such as *The Hand*, may have interested Giger.

<sup>104</sup>*H.R. Giger's Vampiric*. Festa Verlag, Almersbach, 2003, p.7.



33-Biomechanical Landscape – Scythe (1980)



34-Vampire (1967-68)

## H.P. Lovecraft

The work of Howard Philips Lovecraft has inspired many artists, who have created their own interpretations of the author's stories. Lovecraft is undoubtedly one of the writers who has most influenced Giger. This author of fantasy stories and horror tales continues the tradition of Edgar Allan Poe in the 20th century. His work combines the supernatural, esoteric knowledge and the world of dreams, and one of its most interesting aspects is the creation of a personal mythology expressed in the Cthulhu myths. His influence on writers and authors of science fiction and fantasy has been remarkable. Some of his best-known works are *The Case of Charles Ward*, *At the Mountains of Madness* and *The Dunwich Horror*, but in this study we will highlight his references to the famous book *Necronomicon*, an imaginary book invented by Lovecraft in which ancient powers and supernatural entities from other dimensions are described.

Lovecraft's literature has had a considerable influence on Giger's work, especially during his airbrush painting period and particularly in the creation of some of his monsters, whose images could serve to illustrate a Lovecraft book<sup>105</sup>. Eloquent examples are the *Necronom* series and his work for the film *Alien*. Giger assimilated Lovecraft's imagery and his Cthulhu myths, incorporating them into his iconographic repertoire.

He discovered Lovecraft's work around 1967, after becoming interested in the author who had written the *Necronomicon*. At that time, he was illustrating a magazine called *Cthulhu News* [35]. He was attracted by the descriptive and precise value of his stories, which stimulate psychological terror. His fascination with the writer was such that he decided to title his first large-format book *Giger's Necronomicon*, arguing that it was a book that existed in a fragmentary and fantastical way and was now palpable: "When I was looking for a title for my book of dark illustrations, my teacher Sergius Golowin,

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<sup>105</sup> This is how it happened; the connections are obvious and have not gone unnoticed by publishers, such as Madrid-based EDAF. See the chapter on *Repercussions*.

a well-known Swiss mythologist, referred to Lovecraft and said: why not simply call it *Giger's Necronomicon*, if only fragments of the original exist?"<sup>106</sup> . Giger's book features a text by the artist himself on the first page, in which he comments: "The Necronomicon is one of the most esoteric magical books (...) it is supposed to recount events that took place in the grey mists of prehistory and contains illustrations of sinister life forms that are hidden in the depths of the earth and the sea, waiting for the day when they will destroy humanity and take over the world."  
(<sup>107</sup>)

In this way, the content of Giger's book is directly associated with the world of Lovecraft and the depiction of these inhuman life forms. Giger continues: "Necronomicon, literally translated, means the types or masks of death, a museum of the most fabulous abominations and perversions. The famous writer H.P. Lovecraft was the first to mention this work in his Cthulhu mythology. Many science fiction and fantasy writers have repeatedly mentioned this work, but it is only now, in *Giger's Necronomicon*, that it has become a reality for the first time"  
(<sup>108</sup>).

Giger presents himself as a painter of terror and horror, a description that is often used in the press. In fact, the large, black book can be seen as an initiatory journey into the painter's universe.

Lovecraft's creations are a clear literary inspiration for Giger to develop his world. Take, for example, these revealing notes from one of Lovecraft and Derleth's stories, which Giger seems to adopt as dogma, since he will develop all these figures in his paintings:

H.P. Lovecraft and August Derleth. *The Black Brotherhood*.

"At night, the streets of any city on the East Coast provide the night-time stroller with visions of the strange and terrible, the macabre and the unusual: under cover of darkness, they emerge from the cracks and crevices

<sup>106</sup> ARh+. *Op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>107</sup> H.R.. *Giger's Necronomicon*. *Op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

cracks, attics and alleys of the city, those human beings who, for dark and remote reasons, shelter during the day in their grey niches. They are the deformed, the lonely, the sick, the elderly, the persecuted, and those lost souls who are always searching for themselves under the cloak of night, which is more beneficial to them than the cold light of day could ever be. They are the wounded of life, the crippled, men and women who have never recovered from the traumas of childhood, or who have sought experiences not permitted to man. Wherever human society has concentrated for a considerable period of time, there they are, though they are only seen emerging in the hours of darkness, like moths flitting around their lairs for a few brief hours before fleeing again when the sunlight rises.

References to Lovecraft are constant, especially in his aerographic work. In his 1978 painting *Iluminatus I*, he includes a portrait of Lovecraft as a tribute to the writer. One of the aspects in which Lovecraftian narratives most influence Giger is undoubtedly in the creation of monsters and the development of alien cultures.

Let us look at another quote about descriptions of beings from other worlds: "It was as if I feared losing consciousness in a strange place, with no means of returning to earth, for what I was witnessing was an extraterrestrial scene of proportions of grandeur and magnificence incomprehensible to me. Vast panoramas of space swirled before me in an unknown dimension, and in the centre I saw a collection of giant cubes scattered in a cove of agitated violet radiation. Among them moved other enormous, changing figures, rough cones ten feet tall, resting on a base composed of a semi-elastic material with scales and lumps. From their apexes emerged four flexible, cylindrical limbs, each at least a foot wide, made of a substance similar to that of the cones, though more like flesh. These were the

<sup>109</sup>LOVECRAFT, H.P. and DERLETH, August. *The Closed Room and Other Tales of Horror*. Alianza, Madrid, 2001.

supposed bodies of the members that crowned them. As far as I could see, they had the ability to contract and expand several times until they reached a length similar to the height of the cone to which they were attached. Two of these limbs had enormous claws at their ends, while a third had a crest of four red, trumpet-shaped appendages, and the fourth ended in a yellow globe two feet in diameter, in the middle of which were three enormous eyes, dark opal in colour, which, given their position on the elastic limb, could turn in any direction. It was a scene that fascinated me greatly, but at the same time inspired me with an atrocious repulsion, given the absolute strangeness and aura of fearsome discoveries that emanated from it. With greater clarity and distinction, I could see the figures moving: they seemed to be attending to the large cubes; I could see that their strange heads were crowned by four large grey stalks with appendages similar to flowers and that, at the bottom, they had eight sinuous, elastic tentacles, the colour of seaweed, constantly agitated in a serpentine motion. These tentacles expanded and contracted, lengthened and shortened; they lashed from side to side as if they had a life independent of that which animated the cones, which seemed more sluggish. The scene was bathed in a faded red glow, like that of a dying sun which, having lost its planet, had now taken the place of the violet radiation of the cove" <sup>110</sup>.

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<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*



35-Cthulhu Genius (1967)



36-Behemoth (1975)



37-Mordor VI (1975)



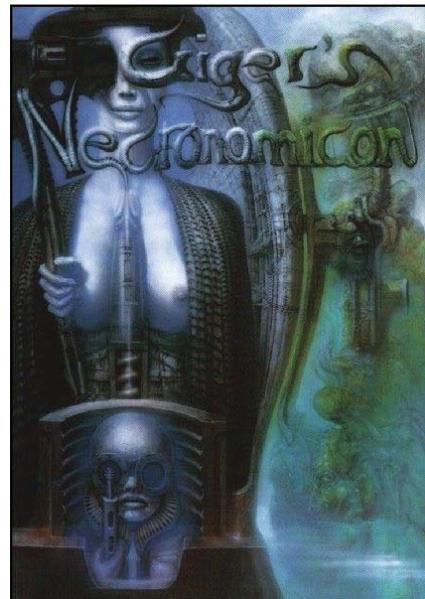
38-Mordor VII (1975)



39- *Necronom III* (1976)



40- *Necronom VII* (1976)



41- *Giger's Necronomicon* (1977)

### 2.1.1.3. Existentialism

Throughout the 20th century, existentialism has become one of the most influential philosophical and cultural systems, aiming to analyse and describe the meaning and contradiction of human life. It emphasises individual existence, freedom and the conflicts of choice. Existentialism has been a widely represented movement in literature. This philosophy influenced Giger, especially during his early days as an artist. Three existentialist writers had a particular influence on him: Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett and Thomas Bernhard. Kafka was a constant influence on his work, while Beckett and Bernhard were of particular interest to him around 1968, as they were two authors who received international recognition during those years<sup>111</sup>.

#### Beckett

Since his studies in Zurich, Giger began to question the mystery of humanity and search for clues about its existence. Samuel Beckett, Irish novelist, poet and playwright, was noted for his bleak portrayal of the human condition and the absurdity of existence. His play *Waiting for Godot* is one of the most important works of the 20th century. In his writings, he speaks of the desperate fate of the human race, using a distressed and pessimistic view of man and his world. Giger dedicated three oil paintings to him, and his influence from the mid-1960s onwards can be traced in his work, already in one of his first series, *A Feast for the Psychiatrist*, in which he draws two works entitled *Waiting for Godot* [42] and in the *Biomechanoids* series.

The oil paintings dedicated to Beckett [43] can be placed alongside Munch's *The Scream* in terms of their quality, as they reflect the anguished and desperate condition of man, and alongside the figures of Francis Bacon.

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<sup>111</sup> Beckett received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969 and in 1970 Bernhard won the highest award given by the German Academy of Language and Poetry, the Georg Büchner Prize.



42- *Waiting for Godot* (1966)



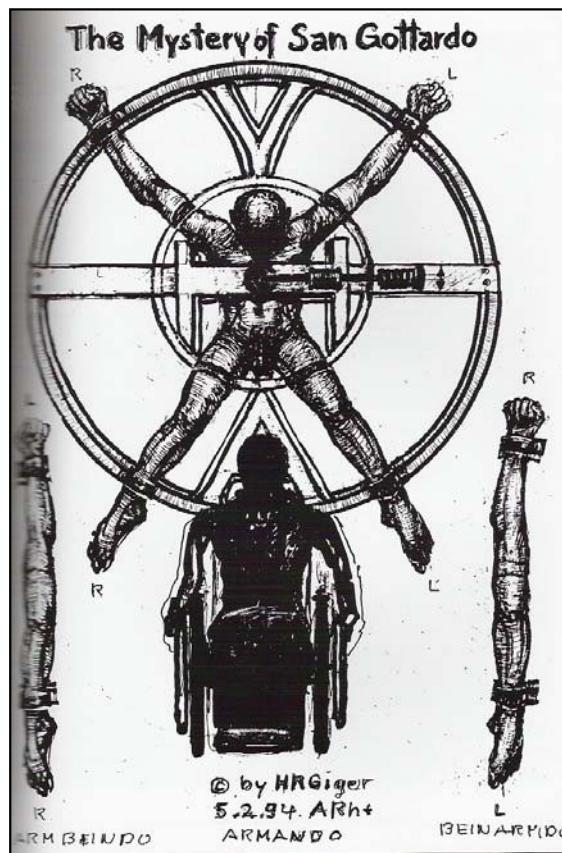
43- *Homage to Samuel Beckett II* (1968)

## Kafka

Franz Kafka reflects in his writings the anguish and oppression of 20th-century man through an expressionist, symbolic and unsettling narrative, a facet that has greatly interested Giger. The themes of his works focus on loneliness, frustration and the agonising sense of guilt experienced by individuals when threatened by unknown forces that they cannot understand and are beyond their control. *In the Penal Colony* (1919) is one of the works that influenced Giger, depicting the horror of torture. In Giger's paintings, we see figures tied up with straps and oppressed by perverse mechanisms, as in *Biomecanoide* or *Stillbirth Machine*.

Some press articles have used the term Kafkaesque to describe Giger's works. In Giger's story *The Mystery of St. Gotthard*, there are influences from Kafka's stories in terms of grotesque and macabre situations; there is the amputation of limbs in a drawing with a circular mechanism that serves to mutilate a man's arms and legs to create the biomechanoids that swarm throughout the novel [44].

In a recent drawing, Giger pays homage to Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* [45]. Gregor Samsa, the protagonist, wakes up one morning to discover that he has turned into a giant insect; his family rejects him and leaves him to die alone. It is a nightmarish and distressing work about bodily transformation that would influence the insectoid appearance of Giger's monsters.



44- The Mystery of San Gottardo  
(1994)



45- *Kafka's Metamorphosis* (2002)

## Bernhard

Thomas Bernhard's novel *The Lime Works* (*Das Kalkwerk*, 1970) is often linked to Giger's work. Albert Glaser quoted it at the beginning of his extensive text on Giger in the catalogue for the exhibition at the Sydow-Zirkwitz gallery. It is also quoted in the documentary *Passagen* (Li is seen reading an excerpt aloud while Giger draws).

In his poems and novels, Bernhard has explored the theme of absurdity in life and human feelings, as well as the pressures that drive people to the brink of madness. Bernhard's humour is dark, cruel, sometimes Buñuel-esque. A humour that shares the very German *schadenfreude* (joy at the misfortune of others) and the no less German *galgenhumor* (bitter humour in a desperate situation). Bernhard believes that man laughs only at his neighbour, at his misfortune. Giger constantly uses irony and black humour in his work.

In *The Lime Works*, his style reaches maturity and fulfilment. The novel consists of a single paragraph and "constitutes a profound reflection on contemporary man, animated by a negative view of today's society and culture, focusing on the problems of loneliness, lack of communication, self-destruction and failure"<sup>(112)</sup>. The setting for the action is an abandoned lime factory where the protagonist, Konrad, locks himself away with his paralysed wife to complete a supposedly definitive study on hearing. Five years of total and voluntary isolation culminate in the murder of his wife. It is a distressing, oppressive story with insane ideas and ruthless cruelty.

Konrad has the idea of closing everything off from the outside world, putting up bars and isolating himself, as he hates creatures and wants to cloister himself away: "doors tightly closed, securely bolted, windows well barred, everything tightly closed and bolted (...) if you approach a building like the lime kiln, you always have the feeling of being watched, of being watched from all sides... everything is

<sup>112</sup> BERNHARD, Thomas. *The Lime Kiln*. Alianza, Madrid, 1984.

gradually, after an initial unprecedented lucidity, a tension of all the sensory organs, into something powerless, a great prostration takes hold of everyone who enters the domain of the lime kiln, suddenly... the interior of the lime kiln allowed only a very limited freedom of movement (...). The construction of the complex, he said, was geared towards total illusion, the superficial critic fell into the trap in any case (...) for him, Konrad, the lime kiln had all the advantages of a so-called voluntary labour camp"<sup>(113)</sup>. As we can see, there is a sense of claustrophobia throughout the story. Giger has often depicted this feeling, relating it to the moment of childbirth.

Very confined spaces immediately produce a feeling of suffocation and are spaces that increase the tendency towards despair, towards the anguish of living oppressed without freedom of movement. One sentence sums up this decadent aspect: "darkness reigns in the cellars of the lime kiln". The things surrounding the lime kiln are rusty and rotten. Giger often uses this idea to represent the passage of time and decay.

He lavishes himself on the repetition of routine, of the horrible and the absurd day after day; his existential space is distressing. He says, "it almost drives me crazy"; he is disturbed by the sinister tranquillity that reigns in the lime kiln, he is overcome by feelings of despair because nothing happens (he calls someone and no one answers) little by little he becomes aware of the absurdity of his existence, of his deplorable life.

Konrad recounts his daily mental torture, his humiliating thoughts, his constant paranoia and his rigorous self-analysis. He believes that man lives in a world of brutalisation, in which catastrophic situations and chaotic scenes occur and people seem mediocre and superficial to him: "one would have to give in and give up and despair in the most fundamental way, disappear in the most shameful way, annihilate oneself. Many believed that by filling their heads with fantasies, they could save themselves, but no man and, consequently, no head could be saved. There was a head, and because that head was there, it was irretrievably lost. Only lost heads populated only lost bodies on only lost continents"<sup>(114)</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.* p.145

Bernhard also criticises hypocrisy and makes a strong social critique. For him, the country is a "graveyard of ideas" and a "perverse desert of aborted flights of fancy", with continuous failures, humiliations and ignorance. He also recounts strange deaths and macabre stories such as that of the sawyer, the butcher and the tobacconist who "had doused himself with petrol, set himself on fire and thus turned to ashes". Giger also recalls these macabre anecdotes in his texts.

He tries to see what is inside his head, as Giger will do to paint his ghostly pictures: 'I wouldn't want to see what's inside your head; if your head could be turned around, something horrible would fall out of it, rubbish, something rotten, undefined, blurred, totally worthless'<sup>115</sup>. The iconography of decay, bodies and skulls perforated by worms is also frequently used by Giger.

The work on the ear becomes sinister and will lead to madness, ultimately annihilating his character and destroying his life, turning him into a monster, cornered and unscrupulous. He also criticises architecture: "The question of architecture, too, although now barely different, played a more subordinate role. The viewer was presented with an atmosphere uniformly permeated by the madness of progress and, consequently, the madness of machines, in which, wherever he went, in the countryside or in the city, he always found the same conditions"<sup>(116)</sup>.

Over time, the world wears itself out, one is confronted with its sordidness, man becomes a monster (an idea that Giger develops in his paintings). The ultimate goal will be death; the lime kiln will lead him "first to despair, then to intellectual and emotional desertion, and then to illness and death"<sup>(117)</sup>. The anguish is total and constant in the face of the lime kiln and the world, even more so with the knowledge of Konrad's own helplessness and misery, who will end up painting the interior of the lime kiln with black lacquer, everything painted black (a feeling that Giger also realises, renouncing colour and painting everything dark,

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<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.* p. 156

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.* p. 184

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.* p. 188

with hardly any light). Konrad ends up exhausted, bolting the doors and locking the locks.

The lime kiln is a metaphor for the world; the feelings described are those of modern man, on the verge of madness and despair (because nothing happens). Giger will work on all these ideas in his creations, sometimes answering his own questions and raising existential concerns.

#### **2.1.1.4. r French literature**

Fascinated by flashes of wonder and human passions, the Surrealists championed the work of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Sade, Lautréamont and Jarry, who until then had been considered cursed writers. Giger has expressed in interviews his attraction to Sade, Lautréamont and Jarry, especially among the French literary authors revisited by the Surrealist artists. Giger has also read a great deal of French literature, such as the occult writings of Alphonse Costant, alias *Eliphas Levi*, and the horror stories of Guy de Maupassant. French literature is therefore one of his greatest influences, along with German literature (Bernhard, Kafka, Meyrink).

#### **Alfred Jarry**

Jarry's best-known creation, the character of Ubu from his first play *Ubu Roi* (1896), has become a contemporary myth that we find not only on the theatre stage, but also on television and cinema screens, and whose influence on art has been widespread, in paintings, sculptures, book illustrations and even as a literary symbol of brutality, ambition and greed<sup>(118)</sup>

Since its premiere, it has become a key reference for French surrealism. In it, Jarry attacks the traditional view of authority through the rise to power of a grotesque and pompous king, Ubu, and his wife, Mother Ubu, who symbolise greed, ignorance and bourgeois attitudes. This farce,

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<sup>118</sup> See *Alfred Jarry: from the Nabis to Pataphysics* [Catalogue]. IVAM, Valencia, 2000.

whose presentation caused a real scandal, is considered the first work of the theatre of the absurd.

The Surrealists maintained a deep and ambitious relationship with the character of Ubu and assigned him a privileged place in their iconography. In 1923, Max Ernst painted Ubu Emperor transformed into a kind of blast furnace built with bricks. Giger has also dedicated drawings to this figure. The caricature of the physics professor and the constant humour and irony in the work are what most interested Giger, who worked extensively with caricature and the theme of the grotesque in his compositions. For Jarry, humour is the fourth dimension, without which life is empty. Like Jarry, Giger created grotesque and absurd atmospheres in which his characters move.

### **Lautréamont**

The Count of Lautréamont, pseudonym of Isidore Ducasse, was a French writer who died at the age of 24 (1870) in mysterious circumstances, which in fact surrounded his entire life (he was born in Montevideo). Even today, he remains indecipherable and very little is known about his biography. His best-known work, *Les Chants de Maldoror*, is cited by Giger. The book, which is a poem filled with moans of pain and cries of madness, is a satanic breviary imbued with melancholy and sadness. A discourse on schizophrenia and brilliant madness, it served as inspiration for surrealist literature. The dreamlike quality of his images borders on the nightmarish. What is cursed in Lautréamont is not only in the subject matter, but also in the way he writes. He has certain connections with Poe and Blake, as well as with the morbid gothicism of Sade.

This "poetics of evil"<sup>119</sup> characteristic of Lautreamontian discourse aims to lead to good through delirium and horror, through delight in the horrible, and to bring the images and

<sup>119</sup> This concept appears in COLLAZO RAMOS, Leticia. Isidore Ducasse Comte de Lautréamont: the poetics of evil as a precursor to symbolism. [online] *Espéculo* 2001 [Date of consultation: 18-3-2002]. Available at: <<http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero18/maldoror.html>> Lautréamont, Comte de. *Les Chants de Maldoror*, Visor Libros, Madrid, 1997, p. 64

the symbols of horror. The poetics of evil consists of artistically working with vice and the satanic aspect of the universe and man, giving them artistic value. Monstrous images with dense symbolic value proliferate in the songs. By associating the unassociable, Lautréamont creates the poetics of the fortuitous and the unconscious that the surrealists will work with as "exquisite corpses".

Maldoror feels repugnance towards heroes, loneliness and alienation. That is why he seeks to create the antihero, for which he forges the archetype of the decadent, the infernal and inhuman, the depraved and insane, the damned, the romantic image of Satan, of otherness. Maldoror is the angel of evil; and evil comes with the recognition of the human condition. The songs describe a ghostly universe with hardly any points of anchorage in the face of so much horror. André Breton and the Surrealists brought this work to light as a model of the avant-garde break with convulsive poetry, and made him their prophet alongside Sade, both writers being outlawed and damned. Lautréamont is an enigmatic and mysterious figure, about whom little is known. In an artist like Giger, the Cantos could have stimulated his fantastic and imaginary creations.

The book is rich in descriptions that connect with Giger's monstrous figures and his studies of disease and sickness. The aim of Lautréamont's poetry is explicit: to attack man, whom he compares to a parasite: "My poetry will consist solely of attacking, by all means, man, that fierce beast, and the Creator, who should not have begotten such a parasite" <sup>120</sup>.

The narrator is a demonic being, with a gaunt face with "green wrinkles on his forehead... with protruding bones". He himself is abjection personified, having vowed to live with disease. His own description is sickly: "I am dirty. Lice gnaw at me. Pigs vomit when they see me. The scabs and sores of leprosy have flaked off my skin, covered with yellowish pus... an enormous mushroom grows on the back of my neck." He sees himself covered with lush vegetation growing on him, full of parasites... no longer flesh...An evil viper has devoured my penis and taken its place, jellyfish from the realm of slime have lodged themselves in his rear..."

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<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*

This description resembles that of the Space Jockey in *Alien*, with its sickly appearance, in which Giger mixes various resources and sources such as this to recreate the image of an extraterrestrial corpse, petrified and covered in protuberances.

He writes descriptions and poems of abjection that speak of the repulsive monsters that swarm in the abyss, of tearing, suffering, cruelty and pain. He compares the depths of the ocean to those of the human heart. He stimulates the imagination and creation.

In his first Canto, he gives a description reminiscent of paintings from Giger's *Necronom* series [46-47]: 'No one has yet seen the green wrinkles on my forehead; nor the protruding bones of my thin face, like the spines of some great fish'<sup>121</sup>.

Lautréamont envelops his prose in a macabre aura, describing things in a sickening, distressing way. To compose *The Songs*, he draws on sadistic, gloomy, bloody and mysterious material, which he elaborates with poetic language that extraordinarily multiplies the images with prodigious imaginative violence.

The connections with Giger, which are abundant, can be summarised in four sections: animal symbolism, disease, the abject, and scenes of violence and torture, which constitute a catalogue of aberrations.

Lautréamont uses many symbolic resources, such as quotations and descriptions of animals of darkness, such as frogs and toads, snakes, dogs, panthers, owls, spiders, and crows. He describes all the satanic fauna, the dark side of creation. In addition, Maldoror metamorphoses into monstrous creatures such as octopuses, dragons, and other sea monsters. His descriptions can evoke the creation of imaginary beings.

He also defends disease in its most unpleasant graphic aspects: he speaks of corrosive diseases, of blenorragic pus with clots, of paraphimosis, cysts, malignant tumours, poisoned pustules, skinned, tortured bodies stripped of their epidermis; he recounts the misfortunes and actions of a depraved being, with a face hidden under layers of

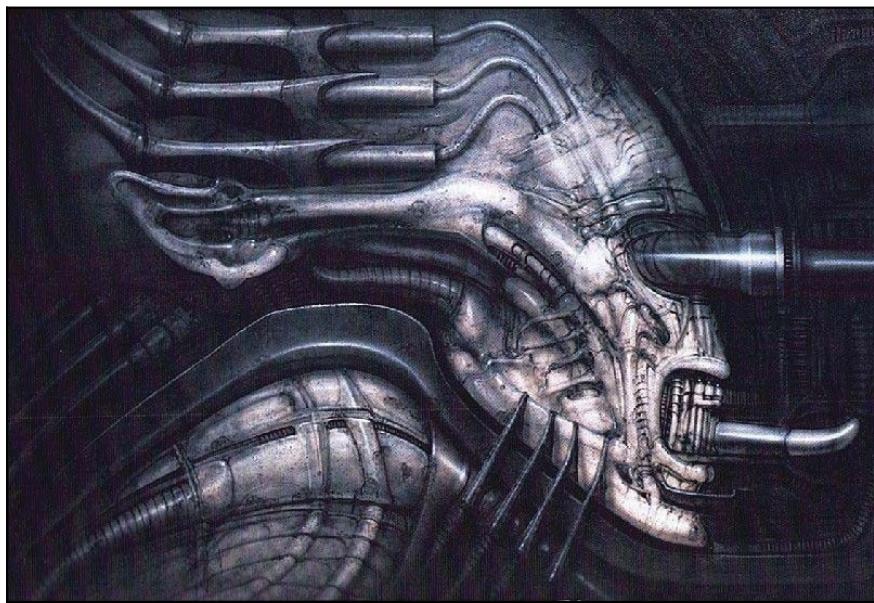
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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.

blood and semen due to the numerous crimes committed; of carnage and perverse scenes such as when he disembowels a girl and removes her internal organs, amid abundant spilled blood.

He frequently uses the device of metamorphosis. The protagonist is consumed by evil. There are abundant monstrous descriptions (insect tentacles, mutilated organs, putrid fluid), martyrdom (skinned bodies, splattered brains, blood, rotting corpses).

He also uses abundant gloomy iconography: blood, cemeteries, hunger, death, open graves. Many of these elements have been developed by Giger and used in his works. The songs are a great poetic inspiration for the creation of images. The Surrealists would see this work as a goldmine for developing their theories, and Breton would adopt one of the paradigmatic phrases of Surrealism from the Cantos: "beautiful... like the chance encounter, on a dissecting table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella", a maxim to which Giger also subscribes.



46- *Necronom I* (1976)



47- *Necronom VIII* (1976)

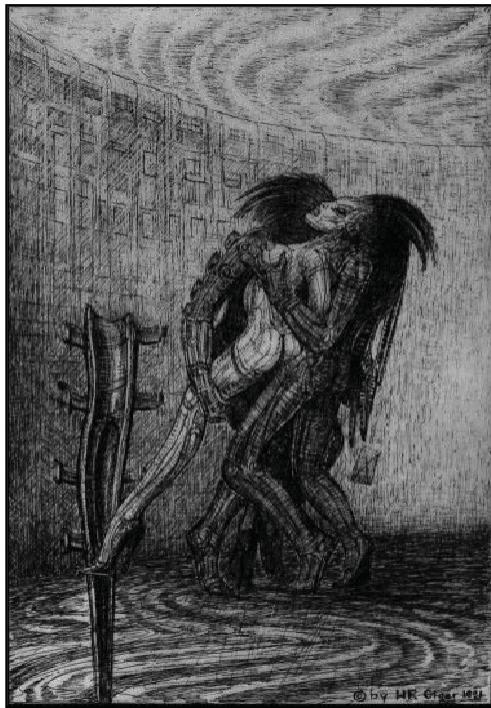
### Sade

The figure of the Marquis de Sade was extolled by the Surrealists and has inspired the work of almost all artists linked to this movement, such as Hans Bellmer, Max Ernst, Salvador Dalí and Giger himself. His stories are a great inspiration for the visualisation of sexual fantasies. Among his most interesting works are *Justine, or The Misfortunes of Virtue*, *Philosophy in the Bedroom* and *The 120 Days of Sodom*. In 1966, Giger produced a small drawing (21 x 24 cm) entitled *After the 120 Days of Sodom* [48], inspired by Sade's novel *The 120 Days of Sodom*. This was one of the Marquis's best-known masterpieces, abounding in aberrations, perversions and horror. The Surrealists appreciated him for his relentless pursuit of absolute pleasure in all its forms, especially in relation to sex, and for his contempt for traditional values.

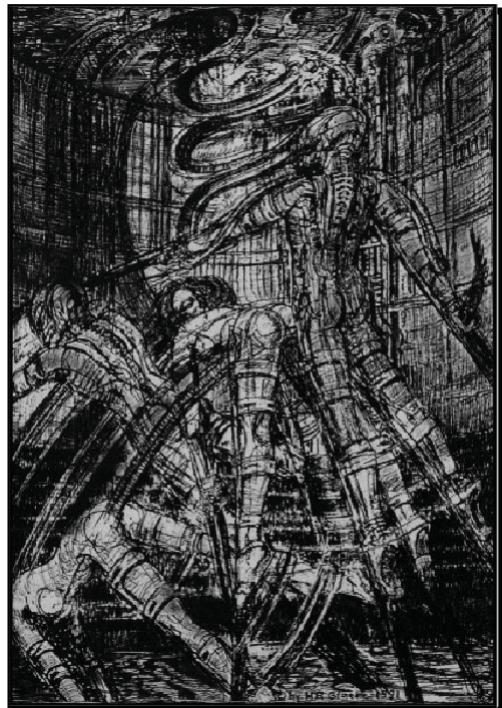
Sade is the author of one of the most scandalous and excessive works in world literature. Two levels overlap in Sade's works: detailed descriptions of orgies and the ideological justification of depravity. Sade constructs a philosophy to justify his sexual fantasies, describing aberrant and perverse acts. He thus introduces a radical shift in the conception of evil that has been prevalent throughout Christianity: since St. Augustine, evil had never been conceived as a positive category, it was simply the exception to a hypostatised good. Sade, following Hobbes' theories, concludes that evil is consubstantial with nature. Therefore, for him, the meaning of life is that we are heading towards chaos and self-destruction. Surrealists such as Apollinaire, Dalí and Buñuel carried out a recovery of Sade's work. Buñuel was fascinated by Sade's writings, especially those referring to the imagination as an instrument of human liberation. Imagination without limits, without chains to restrain it. Imagination as an infinite source of pleasure, of extreme pleasure. Images of torture, sex and death are common in the work of Giger, who devoted numerous erotic drawings to them [49-50]. In them, we see a whole series of excesses, rapes and penetrations. The airbrush series *Erotomechanics* may also be partly inspired by Sade, as it focuses on erotic/pornographic themes.



48- *After 120 Days of Sodom* (1966)



49- *Interpersonal Relations II* (1991)



50- *Illustration for the Marquis de*

*Sade VIII* (1991)

### 2.1.1.5. r psychedelia

Between the 1960s and 1970s, Giger completed his intellectual training, which would be fundamentally marked by literature. This period coincided with the emergence of psychedelic culture.

Golowin recalls how Giger works, sometimes drawing while listening to Li read aloud from Lovecraft, Bulgakov and Leary<sup>122</sup>. Like Bulgakov in his most famous novel, *The Master and Margarita*, Giger examines humans and their lives full of fear and terror, unfolding in extreme situations, full of horrors, wars, diseases and, what is more serious, all in the face of total human passivity, which is blinded. He has an airbrush work, *The Master and Margarita* (1976) [51], in which the literary evocations that emerge from the novel are mixed with Gigerian duality expressed by the contrast between beauty and horror, represented here by the female sex and the monster with an erect penis.

Another group of writers who influenced Giger is the so-called Beat Generation, a group of American writers characterised by their subversive literature and visionary ideas, mainly consisting of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs, who had a considerable impact on the countercultural movements of the time, especially in art and music.

The figure of Timothy Leary, an American writer and philosopher concerned with human communication and understanding of the mind, also had a profound influence on Giger in the late 1960s. Leary was called the guru of LSD for his experiments with drugs, becoming a prominent figure in the counterculture. He later discovered the potential of new computer technology and attempted to promote the computer revolution, becoming one of the most prominent figures in cyberspace, staunchly defending computer science, cybernetics and virtual reality. Leary was expelled from the United States and took refuge in Switzerland in 1971, where he befriended Giger, who got involved by collecting signatures and participating in a manifesto calling for political asylum for Leary. This moral debt was repaid by

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<sup>122</sup> H. R. Giger *Passagen*. Bündner Kunstmuseum, Chur, 1974.

Leary at the end of that decade by writing the introduction to the books *Giger's Alien* and *New York City*, in which he praises the Swiss artist's visionary art.

Another author who has influenced him is Herman Hesse (*Steppenwolf*). Science fiction writers Philip K. Dick and Isaac Asimov are among his favourites. William Gibson has also had an impact on him, but his influence is minor since Giger already had a very defined style when he read him. On the other hand, Dick's novels and Asimov's writings on robots did contribute to his fascination with machines and intelligent devices.

In 1968, writer Erich von Däniken's first book, *Chariots of the Gods*, was published, in which he raised the possibility that the ancient mysteries of humanity could be better understood if explained by the intervention of beings from other planets, even that man had been created by some kind of alien experiment from outer space. In his works, von Däniken revolutionised the traditional conception of the creation of man and raised the question of contact with other intergalactic civilisations. In those years, with the space race at its peak, science fiction works and theses such as this one would greatly open up the field of experimentation for artists such as Giger, who was inclined to take the ideas and theories of some writers further. Another work that was very famous during the 1970s was Robert's *Illuminatus* trilogy.

A. Wilson and Robert Shea, a classic among the counterculture of the time. The work presented conspiracy theories, secret files, and the existence of occult societies, mixed with LSD trips and insane readings in a surrealist and occult work that became a cult classic. Giger created two paintings in 1978 entitled *Illuminatus*, which have a clear connection to the novel.

From all these references, Giger has forged his own mythological and iconographic universe, creating new worlds with myths of great visual impact, such as the *alien*. His images are a model to be studied in order to understand the complexity and meaning of his particular universe.



51-*The Master and Margarita* (1976)

#### 2.1.1.6. r esoteric literature

From 1970 onwards, Giger became particularly interested in occult literature, esoteric texts on magic, alchemy and other mysterious sciences related to the mythologies of death and the afterlife, with their cosmological symbolism and funeral rites (such as those in Egypt). This interest would translate into a dark, gloomy and occult period that is one of the most defining of his style, making it darker and connecting it with the occult. During these years, he would create some of his most emblematic works.

Alchemy is another pseudoscience that interested Giger from childhood, when he experimented with metals in his father's pharmacy. Likewise, Egyptian culture, the origin of remote and occult knowledge, attracted Giger from childhood, especially because of the mystical and mysterious nature of its civilisation. Egyptian funerary culture and its strong symbolism are widely used as a source of expressive resources.

The themes of his paintings in the mid-1970s were clearly influenced by these readings. As Mircea Eliade comments, the 1970s saw an "occult explosion", with these ancient disciplines achieving surprising popularity<sup>123</sup>. Astrology and horoscopes were hugely successful, and contemporary occult movements, satanic lodges and neo-pagan groups developed, with a notable influence on the arts, cinema and rock music.

Giger has extensive knowledge of esoteric literature. He has read everything from the works of Agrippa von Nettesheim to modern masters such as Madame Blavatsky and Georges Gurdjieff. One subject that has greatly interested him is the Tarot and its magical connotations, as well as its creative possibilities.

Giger's interest in these sciences is purely academic and aesthetic. He has stated on several occasions that he does not practise these arts nor is he associated with any of these groups. Thus, we observe in many works from this period a wealth of iconographic and figurative content, particularly in the airbrush paintings. The works offer different levels of interpretation depending on our knowledge of magic and esotericism and contain hermetic and hidden messages. We must delve into in-depth analyses of the paintings in order to describe

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<sup>123</sup> ELIADE, Mircea. *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions*. Paidós, Barcelona, 1997.

these influences. His paintings are filled with magicians, witches, demonic beings, representations of Satan and a whole occult iconography assimilated into his art.

The introducers to this type of literature would be, on the one hand, Fuchs, who studied the texts of the Kabbalah in depth, and his girlfriend Li. But the person who probably introduced Giger to these readings was his friend, the Swiss mythologist Sergius Golowin.

In the philosophical and mystical system of Kabbalah, letters and numbers take on fundamental significance. Giger immersed himself in these texts, which led to works of profound symbolism and mysticism, in which he expressed his esoteric ideas and knowledge. He also explored the idea of the macrocosm or universe and its correspondence with the microcosm, man, and the balance between these two forces.

### **Eliphas Levi**

Eliphas Lévi is the hermetic name of Alphonse Louis Constant, one of the most significant esoteric masters of the modern era. One of his best-known works is *The Key to the Great Mysteries*. Lévi, who is an essential reference for any Kabbalist, coined the term "occultism" <sup>124</sup>in 1856 in his work *Dogme et rituel de haute magie*. Giger followed his description of Baphomet to incorporate it as an iconographic motif into his paintings. In 1975, he made a preparatory sketch of the figure of Baphomet: a goat-like figure whose head is inscribed in a pentagram. The geometry is determined by the horns of the beast and the extremities of a female figure. He later made a much more elaborate painting, using an airbrush, adding the theme of drugs, with six needles in the woman's body [84]. For Giger, he is one of the greatest occult scholars of all time and is considered the greatest magician of the 19th century.

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<sup>124</sup> *Occultism*, a French term derived from the Latin adjective *occultus* (hidden, secret, mysterious), refers to a set of beliefs and dogmas related to magic and alchemy and to beliefs that identify an invisible world within the visible world.

## Aleister Crowley

Crowley liked to call *himself the Beast*. He was a writer, poet, and scholar of magical Kabbalah, with a deep knowledge of esotericism and magic. Even in his own time, he was a controversial and polemical figure, an enigmatic character who was criticised ad nauseam. He was given the nickname 'the most wicked man in the world', and today his name evokes an aura of evil and perversion, placing him in the position of a black magician or Satanist. He practised sexual magic, writing a comprehensive treatise on the subject entitled *De Arte Magica*. He is the author of numerous articles and books on magic and the occult. Giger was fascinated by the figure of Crowley, and his interest in the Tarot came about through reading his writings.

Aleister Crowley's literary work, as well as his paintings and, in general, most of the graphic or written evidence we have of his life and activities, convey something very different from what the legend has strived to preserve about him: a sense of arbitrariness and confusion.

## Gustav Meyrink

Meyrink belongs to the world of the esoteric. In his works, the real and the fantastic combine to form an initiatory progression, divided into stages, trials and final enlightenment. An interesting feature of his work is the awareness of the essential duality of the feminine and masculine principles that exist in every human being, integrating the two antagonistic and complementary poles<sup>125</sup>. His best-known work, *The Golem (Der Golem, 1915)*, is a modern-day myth and a classic of fantasy literature. In his works, he explores the symbolism of numbers and benevolent and malevolent entities. Giger considers him to be the great master of the occult novel<sup>126</sup>. His painting *Chidher Grün* (1975) [52] is inspired by the story of the same name by

<sup>125</sup> VÁZQUEZ ALONSO, Mariano José, *Maestros esotéricos*, Robinbook, Barcelona, 1999, p. 233

<sup>126</sup> H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon*. *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

Meyrink, *The Green Face* (*Das grüne Gesicht*, 1916). In this painting depicting the crucified serpent, the literary inspiration is evident in the quotation from Meyrink's novel. Originally published in 1916, it consists of an apocalyptic vision, set in a decadent post-war Amsterdam, where a being called *Chidher Green* appears, related to the myth of the "wandering Jew", a being destined to wander the earth until the end of time. The myth becomes an image, a kind of totem. It deals with the paths of initiation and enlightenment. It focuses on mystical occultism, the European morality of the turn of the century. Giger translated Meyrink's literary description into this painting: 'His face... resembled that of a mummy; the skin of his lips, thin and dry as parchment, was stretched over decaying yellow teeth...'. Giger composes a grim face based on the story, with a snake coiled around a metal cross.



52- *Chidher Grün* (1975)

## 2.1.2 Artistic sources

Giger's interest in art came rather late, as he lived in Chur for the first 20 years of his life, isolated from the art world. No major exhibitions were held there; it was a small town. He began to learn more about art when he moved to Zurich. However, at secondary school, through illustrations and reproductions, he became acquainted with some artists and comments that at the age of twenty he was influenced by Dalí, Bellmer and Oelze<sup>127</sup>. Even as a young man, his artistic interest gravitated towards surrealism and fantastic art, and this would remain constant throughout his life, as we shall see that the artists and movements that influenced him can be grouped under these trends. In any case, there are essential artists without whom it would be more difficult to understand the evolution of his work, as is the case with Dalí and Bellmer, as he discovered both of them very early on and their art influenced his early drawings and creations, at which point his figures already took on a certain aesthetic character. From then on, his work would be oriented towards the fantastic and the erotic (marked by these artists). Other artists have influenced him at specific moments, or he has paid tribute to them with a painting or drawing.

### 2.1.2.1. r fantastic art.

Giger's art connects with many manifestations of fantastic art. Various relationships can be established with the artists who have developed this tradition throughout history, but we will focus on those who, either through morphological and content analysis or through textual quotations from Giger himself, have clearly served as a study and inspiration for the creation of his plastic world.

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<sup>127</sup>Richard Oelze (1900-1980) is considered one of the most important German surrealists. A student at the Bauhaus with Klee and Kandinsky, he is also associated with Otto Dix and the Neue Sachlichkeit.

## **Hieronymus Bosch**

The first artist to fascinate Giger was Bosch, considered the great precursor of fantastic art. The development of the iconography of the monstrous in his work is one of its most interesting features, whose influence extends to most of Giger's work, dominated by the development of fantastic worlds and elements, as well as the creation of monstrous forms.

We can extract characteristics from Bosch's work that are applicable to Giger's:

- a-In his paintings, he makes symbolic allusions taken from the popular culture of his time.
- b-He demonstrates a great knowledge of popular legends surrounding the devil and the forces of evil, as well as hermetic, magical and alchemical literature.
- c-Grotesque physiognomic characterisations with a grotesque nature.
- d-His paintings reflect hellish, dreamlike and fantastical visions. He creates realistic representations of the demonic forces that surround man.
- f-Sense of humour and burlesque character.

Giger shares with Bosch a fascination with the grotesque and the unnatural. Both create unique images of hell and nightmares in which scenes of torture feature prominently. Bosch reflects the esoteric practices of the Middle Ages, such as alchemy, astrology and witchcraft, constantly using this iconography in his works. Giger does the same, but updates the hidden meanings and symbols of these images. The demonic theme is one of the most important that Giger has worked on. The airbrush period is the most *Boschian* in Giger's work, producing a proliferation of fantastic forms and creatures and developing the monstrous in a more explicit way. Bosch's paintings show his concern for man's inclination towards sin, in defiance of God, as well as the eternal condemnation of souls lost in Hell, as a fatal consequence of human madness. His main sources were Dutch illuminated manuscripts, foreign engravings, medieval bestiaries, and legends and texts of the time. As we have seen, Giger also uses a wide range of literature as inspiration and documentation in his creative processes.

Bosch frequently depicted images of beggars and invalids. Similarly, Giger drew *Beggar* in 1963 and later developed mutilated figures in wheelchairs or with other disabilities and deformities. For Bosch, the main enemies of humanity are the world itself, the flesh and the devil. This establishes further points of connection between the two artists.

### **Goya**

Goya is one of the artists who has most influenced modern art and who has also left its mark on Giger. Especially his black paintings and the satanic themes of his later period and his famous series of engravings, such as *The Disasters of War* (1810) and *The Follies* (1820–1823), in which he presents caustic commentaries on the evils and follies of humanity. The horrors of war left a deep impression on Goya, who personally witnessed the battles between French soldiers and Spanish citizens during the years of Napoleonic occupation. Giger, like Goya, has also worked with the theme of war and the horror it causes. Giger uses war iconography in many of his works, in which we see armed children, machine guns, pistols, bombs and grenades that do not directly allude to any particular war but reflect the drama and terror caused by weapons and wars and their destructive power.

However, Goya's most influential works on our artist are the famous *Black Paintings* (c. 1820), which get their name from their gruesome content. Black, brown and grey tones predominate, demonstrating the artist's increasingly sombre character. He was also fascinated by engravings related to witchcraft and demonic figures, reflecting Goya's interest in these disciplines rooted in the popular culture of his time. Giger's painting *Witches' Dance* (1977) is reminiscent of Goya's *Aquelarre* (1821-23). These Goyaesque influences can be seen in Giger's satanic works and in some demonic creations for cinema, such as his paintings for *Poltergeist II*.

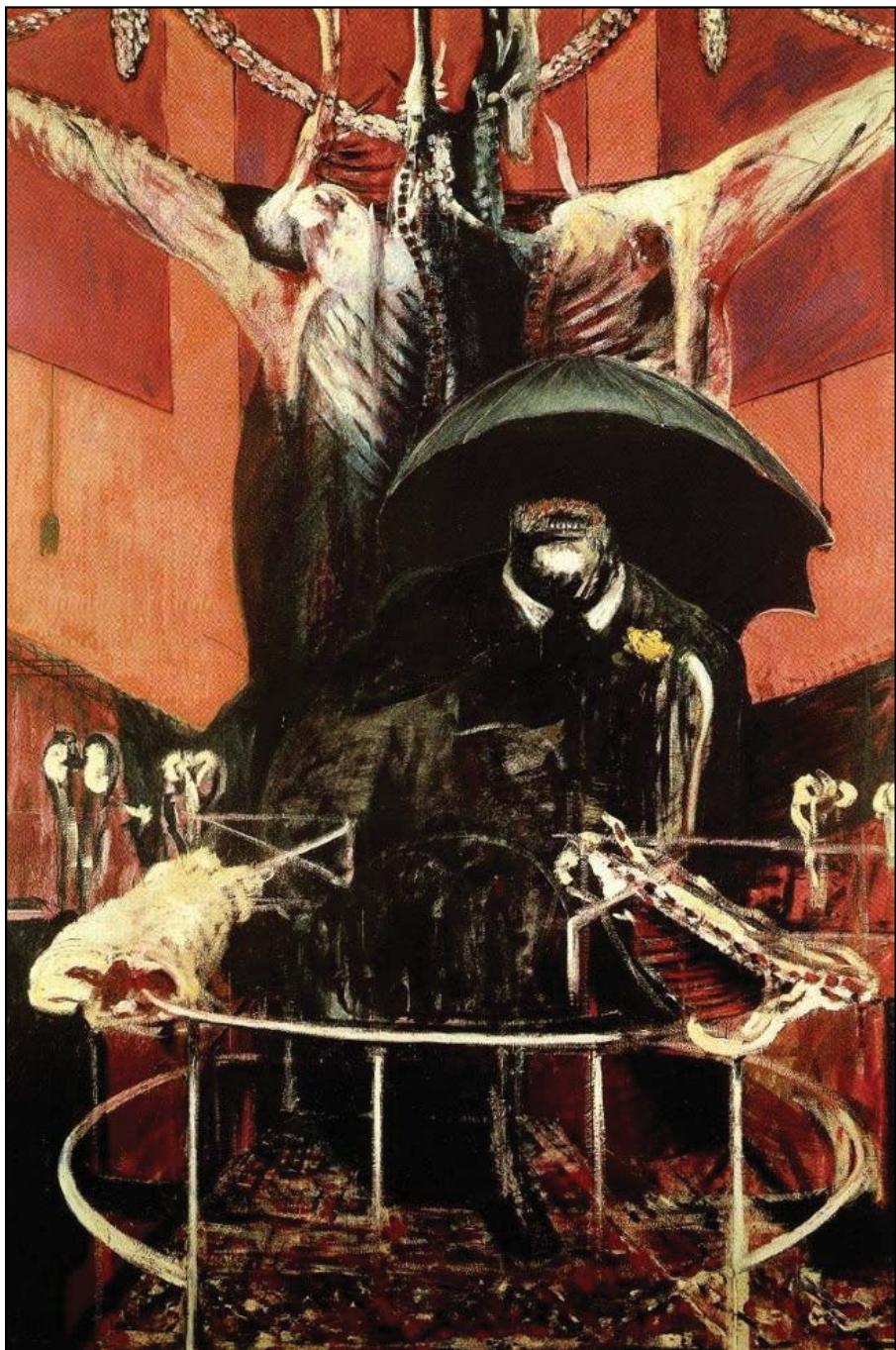
## Francis Bacon

For Giger, Bacon is possibly the most important contemporary British artist. He was an artist who focused on the human figure as the core of his painting, using an expressionist style to distort the human body. Like Giger, Bacon is obsessed with physical forms and interior representations. Both offer bleak and violent visions of the human condition. They create dark and gloomy images that suggest X-ray visions. In Giger, the lack of colour reinforces the expressive tension and negation of being, which immediately provokes a feeling of anguish and revulsion. Claustrophobia is shared by Bacon's and Giger's figures.

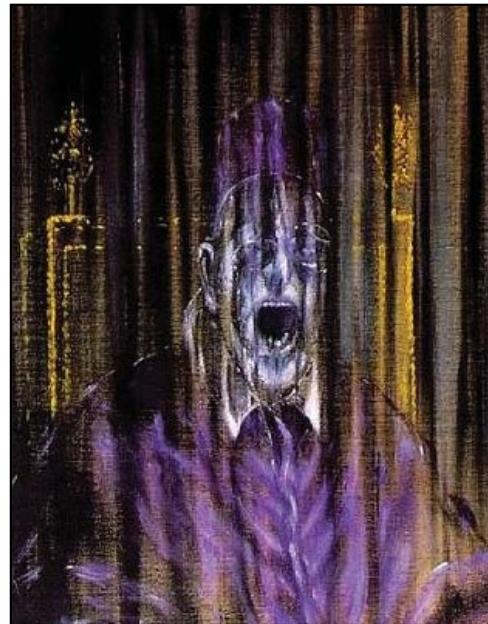
Bacon's figures writhe in anguish, provoking unease that can be interpreted as the tragedy of the world, of the wars he lived through, such as World War II. In his studies of Velázquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953) [54], he depicts a blood-spattered figure enclosed in a tubular construction and trapped in a kind of electric chair. We are interested in the expression of pain and anguish on his face, reminiscent of Giger's painting *The Green Face* (Chidher Grün, 1975) [52] with a serpentine monstrous figure wearing a crown of thorns. The primal scream would be the theme of these images, in which the expressive centre resides in the mouth. He uses religious iconography to subvert it (crucifixions, the Pope). In *Reclining Figure with a Hypodermic Needle* (1963), the idea of death and torture is hinted at, as we will also see in Giger's works that use needles or syringes. A work from the *Necronom* series, number II is inspired, according to Giger himself, by a painting by Bacon in which an umbrella appears. This work is entitled *Figure Study* (1946) [53] and is dominated by an image whose skull is shaped like an open umbrella, surrounded by butchered body parts, which make up a kind of exploration of the human body. In another work, *Three Studies with a Crucifixion* (1944) [55], there is another reference to the theme of the body related to the phallic and monstrous, with the mutilated body and animal anatomy. It served as inspiration for Giger to create the iconography of Alien and specifically the *chestburster*.

Bacon uses the iconography of meat and slaughterhouses, and can therefore be considered a precursor to the sensibility of *New Flesh*. Bacon and Giger create distorted medical illustrations, the product of skin and mouth diseases, in which the most unpleasant aspects of our being come to the surface.

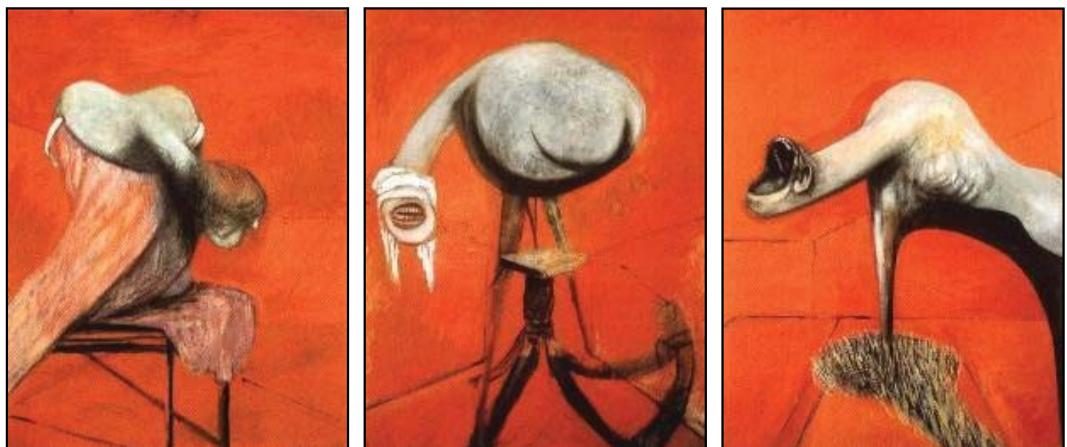
Another interesting connection between Bacon and Giger is their use of the triptych for some of their compositions. The altarpiece has served as a vehicle for devotional paintings since the 4th century and is related to Christian worship. Its scenography enhances the religious feeling of adoration. The triptych has been reinterpreted by modern artists such as Munch, Bacon, Beckmann and Giger himself. In the series *The Spell*, Christianity is rejected in favour of anti-Christianity, with Giger placing the Antichrist in the centre in the form of Baphomet. The compositional symmetry of the triptych emphasises the solemnity of the scene.



53- Francis Bacon. *Figure Study* (1946)



54- Francis Bacon. Fragment of *Portrait of Pope Innocent X, after Velázquez's study* (1953)



55- Francis Bacon. *Three Studies of Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944)

### 2.1.2.2 Surrealism

Since its inception, Giger's art has been linked to surrealism, and some critics have pointed to him as a clear exponent of the neo-surrealist movements of the 1960s and 1970s<sup>128</sup>. The truth is that the presence of the surreal in Giger's work is undeniable. Giger has a close relationship with this movement. He declares himself a surrealist, and most critics have classified him as such. Starting with Dalí and Bellmer, the list of surrealist artists who have influenced Giger would be long, so we will comment on the influence of some emblematic creators, in addition to these two, such as Max Ernst, Jean Benoit and Austin Osman Spare. Surrealism has manifested itself in various forms depending on the era and the authors. The art of the surrealist avant-garde was based on the research carried out by Sigmund Freud, which exposed the dark side of human beings. The most common techniques used by surrealist painters were dream interpretation and the uncontrolled association of ideas, based on automatic processes that allow the unconscious to be freed from the control usually exerted over it by reason, morality, and good manners<sup>129</sup>. They therefore focused on exploring the subconscious, chance, and hallucinatory states. They also championed authors such as Lautreamont, Sade and Jarri, and were fascinated by the Gothic novel. All these traits fit Giger perfectly. He has read all these authors, as we have seen, and they have had a notable influence on his intellectual development. In his aerographic period, he often used automatic writing, as we will document, linking ideas and forms, like Ariadne's thread, and mixing different concepts to develop his personal iconography and biomechanical style. Giger rejected the aesthetic uses and norms of his time to create a personal body of work, with which he delved into the inner world of human beings. His art is sometimes dominated by chaos and confusion, a tangle of elements and ideas. Giger used different resources to achieve

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<sup>128</sup> In the *Passagen* catalogue published by the Chur Art Museum (1974), Billeter pointed to Giger as a genuine surrealist artist capable of formulating the nightmares of the contemporary bourgeoisie with great precision, due to his technique and the representation of phantasmagorical visions that haunt the viewer again and again.

<sup>129</sup> GARCÍA DE CARPI, Lucía. *Las claves del arte surrealista* (The Keys to Surrealist Art), Planeta, Barcelona, 1990, p.8

satisfactory solutions when creating their works of art, such as the use of automatic writing, black humour and, above all, imagination.

An interesting point is the connection between surrealism and esotericism through poetry and magic, which is evident in the title Breton gave to the second part of the first manifesto, *Secrets of the Magical Art of Surrealism*.

G. Durozoi and B. Lecherbonnier have clarified this link: "The Surrealists will not cease to explore in all these directions, which gives an esoteric and Gnostic aspect to their approach to the world. Insofar as they tend towards absolute knowledge that allows them to decipher the mysterious relationships between man and the universe, insofar as they place intuitive knowledge far beyond discursive reasoning and pursue, immersed in a kind of enlightenment, a *clairvoyance* in the other world, that is, the desire to transcend this current, limited and mediocre world in order to perceive in this violence the original state of man, the Surrealists will be *Gnostics*, all the more so as they will turn equally to symbols, myths, analogies, subjective knowledge and lived experience"<sup>(130)</sup>. In this way, esotericism will be used in surrealist iconography as a source of new emotions. The seduction manifested by the surrealist avant-garde movements for the esotericism of past eras will be shared by Giger, who, especially in the 1970s, will base his art on this relationship. His biomechanical beings and landscapes are fully identified with surrealist postulates. One of Giger's most important connections with surrealism is established through his work on human representation. Josep Renau comments: "With surrealism, human representation appears. But the spectacle offered by such an attempt to humanise art is extremely depressing: surrealism does not resurrect man, it simply unearths him. The surrealist man is the corpse that cynically parades the horrendous scourges of his corruption, with the frenetic insistence of a world that refuses to follow the relentless destiny of its historical disappearance" <sup>(131)</sup>. Giger's representation of man is very close to that of a corpse, as well as a monster.

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<sup>130</sup>DUROZOI, G. and LECHERBONNIER, B. *André Breton: Surrealist Writing*. Guadarrama, Madrid, 1974, p. 11.

<sup>131</sup>RENAU, Josep. *Función social del cartel* (The Social Function of the Poster), Fernando Torres-Editor, Valencia, 1976, p. 54

## Dalí

At the age of 14, Giger saw a work by Dalí that had a profound impact on him, and since then Dalí has been the artist who has most influenced him and fascinated him, as Giger himself comments. Not only because of his qualities as an artist, but also because of his personality and his crazy ideas. Giger recalls his visit to Cadaqués in 1975: "Dalí was very courteous and interested in my work and introduced me to his wife Gala as a specialist in monsters and nightmares, whose external appearance did not match her inner world at all. In this regard, Gala thought that my case was different, that I was only wearing a mask, since my pictorial world fit perfectly with myself and my inner personality. She then began to tell me about her life. She renounced the evil in the world. Truly, Gala was one of the most impressive women I have ever met in my life" <sup>132</sup>.

Giger's intention in visiting Dalí was to ask him to write an introduction for his book *Necronomicon*: "Dalí turned the proof sheets upside down, pointing out some fantastic creatures to be discovered. In doing so, he remembered the dog armour he had seen in my catalogues. Dalí wanted that piece for his museum. We concluded by agreeing on the armour for his preface (...). Dalí is one of the few people who could make me lose my composure" <sup>(133)</sup>. Giger comments on his visit to Dalí when he was staying at a hotel in Paris. Dalí was sitting on a kind of throne with Amanda Lear and other people.

Dalí's influence can be seen in Giger's art, especially in his drawings and creations such as clocks and curved shapes. His realistic technique of representation is also influential. Dalí is a cult figure for Giger. He visited him twice in Cadaqués, where he showed him his works. Dalí's influence is undeniable, among other things because he was the one who introduced him to the world of cinema. He helped him get involved in the *Dune* project, which would be the start of the road to his biggest commission, the designs for *Alien*. The melted figures in Giger's pictorial tribute to Beckett are reminiscent of the

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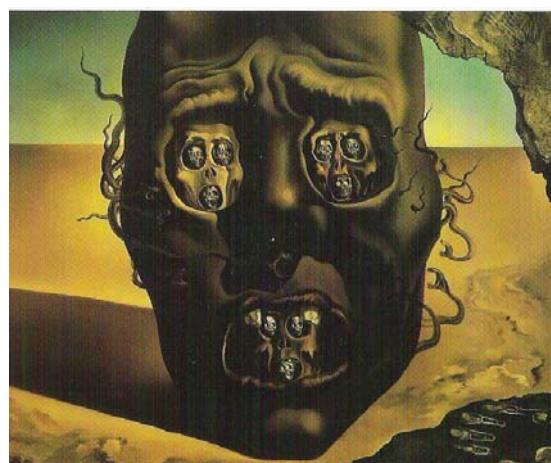
<sup>132</sup> *ARh+*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>133</sup> *H. R. Giger's Necronomicon 2*. Zurich: Edition C, 1985, p. 38.

Dali's famous clocks, and many of Giger's figures bear some connection to Dali's art.



56- Photograph by Philippe Halsman based on a drawing by Dalí. *Human skull composed of seven naked female bodies* (1951)



57- Salvador Dalí. *Face of War* (1940-1941)

## Hans Bellmer

Hans Bellmer's artistic work presents an extreme vision of eroticism. His art combines bodily mutilation and fragmentation, as well as excess. He uses sexual material to express his personal ideal of beauty. Hans Bellmer's photography directly shows reality, focusing on the representation of sex, the product of his research into drives.

Bellmer spent most of his artistic career in Paris, forming part of the surrealist avant-garde. His early works revolved around the assembly of dolls, initially inspired by the discovery of broken toys found in a box from his childhood; these dolls correspond to a sadistic vision, representing women as victims of the worst excesses. His goal was possibly to use his imagination to eliminate the boundaries of eroticism.

With his photographs of dolls, which constitute his best-known work, Bellmer visualises his theories, which are directly connected to the writings of Freud and Georges Bataille. However, it is Bellmer's work as a draughtsman that Giger values most in this German artist, and it is not surprising that Giger considers him one of the best draughtsmen of the century.

The technique he uses most in his creations is that of bodily fragmentation, as Giger would also do. In his drawings, Bellmer uses radiographic views of the human body, achieving transparencies of the epidermis that reveal amorphous structures that advance and crowd towards the outside of the body [58]. He sometimes reduces the body to its basic structures, such as the head, which is also a prominent element for Giger [59]. He uses automatic writing, which leads him to create hybrid structures. Giger employs all these techniques, developing organisms with manipulable structures, artificial constructions that transgress the nature of the body.

In one of Bellmer's drawings entitled *Homage to Antonin Artaud* (1942) [60], we see an embryo of what will become Giger's biomecanoids: the limbs, arms and legs are joined together; the bones protrude outwards, forming fantastic anatomical combinations. Around 1963, Giger was already producing drawings with similar characteristics.

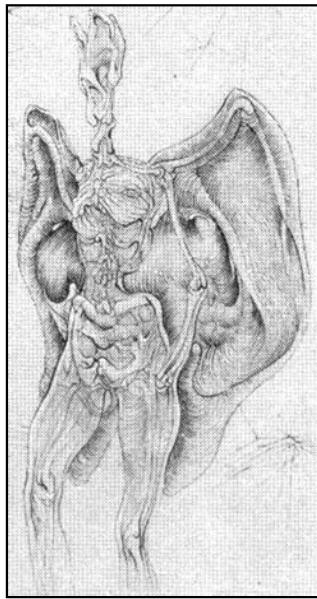
The Surrealists exalted the themes of cruelty and sadism, as well as unsatisfied desire. Giger would explore these themes in his art, in which Bellmer's work plays a prominent role. Bellmer's fetishistic fascination would be fundamental as an influence on the representation of mannequins and dolls in modern art and cinema<sup>134</sup>.

"Beauty will be convulsive or it will not be at all," wrote André Breton, the poet considered the spiritual father of the movement. For Surrealists such as Hans Bellmer, fantasy was not a part of art: all human experience had to be fantastic. Their view of the role of the subconscious in life and art was derived from the theories of Sigmund Freud. Bellmer's dolls are both attractive and repulsive. His constructions are often associated with perverse games, forbidden and permitted, related to innocent children's games and curiosities of this age. Bellmer is an artist with a wide-ranging body of work, very interesting to Giger, as both have explored the hidden places of eroticism and the body.

Like Bellmer's artistic proposals, Giger's provoke horror and cruelty due to the expressiveness of his works. From the perverse operations they perform on the body, they manage to bring to light the invisible organic structures of the flesh. They model and manipulate the flesh. Giger metamorphoses it and adds an industrial component to create a modern monster, the *cyborg*.

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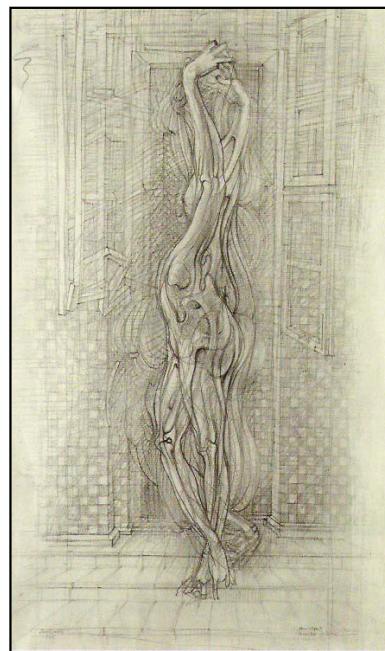
<sup>134</sup> See Pilar PEDRAZA, *Máquinas de amar*. Valdemar, Madrid, 1998, p.119.



58- Hans Bellmer. *Bat Harvest de murciélagos* (1935-50)



59- Hans Bellmer. *Vanity* (1935-50)



60- Hans Bellmer. *Tribute to Antonin Artaud* (1942)

## Max Ernst

Max Ernst is a key figure in pictorial surrealism. He created images verging on hallucination, full of arbitrariness and incongruities. Throughout his varied artistic career, Ernst was known for being a tireless experimenter. In all his works, he sought the ideal means to express, in two or three dimensions, the extra-dimensional world of dreams and imagination. He was the creator of surrealist collage and, as a result of his research, invented the technique of *frottage*, which basically consists of rubbing a pencil on paper placed on top of an uneven surface such as wood or fabric. He later used the technique in oil painting to create his famous paintings of landscapes, forests and rocks. This produces fantastic forms of great plastic power. Ernst creates diverse suggestions, with a disturbing appearance. Natural forms are transformed and metamorphosed. These symbioses would be developed by Giger in his biomechanical natures, in which he would work on textures and natural and mechanical associations. Giger dedicated a painting from the *Victory* series to Ernst. The surfaces do not appear smooth but are highly decorative, as if they were prints (as we see in the snakes in *Spell IV*). Perhaps Ernst's introducer was Fuchs, who also worked extensively with textures and surfaces in his paintings.



61- Max Ernst. *The Eye of Silence* (1943-44)



62- Max Ernst. *Europe after the Rain II* (1940-42)



63- Max Ernst. *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1945)

## Man Ray

Giger has pointed out that Man Ray was the first to use the airbrush for artistic purposes<sup>135</sup>. Ray, a multifaceted artist, is best known for his work as a photographer, a field in which he experimented with innovative technical procedures. The relationship between Giger's pictorial work and photography is noteworthy. The manipulation of reality through art and the construction of alternative worlds with hyperrealistic finishes are facets that Giger has explored in his painting. Ray constantly experimented with photographic techniques (such as

<sup>135</sup> ARh+, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

rayograms) and their expressive possibilities, and was heavily involved in the surrealist movement. In addition to photography, he worked with *ready-mades*, creating everyday objects such as an iron with studs protruding from its base.

### **Austin Osman Spare**

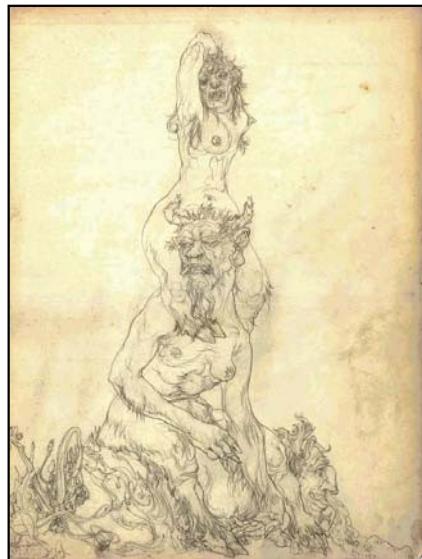
A little-known but significant artist for Giger is Austin Osman Spare, especially for his drawing skills and esoteric knowledge. Spare is an artist and writer linked to surrealism and the occult tradition who produced an interesting series of drawings at the beginning of the century, featuring demonic creations and representations of Satan. He published this series in 1924 in a book entitled *Book of Ugly Ecstasy*. The concept of ugly ecstasy was fundamental to his idea of sexual Gnosis, in which he shared Aleister Crowley's belief that sexual desire should be freed from superficial traits. Spare was an initiate into the Sabbatic mysteries and the Salem witch cult, and a scholar of ancient cultures, especially those of Egypt and Assyria. He made interesting observations on alchemical hermetic symbolism, on the elements and graphics involved in the great work. With all his knowledge, he created a refined occult cosmogony, using the technique of automatic drawing and trance states. His influence on Giger is twofold, through his writings and his drawings. In his essay *Automatic Drawing* (1916), he anticipated some of the ideas that Breton would spread with the Surrealist Manifesto<sup>136</sup>.

In his series, he depicts satyrs, androgynous beings, and demons. The female figures are presented with their arms extended behind their heads, Spare's typical death pose. In drawing no. 1 of *The Book of Ugly Ecstasy*, a satyr with male and female breasts is depicted sitting on a protuberance on which a horned face can be discerned [64]. The composition may represent ejaculation (fluids coming out of the nose of the

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<sup>136</sup> "An automatic sketch of intertwining lines allows the germ of an idea in the subconscious mind to be expressed, or at least suggested to the conscious mind. From this mass of procreative forms, full of fallacy, the weak embryo of an idea can be chosen by the artist and trained to grow and acquire power. In this way, the depths of memory can emerge and the spring of instinct is called forth." SPARE, Austin O. and CARTER, Frederick. *Automatic Drawing* [online]. 1916. [date consulted: 22-8-2002]. Available at: <<http://www.topy.net/kiaosfera/aos/auto/Auto.htm>>.

satyr) of astral children born from the semen that reaches the goddess. In his drawings, Spare alludes to sexual energy. These drawings and also his paintings [65] give an idea of the symbolism and mode of representation that Spare used.



64- Austin Osman Spare. *Drawing no. 1 from The Book of Ugly Ecstasy* (1924)



65- Austin Osman Spare. *The Vampires Are Coming* (1947)

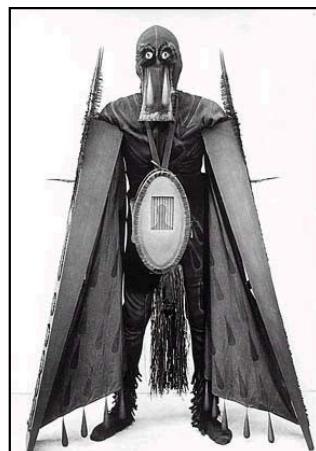
### Jean Benoit

In an interview we conducted with him, Giger discussed his attraction to this artist and recalled the creation of the dog of Maldoror and his fantastic costumes for *The Execution of Sade's Testament*. Benoit moved to Paris in 1947 and became one of the most active surrealists during the 1940s and 1950s.

He began creating costumes and stagewear. His most important work was the 1959 performance of *The Execution of Sade's Testament* in a Paris gallery, inspired by a masochistic ceremony. He based his *Necrophilic Costumes* (1964) on classic horror films. Benoit is a highly imaginative artist obsessed with fetishism and sexual fantasies, as well as the work of Sade and Lautreamont. He produced strange drawings and macabre sculptures, working with masks, skeletons, phalluses and mythological figures.



66- Jean Benoit. *The Dog of Maldoror* (1959-64)



67- Jean Benoit. Costumes for the *Execution of the Testament of the Marquis de Sade* (1959)

### 2.1.2.3 Symbolism.

Giger shares many similarities with 19th-century symbolist painters such as Moreau, Kubin and Böcklin, including themes, technique and the iconographic and symbolic use of many elements, such as the representation of the femme fatale. The figure of women and feminine beauty looms large in Giger's art; he depicts them as sculptural beauties, witches, sorceresses, vampires, always highly stylised and beautiful, like futuristic goddesses, full of symbolic attributes. Sometimes as pin-up girls, exposed to the gaze and desire (with abundant erotic elements such as garters and necklaces; also with wings). On occasions, they appear raped and attacked by monsters and robots in violent attitudes and by evil and sinister mechanisms that exist in his imagination.

There have been a series of coincidences between the end of the 19th century and the end of the 20th century, one marked by the industrial revolution and the other by information technology. The end result was a transmutation of values. The symbol, the core of symbolism, is opposed to reality; symbols are created, emblematic categories that deal with themes of the unconscious. This artistic tradition allows ideas that escape the senses to take shape. Symbolism is romantic, allegorical and dreamlike. In Giger, this idea of romanticism is connected to a mystical relationship with nature. The idea of decadence versus progress is also latent in his art.

### Arnold Böcklin

Böcklin is the Swiss painter who has influenced him most. His early period was characterised by idealised classical landscapes, but in the 1870s he took a new direction in his work, devoting himself to fantastical scenes taken from old Germanic legends. His later works took on a dreamlike and nightmarish character, which is what most connects with Giger. Böcklin's best-known and most enigmatic painting is *The Isle of the Dead* (of which there are five versions) [68]. In 1977, Giger paid homage to this painting in a

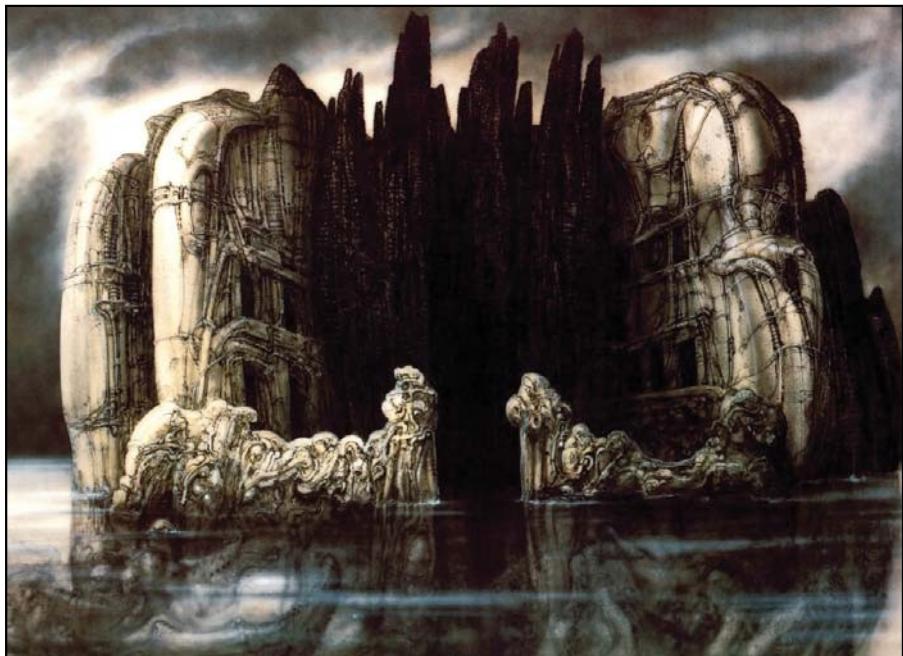
biomechanical version, giving it a new mysterious and sinister air [69]. Just as Böcklin painted a picture about the plague, *The Plague* (1898), Giger has produced several paintings symbolising the threat of AIDS, which establishes certain parallels between the two artists, both interested in the theme of death and with a great knowledge of mythological archetypes.

### **Felicien Rops**

Another symbolist artist who appeals to Giger is the Belgian Felicien Rops, author of a turbulent work that caused scandal at the end of the 19th century. His themes represent phallic rituals of fantastic cults, fetishism, black magic and the erotic attraction of death. Rops reinterpreted the clichés of his time, constantly depicting death, women and the devil in his work, treated with a highly provocative irony. He combined prescribed themes with others that sprang from his imagination. Giger has also used these three elements on numerous occasions, combining them. Death as the ultimate end and symbol of decadence, women as perverse sexual objects, and the devil as the antithesis of humanity, represented in various monstrous forms (especially as a goat). In this sense, Giger reinterprets medieval and Goyaesque iconography, using their satanic imagery in his works and adding the classic elements of Gigerian iconography.



68- Arnold Böcklin. *The Isle of the Dead* (1886)



69-H.R. Giger. *The Isle of the Dead* (1977)

#### 2.1.2.4 Austrian art .

Between 1968 and 1972, Giger came into contact with Austrian art, which at that time was in a very creative phase with innovative artistic groups such as the Actionists and virtuosos of painting such as the members of the *Vienna School of Fantastic Realism*. The leader of this school, Ernst Fuchs, had an enormous influence on Giger, which can be seen in the pictorial evolution of his paintings and in various artistic concepts. From then on, he followed and studied various artists who emerged in this country, who had a special sensitivity, shared by Giger, and which spread throughout the areas of German influence: Austria (Kubin, Fuchs), the Czech Republic (Kafka), Germany (Murnau, Lang and Poelzig) and, of course, Zurich.

Both the work of Gustav Klimt and that of Egon Schiele attracted Giger because of their erotic figures. Klimt produced portraits that can be interpreted as arising from fatality and dealt with themes such as sleep and death. For Schiele, the human figure was his main thematic motif, often emphasising the expressions of his characters with twisted and tormented configurations and deformed and emaciated bodies. Both seem to have influenced Giger's conception of eroticism.

But Alfred Kubin's influence is undoubtedly even greater. Kubin dealt with the theme of the most intense irrational fears and has his own iconography in which he uses the figures of the vampire, the spider, the snake, the devil and the monster. His grotesque, macabre and terrifying drawings, as well as the fantasy novel he wrote in 1908, *The Other Side*, have greatly influenced Giger, particularly in his concept of the sinister. His creative universe is overpopulated with sinister figures, mutilated and deformed bodies, terrible characters and threatening beings, and impossible scenes from a dreamlike, unconscious, strictly interior universe. In this sense, Kubin was a role model for Giger, who also turned the hell of the soul into images, using recognisable elements taken from conscious reality. The technique of extending the

head, used by Kubin and Dalí, as well as in Egyptian art from the Tell Amarna period, was widely used by Giger.

Between 1965 and 1970, an Austrian group burst onto the art scene and caused a sensation with their works: the Viennese Actionists. Formed by a group of artists such as Günter Brus, Otto Mühl, Rudolf Schwarzkogler and Hermann Nitsch, they sought to break with art as contemplation. To this end, they explored the limits of the work, the medium, the body itself, the mind, instinct, reason, pain and sexuality. They sought to assault the limits by immersing themselves in the eccentric areas of the forbidden in order to make them their own.

His art focuses on the theme of the body, which is why Giger paid close attention to this movement, especially the work of Brus and Rainer. One of the pictorial techniques used by Arnulf Rainer consists of working on existing paintings and photographs, often reproductions of works by other artists, which he covers with *over-illustrations* or *over-paintings* that change their meaning and reveal other unexpected meanings. Giger used this technique between 1987 and 1994 in some of his drawings.

Giger's art has never reached the nihilistic tones of the Actionists, but it has been very sincere and has brought everything out into the open without any self-censorship, which has sometimes led to scandal and censorship. The body becomes a medium, a means of expression; it is attacked and assaulted. Giger fragments and pierces it, breaks it down into pieces, and depicts fragments. He has also made some forays into the field of body art, probably influenced by these artists.

### **Fuchs and the School of Fantastic Realism**

The relationship between Giger and Fuchs is important. According to Giger, he met Fuchs and the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism in the late 1960s. This pictorial school comprises a group of some thirty artists, five of whom are its leading representatives: Arik Brauer, Ernst Fuchs, Rudolf Hausner, Wolfgang Hutter and Anton Lehmden. All of them

share a fascination with the old masters, Gothic and Quattrocento painting, and painters such as Bosch, Brueghel and Altdorfer. They are noted for their meticulous realistic technique, with an objective representation of reality to which they add allegorical, symbolic and fantastical elements.

From 1971 onwards, there was a notable change in Giger's theoretical conception and his understanding of painting, as a result of Fuchs' theories and teachings. The Austrian had a profound influence on Giger, especially in terms of the formal resolution of his works, their detail and realism. Furthermore, Fuchs' theoretical work reflected in *Architectura Caelestis* was followed by Giger as quoted in a text: "These drawings (airbrush) are important to me, as through them I discovered new structures and established certain connections with the architecture of the human body on the one hand, and with the technological world on the other. Through them, I learned to value more highly the theories defended by Ernst Fuchs in his *Architectura Caelestis*, and to despise even more the painful studio architecture produced by our professional architects" <sup>(137)</sup>.

He also leaned towards mystical and magical themes and grew increasingly interested in esoteric literature, by authors such as Levi and Crowley. The hyperrealistic finish that Giger's airbrush works would adopt also reflects the influence of Fuchs and the Vienna School.

Fuchs's abundant graphic and pictorial work depicts his own mythological world, with apparent religious connotations. His most interesting work for our study spans from 1945 to 1972. An analysis of his work reveals clear connections with universal fantastic art, surrealism and literature. He uses a personal pictorial language influenced by the old masters such as Michelangelo, Raphael, Dürer and Grünewald, fusing it with contemporary artists such as Dalí and Picasso, thus achieving an eclecticism that would lead to the creation of his own expressive style.

He is an artist who constantly looks to the past, to ancient art and biblical writings, but who is deeply influenced by contemporary events, whether it be the death of Gandhi or the bombing of Hiroshima.

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<sup>137</sup> H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon*. *Op. cit.*

Hiroshima. He dedicated one of his first series to cataclysms and human self-destruction. At the age of 15, he enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna to study. At this age, he was already talented at drawing. He had a predilection for the art of the Renaissance masters, for Germanic (chivalric) and Christian (Crucifixion) themes, and for the nude.

The series *Die Stadt (The City)* is very interesting in that it developed his interest in architecture and his constructive fantasies, modern metropolises [70]. From 1948 onwards, he began to experiment with the painting techniques of the old masters, oil, mixed media, and engraving. He developed a fantastic expressionism by synthesising experiences from theatre, opera, and cinema.

Giger's influences can be summarised as follows:

- a- Demonic iconography, the scatological; some figures in his paintings may have fascinated Giger due to the development of grotesque figures. Examples include *Behind Veronica* (1953) [71] and *The Angel of Death Above the Gate of Purgatory* (1951-56) [72], in which prototypes of the alien can be seen.
- b- The realistic technique he employs.
- c- The fusion of forms, as seen in the *Cherubs* series, which are depicted as solidified stones, a mixture of organic and inorganic matter, and their relationship with celestial architecture and the theme of the cosmos. These concepts may have been decisive in developing his concept of biomechanics, especially since he worked with an airbrush. Also decisive were his recreation of ornamentation and colourfulness, as well as the idea that the essence of painting lies in small details (as in the Flemish school).
- d- Serpentine and dynamic forms, a mixture of organic and inorganic matter (as in *Job and the Judgement of Paris* (1965-66) and *El antilaokonte* (1965) [73].
- e- The mannerist resources he uses to provoke unease and strangeness in the viewer, the elongation of figures and geometric distortions, the variegation and cold, metallic colours, and the use of perspective to create ambiguous spaces.

Giger's admiration for Fuchs is mutual. In an introductory text to Giger's book, *H.R. Giger Retrospective 1964-1984*<sup>138</sup>, entitled *The Archaeology of Now and Tomorrow*, Fuchs addresses a philosophical and symbolic dimension in Giger's work. For Fuchs, Giger is an archaeologist and photojournalist of our time, who seeks to unearth the traces and strata underlying the modern metropolis in order to speak of the spirit and soul of our time. He thus walks through the debris of our industrial society, trying to show the beauty that lies in the grotesque and the horrible through his particular aesthetic. This beauty of the monstrous shines through the layers of the underground, and Giger thus describes the threatening future that looms over humanity.

In this same book, Fuchs dedicates a poem to Giger, *Poem for H.R. Giger*. Written in Venice on 15 January 1984, here is an excerpt: "In the

darkness all images sink;  
God paints on the canvas of life once more. Armed  
to fight with plume and shield, While the enemy  
blackens the field...

In the fiery abyss into which you dive,  
Where, trembling, you discover that the dead are alive.  
In a hell where they change and swirl horribly..."

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<sup>138</sup>*H. R. Giger. Retrospektive 1964-1984*. ABC-Verlag, Zurich, 1984.



70- Ernst Fuchs. *Woman reflected in a row of houses* (1946)



71- Ernst Fuchs. Fragment from *Behind Veronica* (1953)



72-Ernst Fuchs. *The Angel of Death Above the Gate of Purgatory* (1951-1952)



56)73-Ernst Fuchs. *The Antilaokonte* (1965)

### 2.1.3. Other sources

Giger is a well-informed artist who regularly consults various media outlets, including both general interest magazines and specialist publications. The news he reads in newspapers or sees on television stimulates his creative spirit, and he often develops works based on events, especially macabre ones.

#### 2.1.3.1. Cinema

We have already mentioned that Giger was greatly influenced by Jean Cocteau's film *Beauty and the Beast*, by surrealist and expressionist cinema, and by the horror genre. Jean Cocteau's film *Beauty and the Beast* (*La belle et la bête*, 1946)<sup>139</sup> [74] made a deep impression on him from childhood. It is a film that, in its introduction, mentions various magical memories such as the phrase 'open sesame' and Cocteau's signature with the pentagram symbol. In the castle scenes, the candlestick holders in the corridor are striking: they are holes in the walls from which arms carrying candlesticks emerge, moving and gesturing. These arms can be related to Giger's early works, the *biomechanoids*, in which he joins arms and legs, giving them autonomy and omitting the rest of the body. These candlestick-bearing arms are white and contrast with the darkness of the corridor, becoming a significant iconographic element. In addition, the columns (caryatids) also move, and the objects seem to come to life, such as the talking mirror. Giger was fascinated by these images, which would later influence his creations. In the film, fantasy and surrealism come together, inorganic elements take on organic life and possess an enigmatic symbolism.

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<sup>139</sup>Jean Cocteau is considered a highly influential director in European and North American avant-garde cinema. This would be one of his masterpieces.



74- *Beauty and the Beast* (Jean Cocteau, 1946)

Surrealist cinema is possibly the film style that has influenced him most, especially the films of its most prominent representative, Luis Buñuel, among which Giger cites his first two, which featured Dalí, *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) and *L'âge d'or* (1930). *Un chien andalou* is the pioneering film of surrealist cinema, based on the free association of ideas and the first attempt to create images taken directly from the subconscious. Buñuel thus followed the postulates of Breton set out in the *First Surrealist Manifesto* (1924), managing to unite contradictory states such as reality and dream into a new reality, surrealism. Buñuel revolutionises the conception of reality with a series of transgressive images that shock the viewer, such as the famous image of Buñuel cutting a woman's eye with a razor blade or the scene of ants crawling out of the protagonist's hand, clearly inspired by dreams.

Buñuel uses transgression and scandal as a subversive weapon in his other film, *The Golden Age*, presenting the chaos and decay of civilisation through images that reveal the horrible and absurd aspects of everyday life. One of the constants in Buñuel's cinema is the large dose of irony and humour, which is precisely something that Giger values very highly. When we first visited Giger, he told us that he had just read a

new biography of Buñuel and that he was very interested in his life and the anecdotes surrounding the filmmaker.

In addition to surrealism, Giger has always been interested in horror films in general, especially the films produced by British company Hammer Films about Count Dracula, which revisited and updated the character and figure of the vampire during the 1960s, coinciding with Giger's youth. This English production company was the standard-bearer for horror cinema with its revisiting of the classic myths of the genre, such as Dracula, the Werewolf, Frankenstein and the Mummy, passing on the fascination with these mythical characters to new generations of filmmakers and artists.

Another character that appeals to Giger is Nosferatu. He is familiar with the film versions by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau (*Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens*, 1922) [75] and Werner Herzog (*Nosferatu, Phantom der Nacht*, 1979) and comments that he is fascinated by Andy Warhol's version of Dracula (*Andy Warhol's Dracula*, 1973). He has also been interested in the films of Eisenstein and Fritz Lang, such as *M, Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* (1931). Black and white films in particular, film noir and thrillers have captivated him since childhood. In an interview, Giger mentioned *Wachtmeister Studer*, a Swiss film from the 1940s based on the detective novel by Friedrich Glauser (influenced by Dadaism).



75- *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (F.W. Murnau, 1922)

German Expressionist cinema has been very influential in the staging of horror films, whose hallmarks are identified with stylised scenography, created by photography (the play of light and shadow, which generates unease), exaggerated sets and make-up (tormented visions and twisted structures<sup>140</sup>). Heirs to the romantic trends of the 19th century (art and philosophy), expressionist films are dominated by discourses around demonic figures of an archetypal nature, such as the Golem and Nosferatu. Expressionist cinema is characterised by a remarkable expressive baroque style, as well as the use of symbolic resources and macabre, morbid and sinister themes. In this sense, the sets of films such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (*Das Kabinett des Doktor Caligari*, Robert Wiene, 1920) and *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, 1927) have perhaps been the most influential on Giger. The atmospheres they convey influenced his pictorial and architectural compositions, as can be seen in *Alien*<sup>141</sup>. The leading figure in the design and construction of expressionist sets was the architect Hans Poelzig, who participated in *Der Golem, wie er in die Welt kam* (1920).

#### 2.1.3.2. Photography and media

There are images that have had a profound impact on Giger and that he has been unable to forget, such as the one he describes below:

"During my time at the Zurich School of Fine Arts, I had one of the most powerful experiences of my life. A classmate showed me a book with some photos that I wish I had never seen. Often, when people see my paintings, they think I must have a predilection for extreme cruelty. Until then, I had only seen horror films... pure theatre, of course. What my friend showed me was of a higher calibre. It was a series of photos from 1904 showing the torture of the emperor's murderer.

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<sup>140</sup>LOSILLA, Carlos. *El cine de terror* (Horror Films), Paidós, Barcelona, 1999.

<sup>141</sup> Ridley Scott says: "I think Giger's work on *Alien* should be compared to the great films of German expressionism such as *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* and *Nosferatu*. Although I don't think Giger's work is specifically reminiscent of these films in aesthetic terms, it evokes them in its originality and vision." *HR Giger Filmdesign*. Edition C, Zug, 1996, introduction.

China. They had impaled the victim on a stake and the mob surrounding him slowly cut off his limbs one by one. I will never forget his face contorted with pain. And the onlookers had smiles of satisfaction on their faces."<sup>(142)</sup>

Giger comments that he was horrified by the effect of these photographs for a time and was even afraid to fall asleep for fear of dreaming about these scenes. "Shortly afterwards, I saw documentaries about the atrocities of the concentration camps. This served to push the photos into the background. However, my existential fears had increased greatly."<sup>(143)</sup>

Giger saw a documentary about concentration camps and the Holocaust that shocked him, as it showed the corpse depots. "It was horrible, I couldn't sleep well after seeing it, it was very powerful"<sup>(144)</sup>. These types of images of mass graves, mangled and mutilated bodies are also very common today (the Balkans, ethnic conflicts in Africa, Iraq) and reflect the horrible reality of the human condition. Giger reflects on the monstrosities committed by man, such as violence and torture. Using images of piles of corpses, which are undoubtedly terrifying graphic documents, he constructs compositions such as *Biomechanical Landscapes*, where bone and metal structures merge, in which he studies these interrelationships. We should also remember the *Passagen* pictorial series, inspired by the photos Giger took of a rubbish truck passing through Cologne, which are related to crematoria.

### Medical illustrations

In documentaries, he is often seen consulting books on dermatology, embryology, teratology, orthopaedics, entomology, and genetics. He is interested in all these sciences, and in one way or another they appear in his creations. He usually starts with scientific images, which he transforms and distorts to adapt them to his style.

<sup>142</sup> *ARh+*. *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup>Interview with Giger, Zurich, 16 August 2003.

Giger has been interested in wax figures since childhood, when he read stories about Madame Tussaud and her museum. He later created these figures himself to decorate his darkroom. Giger has researched these figures extensively. He is likely very familiar with the Natural History Museum of the University of Florence, known as *La Specola*, which houses an impressive collection of 18th-century wax figures.

Giger has developed his biomechanical theories by studying the body and its representations of all kinds, dismembering its parts and reorganising them. This vision of destruction, of the precariousness of the human body, of the inexorable passage of time, this continuous *memento mori*, is part of Giger's artistic vision.

#### Media

He is interested in everything that appears in newspapers and magazines, not only art publications such as Panderma, but also general interest publications such as Bild. He is also interested in television documentaries. In his book *ARh+*, he cites, for example, a press clipping entitled *Seriously injured on a milking chair*, which tells how a farmer who was milking his cows suffered an accident when the leg of the chair he was sitting on broke through the seat and pierced his buttocks. This macabre story joins others that fascinate Giger, such as the numerous events that occur in everyday life.

## 2.2. Iconography

Symbolism is an instrument of knowledge that constitutes the oldest and most fundamental method of expression, revealing certain aspects of reality that escape other modes of expression<sup>145</sup>. Giger uses a broad symbolic corpus to convey his ideas and concerns. He uses symbolism in a personal way, in the service of his art, drawing on various iconographic sources that he easily assimilates and reinterprets in a modern key. The study of the iconography that Giger employs provides an approach to his world of images that facilitates their reading and interpretation. Giger's work is almost entirely figurative and symbolist, although he has occasionally used abstract resources.

He has always been concerned with the visual quality and impact of images in order to establish communication and create a sensation in the viewer, but above all to express his world. He often uses metaphor to express ideas through images. Given that painting occupies a pre-eminent place in his artistic production, it is this facet that we will use repeatedly to approach the study of Gigerian icons.

The iconography of Giger's work is very varied, as he uses it to configure the palette with which to create a dense world of images, a universe that has served him to describe his deep concerns and obsessions. On the one hand, he uses a series of theological-liturgical symbols typical of Christian iconography, such as the temple, the altar and the cross, which he subverts to represent an opposite meaning<sup>146</sup>. On the other hand, he uses biblical symbols, especially evil figures such as the devil, in his various manifestations as Satan or Baphomet. In his work, Giger focuses on the representation of evil in its different forms, both human and animal. He also frequently uses abstract-allegorical resources to represent themes such as the abyss, the beast, and the dance of death.

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<sup>145</sup> COOPER, J.C. *Dictionary of Symbols*. Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 2000.

<sup>146</sup> His most representative work in this regard is the *Passagen-Tempel* series of paintings.

Giger has created his own icons, which he uses repeatedly, making formal variations. Throughout his career, he has used various types of iconography, which he mixes and reinvents to adapt them to his era. We will classify the motifs by sections to make the web of images we encounter when approaching Giger's work more understandable.

### 2.2.1. Gothic Iconography

As a result of his reading and the literary influences of suspense and horror novels, he developed a Gothic iconography, which, as we have seen, came not only from literature, but also from illustration and cinema. Formal elements such as wells and cellars, passageways, dark corners, guillotines, decapitated characters, torture chambers, crosses and gloomy characters (frequent in his early drawings, in the *Pozos* series and in his airbrush work) constitute a terrifying and sinister character that appears from the outset. It also includes archetypal characters such as ghosts, spectres and vampires. Death and necrophilia, as well as the aesthetics of decomposition are closely linked to the figure of the vampire <sup>147</sup>. Vampirism has fascinated Giger, as can be seen in an early oil painting from 1962 [132], in drawings such as *Vampire* [34] and in his 1969 *Biomechanoid* series. The historical figure of Vlad Tepes, the Impaler, who inspired the myth of Dracula, has also been used by Giger, as can be seen in his painting *Vlad Tepes* (1978) [76]. In this emblematic work, clearly inspired by literature, he adds his monsters and fantastical figures and a rich iconography composed of nails and crosses. All this is rendered in dark, bluish tones. Based on Poe's novels and Lovecraft's stories, he recreates gloomy and sinister atmospheres in his paintings, which, like their literary references, produce unease. In his pictorial work, he creates a kind of pantheon of Lovecraftian figures with cadaverous and insectoid beings. Representative examples are his *Mordor* and *Necronom* series, in which he works with monstrous forms.

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<sup>147</sup> See BORRMANN, Norbert. *Vampirism: The Longing for Immortality*. Timun Mas Barcelona, 1999.



76-Vlad Tepes (1978)

### 2.2.2. Underground and punk iconography

Due to his constant contact with counterculture, the world of rock and urban cultures, he incorporated underground iconography into his repertoire, drawing on a multitude of elements from popular mass culture: condoms, sadomasochistic and torture elements (black leather, straps, whips, *bondage* elements), psychedelic elements (the mystical nature and world of drugs, with references in his paintings to cocaine, marijuana, joints, syringes), and post-apocalyptic elements (skulls, decay, chaos). In relation to the subculture of the 1970s, we find numerous references to punk iconography, especially at the end of the decade, coinciding with the emergence of the punk movement (rock aesthetics and fashion): his works are filled with needles, blades, razor blades, safety pins, spikes, nails (relating to the Passion of Christ), tattoos, scarifications and the mohawk of the figure on the *Future Kill* poster. Bodies pierced and penetrated by metal are a frequent feature of Giger's work from the outset. The theme of penetration is closely related to the concept of biomechanics, where technology pierces human flesh, and to sex. Already in his early work *Pozo IV* [80], we see figures from the Ku Klux Klan pierced by the metal bar of a foosball table (a game that Giger seems to have played in his adolescence). In the painting *National Park I* [77], we have another example of pierced surfaces (horns, safety pins, hooks, sharp points). On the cover *Koo Koo* that Giger created for Debbie Harry, the singer's face appears pierced by four acupuncture needles, a motif rarely seen at the time. Giger also designed punk glasses [78], which consisted of a giant safety pin and can be seen on the beings that appear on the cover of the Magma group's *Attakh* [215], who wear these glasses piercing their noses, and on the central figure in the painting *Illuminatus I* (1978) [79]. He also uses other types of glasses, such as sunglasses, aviator glasses and diving goggles. Regarding sunglasses, Bruce Sterling comments: "Mirrored lenses protect against the forces of normality, hiding the eyes, making people believe that the wearer is crazy and possibly dangerous. They are the symbol of the visionary who stares at the sun, of the biker and the rocker...and other outlaws..."<sup>(148)</sup>. This insistence on piercing and

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<sup>148</sup>Various authors. *Mirrorshades: A Cyberpunk Anthology*. Siruela, Madrid, 1998, p. 20.

penetrating bodies, make Giger a pioneer of a new sensibility that emerged in the postmodern culture of the 1980s known as *New Flesh*.



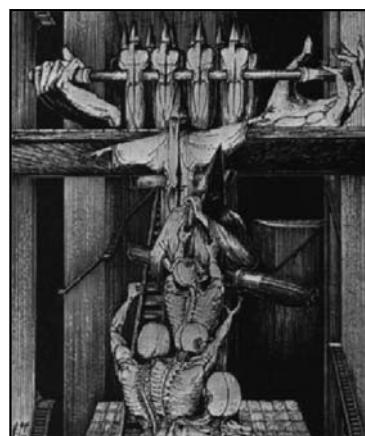
77-*National Park I* (1975)



78- Punk Glasses (1977)



79- *Illuminatus I* (1978)



80- *The Power and Powerlessness of Organisation* (1964)

### 2.2.3. 's iconography of the body

The human body occupies a central place in his work, which is represented as a transformed body, manipulated like a Meccano set, consisting of adding and removing parts (as in Bellmer's dolls). Giger treats the human anatomy and the nude in a particular way, turning man into something monstrous. A unique feature of this iconography is that the genital organs are sometimes treated as independent elements: penises, vaginas and phallic symbols abound in his works.

The influence of the iconography of extermination camps (also related to war) is also evident. The perversities of the human laboratory and the mind that cause mutilations and deformities, mutilated people, freaks, failed laboratory experiments, cloning and other scientific aberrations. In relation to his allusions in his paintings to concentration camps and mountains of bones, he also generates a bone iconography: vertebrae, bones, skulls, hips, ribs. The plasticity of the bone structures that he twists and fantasises about is connected to his concept of biomechanics.

His biomechanical style is developed from bone compositions. Bone is the framework of the body, an essential and relatively permanent element. It is a symbol of firmness, strength and virtue. It represents a return to nature. He has used it to create backgrounds in his paintings, as can be seen in *Dune*, *Alien*, the cathedrals of bones that frame the series *The Spell*, or in his early compositions.

He also uses bone to configure spaces and objects, as he frequently fuses forms, such as in the *Harkonnen* chairs based on the outline of the spine. The skull is the seat of thought and a symbol of human mortality, but also of what survives after death. The skull is a hallmark of his style, as it is one of the most frequently represented elements throughout his career. It is a reminder of the inexorability of death, a symbol of the transience of life, the motif of *memento mori*, to which Giger constantly alludes with his representations of

bones and skulls. It is also the symbol of the life force contained in the head. The skeleton represents the personification of death. In alchemy, it is the symbol of blackness, putrefaction and decomposition. The skeleton represents a dynamic death, heralding a new form of life.

#### **2.2.4. Iconography of industrial technology**

It was already employed by the artistic avant-garde movements of the 20th century, such as Dadaism and Surrealism, and by artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Hannah Höch, Georges Grosz, and Raoul Haussmann, who, through sculptures and photomontages, developed the integration of the body with technology and its fusion with mechanical organisms. Giger represents this type of combination at a much more advanced stage, towards the creation of a *cyborg* being, becoming one of the first artists to begin working with this iconography. The embedding of devices and machines in the body is one of the foundations of his biomechanical style. In any case, the machinery makes sense in itself in Giger's work, which abounds with plates, tubes, hoses, screws, nuts, cylinders, taps (a Freudian element), zippers, circuits, networks, metal chains and antennas. He invents all kinds of mechanical devices and fantastic machines: he is fascinated by the relationship between man and machine and believes that machines are beneficial to man, as demonstrated by pacemakers, artificial organs, the Dobelle vision system for the blind, and industrial products such as prostheses. However, the visions he presents, especially in his drawings and paintings, are terrifying, apocalyptic in many cases, and speak of a horrible present and future, plagued by monstrous creations in which there is no idyllic relationship between machine and man, but rather domination or slavery (this vision has recent versions such as that proposed by the film *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999), in which human beings are subjugated by intelligent machines and artificial virtual reality).

His training as an industrial designer gave him a good understanding of how objects are constructed. The industrial products manufactured by

man merge with the forms of nature in harmonious symbiosis. He is particularly interested in metal objects and machines. Among others, we find metal tubes and cables as links between parts, oxygen cylinders or valves, iron and steel plates and panels.

In this section, we include one of his greatest childhood and adult fascinations: trains. Since childhood, he has been fascinated by these machines and their sinister relationship with speed and death. As a child, he was a regular visitor to the fairground attraction known as the 'witch's train' and even collaborated with the fairground workers to gain access to the secrets and surprises that were represented there. Years later, he would install a small-scale version in his own home, turning the room into a passage of terror with which he could seduce girls, given that he was quite shy. The train, consisting of a wagon and a monorail, was part of a sinister set design for which he made masks and sculptures to decorate the space. This industrial machine attracted Giger, who used its iconography on several occasions, from the concept of the *alien's* head (inspired by a train or underground carriage) to the film *The Train*, the dream sequence of Sil in *Species*, and a set design with a carriage and track installed in his garden (where he now plays, reminiscing about his childhood). From an architectural point of view, he also thought of an underground train system for his utopian *Swiss Transit Train* project.

Giger also uses war iconography, objects that might appear in wars and all kinds of weaponry: daggers, pistols, knives, submachine guns, grenades, bombs, axes, belts, cartridge belts, gas masks, pilot and soldier helmets, which sometimes become the leitmotif of a creation, as in the case of his *Pistola paridora* (1967). These elements are very common and convey a threatening and aggressive tone to many of his figures, with submachine guns on their heads or replacing their arms [81-83]. Giger uses imagery of destruction (weapons, corpses, decomposition) within his vision of the Apocalypse, of the events that herald the end of the world.



81- *Safari* (1973-76)



82- *Pump excursion I* (1988)



83- Detail of *Aleister Crowley, the beast 666* (1975)

## 2.2.5. Occult, demonic and satanic iconography

Giger's interest in these sciences and images has nothing to do with promoting occult dogma, but rather stems from a purely aesthetic interest and his fascination with this iconography.

The use of this symbolism is particularly concentrated between 1973 and 1977, a period when Giger was heavily influenced by occult literature and magic. During this decade, there was a proliferation of this type of imagery in Giger's painting. He delved deeply into this genre, producing a variety of images of emblematic figures such as Satan and occult goddesses. Through his study of literary sources, he developed a world full of enigmatic images that accentuated the mysterious and hermetic nature of his work.

The main figures in this satanic cosmology that Giger worked on were:

- The devil, mainly as Satan or Baphomet.
- The sorceress/priestess, the magician and the witch.
- Lilith and the satanic and demonic goddesses.

Two notable elements in this regard are:

- literary influence (mainly Crowley and Levi)
- iconographic/aesthetic influence, introducing elements into his paintings such as compositional structures based on the pentagram and the inverted wooden crucifix.

Giger demonstrates a deep knowledge of antiquity and mythology, shaping his own style of *Apocalyptic aesthetics*. He uses images that allude to the devil in his different incarnations, with the figure of Baphomet being one of the most recurrent. In the painting *The Spell IV* (1977), the representation of Baphomet is based on the descriptions of the occult writer Eliphas

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<sup>149</sup> He makes an allusion to the O.T.O (Ordo Templi Orientis) founded by Theodor Reuss and led by Crowley since 1921, in his painting *Iluminatus I*.

Levi occupies a central place in the composition, which also has a specific meaning within the series of four large triptychs that recount a path or passage through the history of occultism, passing through historical enigmas such as Eastern religions, the Judeo-Christian tradition, the technological age, the presence of the devil as the organisational centre of the cosmos, magic and diseases (such as those caused by sexual contact, such as AIDS). The figure of Satan in *The Spell IV* forms part of the cover of his best-known book of illustrations and paintings, *Giger's Necronomicon*, related to the figure of Lovecraft, the book of the dead and esotericism. He also has a painting from these years (1975) entitled *Baphomet*, in which a female figure is framed in a pentagonal composition above the head of the goat.

In addition to paintings, the occult dominated Giger's work. He performed a ritualistic satanic scenography on the occasion of the death of his partner Li Tobler, painting a panel in 1975 entitled *The Second Celebration of the Four*, in which he once again resorted to medieval demonic iconography. Satan is represented through one of his most common symbols, the goat. In addition to the painting, he reproduced this iconography in a short film of the same title.

In the course of the study, we must unravel and separate into categories the demonic images, which also extend to monstrous creations and hellish visions.

Noteworthy is his use of Christian iconography to invert Christianity (the interaction of opposites, where one quality gives way to its opposite). A clear example is the cross = Christ, inverted cross = Antichrist. This helps us to better understand a concept that Giger often used during the 1970s, thanks to Crowley: 'as above, so below'. Giger would use this type of duality and opposites on many occasions. In addition to the cross, other examples include the various sacred elements he introduced into his paintings, such as the altar and the temple.

The altar is the sacred table used for celebrating Mass, located in the centre of the church. The church is the representative emblem of the universe, the *imago mundi*, a centre of the spiritual world, and is imbued with symbolic meanings, just like the cathedral, another of the great symbols of spirituality. In the *Spell* series, the meanings of these sacred symbols of Christianity are subverted and a black mass seems to be represented.

The cross is also the cosmic symbol par excellence, the centre of the world, which also represents the tree of life. The Christian cross represents salvation, the acceptance of death. But Giger turns it upside down and represents it inverted, evoking the Antichrist.

Giger also depicts the Tau cross, as in *Chidher Grün* [52] and *Spell IV*, or the inverted Tau. This cross represents the tree of life, regeneration, occult wisdom and the hammer of the thunder gods. It is also related to the Order of the Knights Templar, as it is called the Templar cross (also known as the Cross of Saint Anthony). It was used by the Templars to mark places of magical or esoteric value. It is also the cross of the chosen ones on the Day of Judgement, according to the biblical Apocalypse.

The pentagram has multiple symbolic meanings, but is basically based on the number 5, which expresses the union of unequals. The ancients considered it a symbol of perfection. According to Paracelsus, it is one of the most powerful signs, as it expresses a power that is the result of the synthesis of complementary forces. The five arms come together in union with the number 3, which signifies the masculine principle, and the number 2, which signifies the feminine principle. It symbolises androgyny, as well as the idea of perfection. The use of this symbolic element is related to the numerology of the number 5, a magical number for Giger. Giger used the pentagram especially during the period when he was greatly influenced by esoteric literature. The number 5 symbolises the human microcosm and is the alchemical number of the quintessence.

The number 5 was very important to the Pythagoreans, as it represented love and the projection of the cosmic soul, as well as being a symbol of knowledge and the acquisition of power. The geometric emblem of the number 5 is the

pentagram, the five-pointed star, which is the source of a chain of golden ratios. According to Levi, it is the star of the magicians. Depending on the direction of its rays, it represents good or evil, order or disorder. It is drawn with a single stroke without lifting the hand. It represents the number of human perfection. The number five represents harmony and balance.

A set of knowledge related to the occult that has also interested Giger is alchemy, whose fundamental aim is to achieve the complete union of divided man, the *unio contrarium*. The interaction between the celestial and the terrestrial is important. In Giger's works, we see a duality and balance of forces, as well as the transformation of matter and flesh. He sometimes uses lights and flashes of a spiritual and symbolic nature.

### *The influence of Tarot*

One of the best occult approaches to date is that of Swiss writer Akron (pseudonym of Charles Frey) who, in collaboration with Giger himself, published a Tarot deck in 1993 entitled *Baphomet: The Tarot of the Underworld*. In the texts accompanying the cards, he provides in-depth descriptions and interpretations of the images that Giger and Akron chose to designate each card in the Tarot. In the second edition of Giger's Tarot (*H.R. Giger Tarot*), Taschen published the book in 2001, which included Akron's revised texts, a poster and the 22 cards illustrated by Giger.

According to critic J. Karlin, Giger's Tarot highlights the artistic absorption of Tarot imagery and certain philosophical principles of occultism in Giger's art, which have profoundly influenced him<sup>150</sup>. In Akron's own words, Giger's paintings are "a tribute to the Tarot as a source of spiritual artistic inspiration"<sup>151</sup>. Giger's vision of the Tarot, rather than dogmatic, is related to the artistic and the magical.

According to Karlin, no

<sup>150</sup> KARLIN, J. *The H.R. Giger Tarot* [online]. [Date consulted: 17-2-2004]. Available at: <<http://jktarot.com/gigrev2.html>>

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

He does not seek to tell us how the world should be, but rather, like a journalist, he shows us how it is, and by manipulating his basic tools, he tells us in his own way that it can be a dark and terrifying place.

This hidden basis may come as a surprise to those who are familiar with Giger's work only in its cinematic facet, but the truth is that the Tarot was a whole world of inspiration, especially Aleister Crowley's Thoth deck. Giger was fascinated by the mystery and magic represented in ancient hieroglyphics and was able to adapt the Tarot to his images and use the ideas of occultists as artistic inspiration, as other painters such as Dalí had done before him.

In Giger's Tarot, we find a symbolic world with various interpretative keys, from the artistic to the literary. The deck was created using pre-existing work from his old airbrush paintings. Akron made a selection that suited the ideas he had in mind about the cards, having seen the images in Giger's work.

Giger's relationship with the Tarot goes back a long way. It was sparked by his friendship with the Swiss writer Sergius Golowin, who had published a book on the Tarot in 1968 and was well versed in esoteric literature. From that moment on, Giger began to read books on magic and esotericism, with a particular interest in the works of Levi and Crowley.

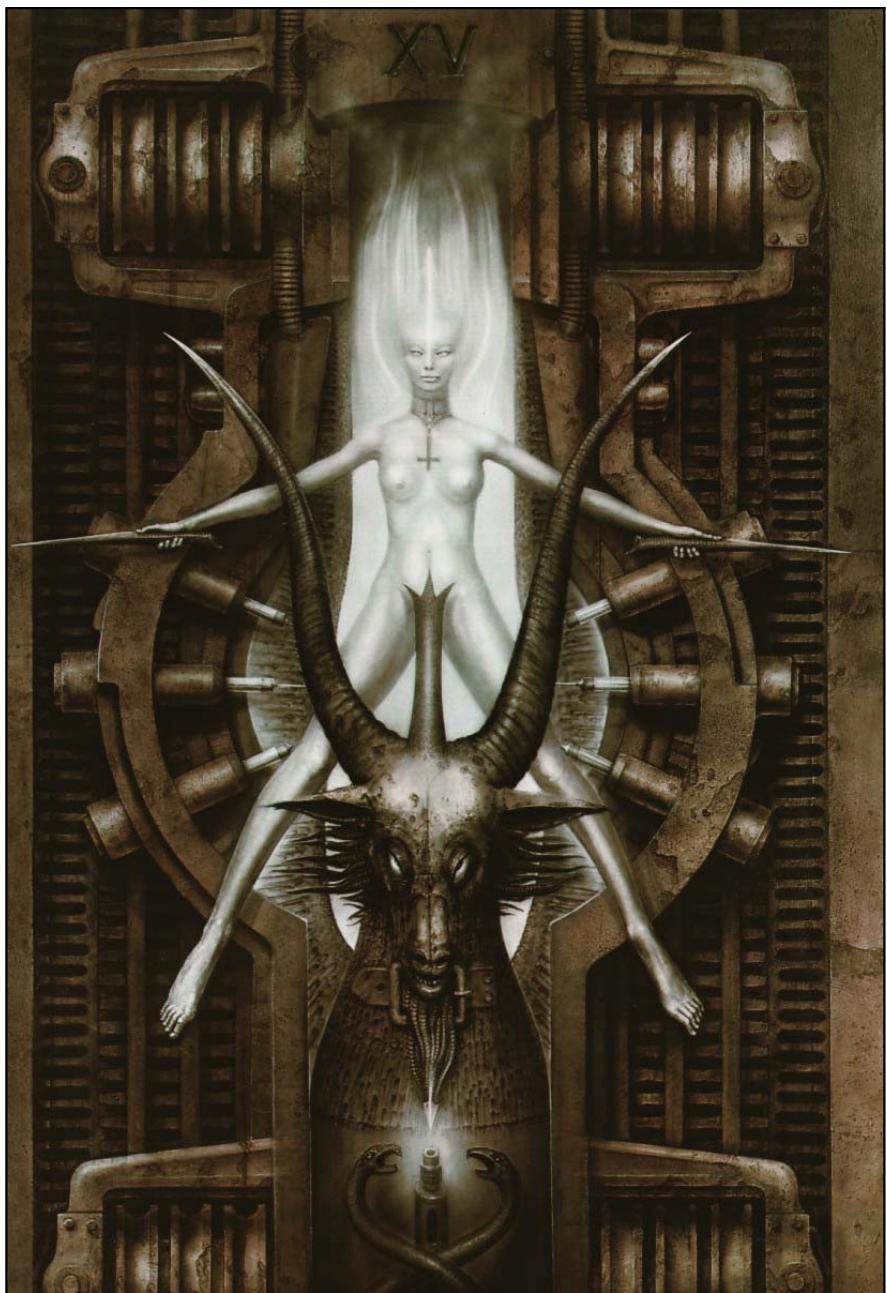
Tarot dates back to the Renaissance, when there was a growing interest in the study of alchemy and Kabbalah. During the 19th century, interest was revived and began to attract intellectuals such as Jung, who conducted a study on the meaning of human archetypes and the unconscious, taking Tarot into account. The symbolism of these cards is composed of mythical characters, hieroglyphics, Kabbalah and archetypes, constituting an ancient method of divination. Its function is to decipher the hidden meaning in the cards that compose it and thus trace a history of the character who consults it.

Giger's version is a modern reworking of these iconic cards, updating the mythical with images from his pictorial universe, inspired by the subconscious and fused with the contemporary spirit, as well as with Giger's own expression. In fact, Giger confesses that when he was painting, he did not think too much about the Tarot, except for card 15, which has the number included in the painting entitled Baphomet.

with Gigeresque expression. In fact, Giger confesses that when he was painting, he did not think too much about the Tarot, except for card 15, which has the number included in the painting entitled *Baphomet* [84]. The cards for this tarot were chosen by Akron with Giger's consent.

The Taschen edition published in 2000 gives greater prominence to the images of Giger's paintings than to the accompanying texts that attempt to shed some light on their meaning. The change in title is significant: from the first edition in 1993, *Baphomet, The Tarot of the Underworld*, to the 2000 edition, *H.R. Giger Tarot*.

The cards represent some of the most widely known images from Giger's work, such as his painting *Spiegelbild* (*The Magician* card) and *Baphomet* (*The Devil* card).



84- Baphomet (1975)

## The representation of the devil

Giger offers a new perspective on the iconography of a subject as ambiguous as the fascinating universe of Evil, represented in its most terrifying form, that is, Satan. Giger recreates the image of a postmodern, technological Satan, an image of nightmares and disease. He is the antichrist, as he is usually associated with inverted crosses. Giger will produce different representations of Satan (especially that of Baphomet, in his goat form). There are also other demonic associations, such as the relationship with vampires (in his early illustrations) and various incarnations of the satanic in his film creations (*Alien*, as the personification of evil and annihilation, and *Poltergeist II*, with demons and ghosts). He also depicts the devil in other forms that are confused with the demonic and the grotesque<sup>152</sup>.

In the painting *Satan I* (1977) [85], the devil points at the viewer with a slingshot that has the figure of Christ crucified at its base, an example of Giger's particular black humour. Later, we find the figure of Satan in the painting *Satan's Bride* (*Satansbraut*, 1986). He also appears in the Akron Tarot cards.

Giger assimilates various representations of the devil, given his knowledge of depictions of Satan throughout art history, since his figure began to appear in painting and engraving.

Our ideas about the devil come from three sources: the earliest interpretations of the New Testament, the figure of the rebellious hero created by Milton and adopted by the Romantic literary tradition of Baudelaire and Blake, and the popular tradition of Satanic cults and black masses<sup>153</sup>.

In his origins, Satan was a beautiful and intelligent angel who, due to his arrogance and pride, was banished from heaven, along with a number of other angels who

<sup>(152)</sup> "The demonic is that *non-being* that arises as pure aggression: the *deranged* being. (...) All art that seeks to represent demonic temptation in one way or another revives this feeling of a horrible indefiniteness of something that has no nature, or worse, something that is totally denatured." CASTELLI, Enrico. *On the demonic in art: its philosophical significance*. University of Chile, Santiago de Chile, 1963.

<sup>153</sup> LINK, Luther, *The Devil: A Faceless Mask*, Síntesis, Madrid, 2002.

like him, rebelled against God. The creation of man took place after Satan's fall. God revealed him to man as the fallen one, provoking terrible hatred in Satan. Thus, the most beautiful of angels was transformed into a hideous, animal-like figure.

During the Renaissance, this character was depicted with animalistic features, large ears, horns, eagle and fox paws, bat wings and fangs. Their hairy bodies were dark in colour. The devil appeared in caves or pits with people engulfed in fire and snakes, carrying threatening tridents. Demons mocked humans in a terrifying manner.

After Michelangelo painted the Sistine Chapel, demons began to take on more human forms with detailed anatomies that emphasised their muscles, although animalistic features (such as ears, mouths, horns, teeth, and claws) were still visible. Their faces were very expressive, showing their feelings. During the Baroque period, the figure of the demon became progressively more humanised until the Romantic period.

### **Modern Satanism**

During the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, Giger's satanic paintings and two of the key films in horror cinema, *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) and *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968), were created. It was a time of demanding freedoms of all kinds. This phenomenon was accompanied by an uncontrolled fascination with the figure of Satan and religious icons. This rebellious movement spread from the United States to the entire Western world with the proliferation of rituals, sects such as the "Church of Satan" led by Anton LaVey, and creeds that often used the figure of the Devil as an effigy to worship. A multitude of musical groups sang odes to the figure of the Evil One, led by the Rolling Stones, Their *Satanic Majesties*, and followed by Led Zeppelin and Ozzy Osbourne. Even in the 1980s

there was fierce controversy about the hidden messages in their records that invoked Satan and caused disorder among young people.

Giger will offer different interpretations and update the content and meanings of this mythology in our time, carving out a niche for himself among the artists who have worked with this iconography, as he has produced a multitude of creations related to the satanic. He will contribute a new vision related to technology, in which the devil will take on the appearance of a modern god mixed with archetypal forms, creating a constant connection between past, present and future. Giger will create a new image of this figure, very contemporary and closely linked to the fantasy tradition, especially the medieval and romantic traditions.

He offers three interesting versions of Baphomet in his paintings *Baphomet* (According to Eliphas Levi) in 1975 [84], *The Second Celebration of the Four* [86], both of which feature only the head, and *The Spell IV* [88], which features the full figure.



85- *Satan I* (1977)



86- *The Second Celebration of the Four* (1976)

#### 2.2.5.1. Baphomet

The origin of Baphomet remains unclear, although it is clear that he is of Eastern origin and arrived in Europe in medieval times, during the Crusades, brought by the Knights Templar. Some researchers argue that Baphomet is an Occitan corruption of Mahomet, i.e. Muhammad, and that the Templars embraced Islam and worshipped the Muslim prophet. Others relate it to the Greek words *baphe* and *meteos*. This etymology of the word Baphomet breaks down the word into *baphe* (immersion, baptism) and *metheos* (spiritual purification by fire, initiation). Baphomet would therefore be *baptism by fire*, perhaps the most appropriate meaning within the Gnostic context in which Templar esotericism developed and insofar as it could explain some of the accusations levelled against the order, specifically the burning of newborns<sup>154</sup>.

Fulcanelli considers Baphomet to be "a complete emblem of the secret traditions of the Templar Order," constituting the synthetic image in which the initiates of the Temple had grouped together all the elements of high science and tradition. He could be considered a symbolic object of contemplation, whose presence would have presided over certain acts and inspired the mental concentration of the Knights Templar or their spiritual disposition at times when they presumably engaged in collective meditation.

There are some references for the visual configuration of Baphomet. In the portico of the Templar church of Saint Bris de Tureaux there is an image representing Baphomet, a bearded and horned devil. In addition, a chest found in Volterra seems to depict scenes that specialists believe to be the famous initiation ceremony into the esoteric Templar chapter, including the worship of Baphomet and the Golden Fleece from the legend of the Argonauts. According to this bas-relief, the image of Baphomet is androgynous, with a long beard, full breasts, a short cloak and a hood. This idol is always described as an androgynous figure. The androgyne is an ancient

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<sup>154</sup> They were also accused of renouncing the wooden cross, symbol of Jesus Christ, of practising sodomy, of worshipping the head of a goat and of worshipping the pentacle.

symbol of the union of opposites, of totality, almost as old as the world itself. The myth of the androgyne is linked to that of twins, that is, to the zodiacal constellation of Gemini.

The most important iconographic reference for Giger's interpretation of Baphomet is undoubtedly that made by Eliphas Levi in 1855<sup>155</sup>.

Giger has artistically perfected Levi's drawing and adapted, in essence, the symbolic message of the Baphomet motif to the spirit of the 20th century. In his book *The Key to the Mysteries*, Levi explains the elements that for him "represent the signature of the devil":

"1. The star of the microcosm or magic pentagram. It is the five-pointed star of occult Freemasonry, the star with which Agrippa drew the human figure, with the head at the top point and the four limbs at each of the remaining four points. The flaming star, when turned upside down, becomes the hieroglyphic symbol of the goat of black magic, whose head can then be drawn inside the star, with the horns at the upper points, the ears at the sides and the beard at the bottom. It is the sign of antagonism and doom. It is the goat of lust, which charges with its horns against the sky. It is a symbol abhorred by initiates of higher rank, even on the Sabbath<sup>156</sup>.

Levi's demon [87] sits on a cube (symbol of human limitation), which rests on a sphere (symbol of fertile earth). Giger's Baphomet [88] is enthroned on five skulls: above the central one emerges a bishop's mitre that transforms into a machine gun (in other paintings, such as *Entrée* [379], the phallic-shaped mitre also appears). In Levi's representation, a caduceus (Hermes' staff) is found at the same height. The lower part of the body represents the mystery of procreation, in the form of two snakes coiled around the staff. In Giger's painting

<sup>155</sup> [In line],[date of consultation: 30- 9- 2003] Available at: <<http://www.baphomet.com/us/baph/fr-baph.htm>>.

<sup>156</sup> LEVI, Eliphas. *The Key to the Mysteries*. Humanitas, Barcelona, 2000.

Snakes surround the weapon. Levi depicts a woman's breasts and the belly of a pregnant woman; in Giger's version, the protruding breasts appear as two demons, both holding grenades in their hands. Levi's Baphomet bears a pentagram on his forehead and a torch between his horns as a sign of sacred revelation. In Giger's version, two pentagrams cross behind the head and figure of Lilith (one vertical and one inverted, thus expressing the union of the microcosm and the macrocosm). The wings reinforce the pentagon shape, as do the horns. The movement of the hands in a blessing gesture is the same in both representations and is reminiscent of Christ.

"When I painted the *Spell* series, I was very interested in magic and read everything I could find on the subject (Crowley), between 1972 and 1977. Then I painted this *environment* with the figure of Baphomet. I had the phrase '*as above, so below*' in my head at the time. Then people started finding magic numbers and making interpretations. I constructed a double pentagram, a tentagram (once with the point facing up, once facing down). Then, according to Agrippa of Nettesheim's message, I painted the picture, with the man inscribed in the pentagram and with Baphomet, with ears, a goatee and elongated horns; I superimposed both motifs in *The Spell*"<sup>(157)</sup>.

For Giger, this painting has no message or philosophical statement. He made this painting consciously, intentionally. In contrast to this work, there is a long list of paintings for which he had no sketches or prior ideas. He would start at the top left and fill the entire surface, "with magical things inside that I don't know exactly where they come from. I just did them without further explanation"<sup>(158)</sup>.

<sup>157</sup> [Online], [date consulted: 30 September 2003] Available at: <<http://www.baphomet.com/us/baph/fr-baph.htm>>.

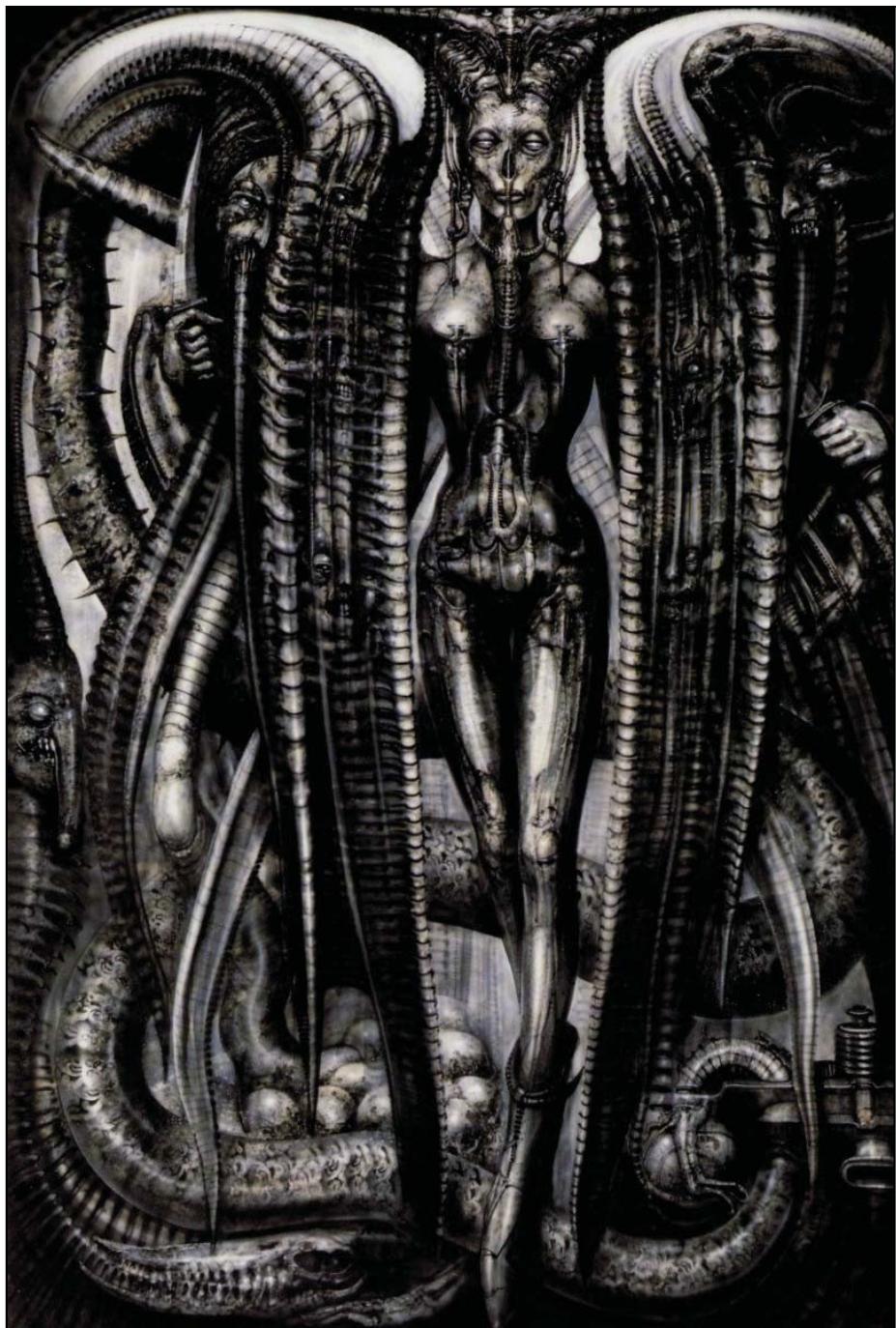
<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*



87- Eliphas Levi. *Baphomet* (1855)



88-H.R. Giger. *Baphomet* (detail from *The Spell IV*) (1975)



89-Lilith (1976-77)

### 2.2.5.2 Lilith

She is a figure mentioned in a dozen ancient traditions (mainly Sumerian, Babylonian and Hebrew). The figure of Lilith is quite complex and her representation differs from one culture to another, becoming more demonic over time.

According to Jewish tradition, Lilith was Adam's first wife. She was expelled from the Garden of Eden when she refused to be Adam's servant, thus becoming a demonic figure (after Adam's rib, Eve, his second wife, was born). Lilith was demonised by Hebrew culture as a symbol of promiscuity and disobedience (popular songs also said that Lilith captured Jewish children at night and ate them).

"Lilith" has often been translated as "night monster", associating the name with *layil*, the Hebrew word for *night*. Men were even forbidden to sleep alone at home, because they would become her prey. There is another word of Akkadian origin, "lilitu", which translates as a female spirit of the wind, which etymologically resembles *lilith* more closely.

Lilith has also been linked to the seductress: as a succubus, that is, a devil in the form of a woman who engages in carnal relations with men. Her role is therefore to sleep with men whom she seduces through wet dreams or to collect their semen, as she made them ejaculate while they slept. In this way, she becomes pregnant and gives birth to demonic children whom she later murders. She is given the role of corrupting marriage. She was one of the most feared demons, and a wide variety of amulets and protective measures were used against her<sup>159</sup>.

In Kabbalistic tradition, specifically in the Zohar, a central work of Jewish mysticism, it is said that Adam originally had two faces, being hermaphroditic, with two bodies. God separated Lilith from Adam's body, to which she was attached. This tradition sometimes confuses Lilith with Naamah (the mother of demons) and also says that both had sexual relations with Adam, bringing plagues to the earth. The fact is that she is associated with the forces

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<sup>159</sup> HUSAIN, Shahrukh. *The Goddess: Creation, Fertility and Abundance. Myths and Female Archetypes*. Cologne, Taschen, 2001.

and darkness. A multitude of commentators and versions converge on this figure.

Modern Jewish feminists, however, consider her a positive symbol, a model of womanhood in relation to man in the story of creation, as the first woman on earth, equal to man in spirit and rights, abandoning the ancestral image of a demon that has traditionally been attributed to her<sup>160</sup>.

Lilith's characterisation is drawn from biblical texts (Isaiah 34:14):

"Wild cats and hyenas will gather, and satyrs will assemble; there Lilith will lie down and find her resting place."

Lilith was frequently depicted by Pre-Raphaelite painters such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and by Symbolists, and was also revived by Dalí. Until then, her seductive nature had been extolled, but in recent decades her demonic and perverse image has been emphasised. Artists such as Michel Desimon and others associated with fantasy illustration, such as Boris Vallejo, have also produced their own versions in this vein. Lilith has also been considered the first of the vampires and their queen. Her image is associated with the aesthetics of darkness.

Giger updates the image of Lilith in his painting *Lilith* (1976-77) [89]. He also makes her the cover of his second book. While he chose the figure of Baphomet for the first, for *Necronomicon II*, he chooses the section of Lilith's face, hence its importance to the painter. Giger's image can be considered one of the most sinister and darkest versions of Lilith ever created.

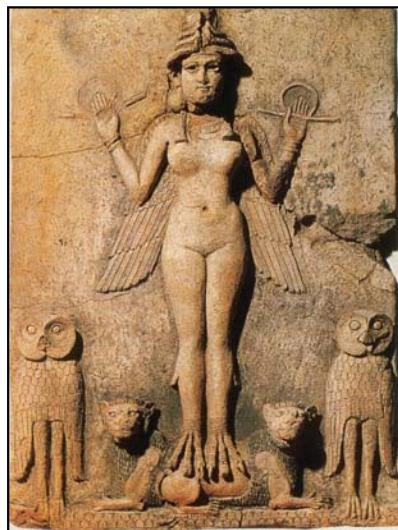
Depicted in full length using the airbrush technique, she is found between two biomechanical forms, columns (or waterfalls) that seem to contain demons. In line with his female representations, she is sensual, like a sculptural beauty, with a highly decorated body, featuring tattoos and piercings. The crown is reminiscent of Mesopotamian iconography, where the

<sup>160</sup> There is currently a Jewish feminist magazine called *Lilith*, the independent magazine for Jewish women, based in New York.

myth (Sumerian); in it, a monstrous figure can be glimpsed; on either side, we see hands with daggers (a motif that is repeated in other works), which convey a threatening character (according to Freud, all long, sharp weapons such as knives and daggers are representations of the male genital organ). A serpentine figure envelops the lower part of the painting. Behind the feet are skulls, which may allude to devoured children, as this was an act attributed to her. There is a Mannerist elongation of the main figure (as in other paintings).

She also appears in two paintings related to the figure of Baphomet (usually above his head), in *Spell IV* [88] and in *Baphomet* [84]. According to Giger, Lilith represents the negative side of Eve<sup>161</sup>. She carries a being on her head (like a lunar crown) and has wings, like the archaic image of Lilith [90].

Lilith's latest evolution in Giger's art comes with her transformation into Sil (the protagonist of *Species*), an "extraterrestrial Lilith" who seduces men and gives birth to monsters, alien beings.



90-Relief of Lilith-Inanna, wearing the lunar crown, made in Mesopotamia (2000 BC).

<sup>161</sup> [Online], [date consulted: 2-10-2003] Available at: <<http://www.hrgiger.com>>.

## 2.2.6. r Ancient Cultures

Egyptian art has fascinated Giger since childhood. In addition, Fuchs' theories in *Architectura caelstis* sparked Giger's interest in the architecture of ancient civilisations, especially temples and pyramids, and in the cultures of Mesopotamia and Assyria.

Egyptology, especially in relation to funerary art, interested him from an early age, as he was fascinated by mummies, which he often visited at the museum in Chur. "When you are a child, the influences you receive are very strong" <sup>162</sup>.

The influence of Egyptian mythology and its refined cult of death is evident in the use of various symbols such as the *ankh* <sup>163</sup>, the eye of Horus (the all-seeing eye), the pyramid and crowns, sarcophagi, tombs, mummies, funerary statuettes, masks and the triangle. He also used the figure of the sphinx in his painting *Death* (1977), which represents the mysterious and the enigmatic.

The pharaonic crowns worn by many of his female figures represent an extension of the values of the head and the gift from above, as well as an insignia of power and light. It is significant that many of his female figures wear large crowns, such as the central figure in *Spell II* and *Lilith*. Giger's female figures have connections with ancient goddesses, such as the Egyptian Isis.

## 2.2.7. r animal symbolism

This was initially related to his fascination with Egyptian culture. Under the guise of animals, the Egyptians worshipped the universal power that the gods had revealed in nature. Giger went on to develop his own personal bestiary reflecting his beliefs about the animal world, using

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<sup>162</sup> ARh +, *Op. cit.*

<sup>163</sup> The *ankh*, the ankh cross, is the symbol of life and wholeness (see this symbolism in *Illuminatus I*, in Debbie Harry's *Koo Koo* video clip and on the cover of the same album).

enigmatic symbols. By representing beasts, moral lessons are drawn that provide food for thought.

Noteworthy here is Giger's use of the beliefs that make up the concept of Evil, which is identified with Satan. Many animals are associated with characteristics of the devil's power. Nocturnal animals, poisonous animals, lustful animals and those seen in the shadows become receptacles for Satan. Satan and witches are embodied in many animals, which coexist in Giger's paintings.

Giger developed representations of fabulous and fantastical animals. Monsters suggest possibilities and potentialities for diverse creation. They symbolise primordial chaos and the terrifying powers of nature. They represent evil and the chaotic forces of the world. He sometimes paints them with their jaws open, as in the *Necronom* series or in *Alien*. Their significance is the gates of hell or the entrance to the underworld. Giger will represent various theriomorphisms, in characters and figures that take the form of animals (monsters and anthropomorphisms). He will represent disturbing animals that frequently appear in his paintings, such as snakes and others related to the occult, such as the goat, trying to make them aggressive.

Another important context is Carnival, which represents the carnal side of man, the animal side<sup>164</sup>. Animals are symbolised, especially lustful and evil ones.

The animal as an archetype represents the deep layers of the unconscious and instinct. The animals that appear in dreams and the arts form partial identifications of man, aspects or images of his complex nature. Giger has stated that he paints what frightens him, distresses him and causes him fear. Let us see which animals have caused Giger dread since his childhood:

The spider symbolises the Great Mother in her terrible aspect, as the weaver of destiny. They are lunar goddesses, spinners. In Egyptian iconography, it is the attribute of the goddess Neith as the weaver of the world. In Christian iconography, it is

<sup>164</sup> MARIÑO FERRO, X.R. *Animal Symbolism: Beliefs and Meanings in Western Culture*. Encuentro, Madrid, 1996.

associated with the devil who sets traps for sinners. As a poisonous animal that lives by killing and using its ingenious trap, the spider symbolises the devil, deceitful and opposed to life. The devil has set his webs, vices and sins that capture and deceive us. We find examples in one of his early drawings related to a female figure [91], and also as attributes of goddesses (*Li II* portrait). In the West, the spider crystallises a whole series of cruel ghosts and phobias: castration, vampirism, cannibalism. The spider is seen as a vulva, but a vulva with teeth, ready to chew, the source of the most hidden virile fears. The spider is also a symbol of chaos and death.

The rat symbolises unfavourable prejudice; associated with notions of greed, parasitism, misery; an image of terror and nocturnal and clandestine activity, of the underground world. In the series of paintings *The Spell*, rats appear as attributes of the figure of Satan. There is also a painting entitled *Rat* [93], associated with a sadomasochistic device. It is compared for its ability to gnaw away at time, devouring everything little by little, leading to decay and death. Rats are reputed to be lascivious (due to their reproductive capacity). They can also symbolise the penis because of their ability to penetrate narrow spaces.

Related to the rat is the bat, as it is a flying mouse. It is impure, as it belongs neither to the sky nor to the earth. It flees from daylight and hides. It is also a satanic animal, as when crossed with the human figure it creates the devil. Since the 13th century, the devil has been represented with bat wings. Giger also follows this tradition, due to its literary connotations and connection with Dracula and vampires. A good example is his airbrush painting for the film *Dead Star* [362].

An animal frequently depicted by Giger is the snake, sometimes its skin or its entire form. It tops the list of evil animals, an image of the wicked, the enemy, and embodies the lower psyche, the dark psyche, the strange, incomprehensible and mysterious. It is a poisonous animal, a reptile. Christian tradition identifies it with the devil, the bitter enemy of mankind. The first symptom after one of its bites is acute pain. For this reason, personified pain carries a snake around its body, thus symbolising

the forces of evil. Related to Medusa (with snakes intertwined with her hair, as on the cover for Steven Stevens [216]). The snake has a figurative association with the phallus. It symbolises original sin. In *The Spell IV*, Giger uses the motif of the caduceus or staff with two intertwined snakes, alluding to Mercury. Vipers are also lethal, as they kill the male during copulation. Then their children kill their mother, tearing open her belly to come out into the light (relating to the birth in *Alien*).

An animal that has repulsed him since childhood is the worm. It is a symbol of life reborn from poverty and death. For Jung, the worm symbolises the primarily destructive aspect of libido, rather than its fertilising aspect. The worm signifies the stage prior to dissolution and decomposition. Worms gnaw at the body. Their symbolism is associated with disease, which was considered to be an evil substance introduced into the body. It symbolises death, the dissolution of the earth, and is related to the snake. It is very important when analysing the monstrous creations in *Alien*.

Sometimes it represents parts of animals such as the lizard, the octopus with its tentacles and suction cups, and the crab with its legs and claws (as seen in *Alien's facehugger*). Some of its figures show features of lizards such as tails, heads, and wet-looking skin. Another important group when analysing *Alien* is nocturnal insects such as the cockroach, which avoids light and feeds in the darkness, and the beetle, due to its relationship with Egyptian culture (for whom it symbolised the sun god Ra) and with excrement, corpses and decaying matter.

An animal that features heavily in his work is the cat, as it is his favourite animal. His own cat, Mucki, appears in several paintings, such as *Minon* and *Behemoth* [92]. The cat is associated with witchcraft, being a kind of disguise under which witches present themselves.

Giger mixes the morphologies of various animals, almost always those related to evil and the demonic, to create monstrous and beastly figures

monstrous and beastly figures such as the creature in *Alien* or those that appear in his work for *Poltergeist II*.

In this way, Giger invents *his own iconography* by mixing literary and artistic references. His images are halfway between tradition and the future, giving the impression of an archaeological past.

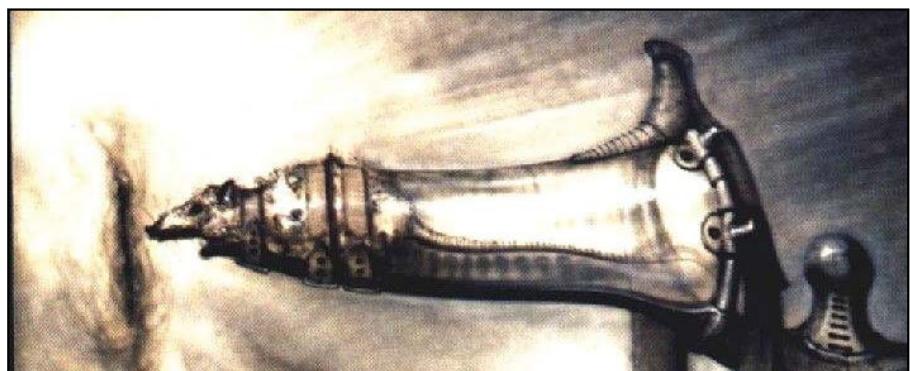
The study of Freud and Jung's work can provide new frameworks and classifications for attempting an interpretative approach and unravelling the complex iconographic programmes of some of his works. For Jung, "the symbol refers beyond itself, expressing something difficult to express satisfactorily; each person sees in it what their visual power allows them to see". Jung, who curiously came from Zurich, speaks in his writings of archetypes as prototypes of symbolic sets, so deeply inscribed in the subconscious that they constitute a structure and are expressed through particular symbols charged with great energetic power.



91-In the Nest (1967-68)



92- *Behemoth* (1975)



93- *Rat picture* (1977)

## 2.3 r artistic disciplines

H.R. Giger is a multifaceted artist who has worked in various fields of artistic creation throughout his career, thus broadening his creative capacity. His personal biomechanical style is recognisable in all of his works, as this characteristic stamp permeates most of his creations. His training as a designer is very important in understanding his innovative style and his desire to constantly improve on previous productions, which is why he sometimes repeats designs in order to get more out of his ideas or to develop them in other directions.

### 2.3.1 Drawing

Drawing has been Giger's basic tool for artistic expression and his main instrument of communication. It represents the first level of materialisation of his artistic ideas and concepts. Giger has always drawn and started out as an illustrator. Through his drawings, he seeks to give plastic form to a series of figures and aesthetic concepts in order to convey a world of images that flit through his mind. Other facets of Giger's art are related to drawing, especially design and painting.

Our journey begins with his early drawings and series when he was working as an illustrator for magazines around 1964. Giger's theoretical background was rather poor from an artistic point of view, but very rich from a literary perspective. His main tool for inquiry and analysis was experimentation, his own experience. Building on a solid foundation as a designer of architecture and industrial objects, he developed a figurative and fantastical art form. Over time, as he discovered the great masters of art, Giger demonstrated a great capacity to assimilate other styles to create his own, which he himself coined as biomechanical. In just a few years, he reached maturity.

From childhood, he developed a great capacity for fantasy and creation, from which he would project his personal assessments and theories about his environment. The

human body would be his medium, support and vehicle. The themes derived from it, such as the introduction of alterations to the body's structure and artificial elements into the human form, would be explored time and again by Giger. We see the presence of certain elements in the human figure that would transform it into a biomechanical body.

He began by drawing small figures on paper, in notebooks and on the edges of plans. He moved from small formats to larger ones when he consolidated his style around 1967 and needed more space to represent his world and his obsessions. This marked the beginning of his artistic expansion, which led him to painting as the medium in which his artistic expression would culminate.

A more detailed Gestalt analysis allows us to grasp what his drawing conveys and the emotions that emanate from it. Giger worked with caricature and physical deformation, creating a graphic style halfway between expressionist fantasy and a peculiar Gothic surrealism. These impressions are created from his grotesque figures and fantastical scenes. His graphic work is presented as a coherent whole in which his style is recognisable, as Giger remains faithful to his artistic principles. The colour black, which is dominant in his early drawings and remains so throughout his work, speaks of melancholy aspects and a certain sombre mood.

### **Technique**

The first and fundamental step in any process of fantastic creation is the deployment of imagination. Then technical resources and skills must be developed to express it in some way. Giger began his production by illustrating fantastic stories and macabre events. To do this, he used caricature as a genre because he felt more comfortable with it and it gave him great freedom to develop his ideas. It also allowed him to indulge in the satire and criticism he poured into many of his works. For these illustrations and caricatures, Giger mainly used Indian ink, developing his own graphic style.

His tools of the trade included pencils (which offer a wide range of tones), Indian ink (fine-tipped stylus, very suitable for very small drawings and details) and ballpoint pens.

The lines achieved with these artistic tools are fluid, elegant and sharp. He used different shading techniques to establish different tones in the lines of his drawings. Giger drew with a fluid, even nervous stroke. This became more pronounced in his later years when his drawings were quick, given that he often used the sketching technique when creating designs.

In his early years, he made studies in pencil or pen for his drawings, in which he used Indian ink applied with pens or stylographs (also used in professional graphic design). At this time, he discovered a special paper used by architects called *transcop*, which is a thick paper that allows for many corrections.

As he became more involved in the art world, his works became larger in format. By around 1967, he was working very little in A4 formats. At that time, he began to use an ink spraying technique for which he used a toothbrush to scrape and splash the paper and a sieve through which the ink fell. He then scratched the ink surfaces to mark areas and created the figures and details of the composition with a rapidograph. Good examples of this scraping technique are *The Voice of America* and *Cthulhu*.

In the series of drawings entitled *Pozos (Wells)*, he used perspective to give depth and mystery to the works, with marked vanishing lines. He would perfect these techniques in his painting.

With the advent of the fax machine (in the 1990s), he returned to drawing on DIN-A4 sheets, which he sometimes stuck together to form planes, using a stylograph, pencil and ballpoint pen. Using the fax machine, he could send his designs immediately to their destination, thus speeding up his work for the Hollywood film production companies that required his designs.

Giger gained experience in sketching architectural spaces through his apprenticeships, first at the studio of Venatius Meisen and

later through his work in the studio of artist and designer Andreas Christen. This skill would prove very important for the sketching and visualisation techniques in the conceptual designs that Giger produced for the film productions he worked on. He became increasingly disciplined in his drawing and created a series of artistic resources that he would continue to work on and perfect. He developed a new aesthetic based on the influence of other artists such as Dalí, Bellmer, and Gaudí, becoming a virtuoso technician with a great capacity for graphic expression that allowed him to capture his personal obsessions and his particular universe.

During his early training, he worked as an illustrator for several local magazines and underground magazines in which he published his drawings. Given his facility for design and drawing, he soon began to create graphic work on posters such as those for the Floh group in Cologne or Urban Gwerder's show, Poetenz, or the cover of the Walpurgis group's album, making a name for himself in the Swiss underground and counterculture movement of the late 1960s.

Giger had this to say about his approach to his early drawings: "Before I start a piece, I imagine it in my mind, at least in broad strokes. Then I try to represent it as accurately as possible, exactly as I imagined it. The details are quite uncertain at first. They gradually become more compact as the piece nears completion. I often make changes, even long after I have finished the drawing, if I realise I have made a mistake when retouching it. I am currently searching for a rational and modern drawing technique. The time it takes me to complete each work to my full satisfaction is enormous. It usually takes from two or three weeks to several months, depending on how hard I have worked"<sup>(165)</sup>.

Giger's drawing production can be divided into two periods based on his dedication to personal work:

-The 1960s: his period of artistic training, during which he developed his first works and his style evolved. In the 1970s, although painting would be his main

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<sup>165</sup> Kunst aus Frankenstein's Labor. *Pop*, November 1968, no. 33.

focus, he did not abandon drawing but worked almost exclusively on sketches, mainly to develop conceptual ideas. He rarely produced series or personal drawings.

-In the 1980s and 1990s and up to the present day, coinciding with his abandonment of airbrushing, he returned to drawing to create personal series.

### 2.3.1. Beginnings

Giger began drawing as a hobby and pastime without too many pretensions. Already in his early drawings (1959-1962), certain morphologies and aesthetic ideals can be observed, which he would gradually work on and develop over time. The literary formulation of these early drawings is the product of the mystery and horror stories he read, due to his passionate reading habits. Giger transforms literary ideas and characters and represents them in his own unique way. In some of these drawings, we can see the aforementioned influence of Dalí and Bellmer as he sought references to help him develop his own style. He illustrates his concerns with a great imaginative capacity for inventing figures and beings. Through his black ink strokes, he adopts an expressionist aesthetic, with anguished, macabre and spectral characters. These beings are reminiscent of the grotesque and contorted figures of early German expressionist cinema (Caligari, Nosferatu). Through simple figuration and schematic drawing, he conveys anguished emotions and draws twisted characters.

Giger does not produce realistic drawings, but rather fantastical ones. In terms of subject matter, the human body plays an essential role: on the one hand, dealing with certain anatomical deformities that border on caricature and the grotesque; on the other, the literary interpretation of these images, which evoke characters and elements typical of Gothic literature and horror novels, such as vampires, skulls, coffins, bones and death. Elements of mutilation such as the guillotine also make an appearance [100]. Lifeless bodies lie on the ground [96] or are about to be pierced; ghosts decapitated with axes wander through a deserted city.

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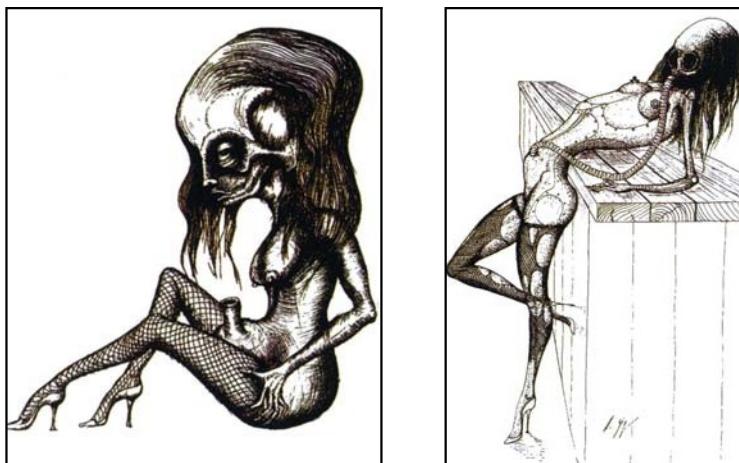
The macabre is evident in a self-portrait in which a body separated from its head is photographing it as a souvenir [101]. In this and other works, Giger's dark sense of humour is evident. Another example of this humour is the colour drawing of a cadaverous, ghostly-looking mother using a syringe as a feeding bottle for her monstrous baby. In the series *Stockings* (1960), cadaverous and deformed bodies refer us to the universe of eroticism, a dark and morbid eroticism [94-95].

Perhaps he was inspired by German expressionist films and by the reruns of Hammer, Roger Corman and his adaptations of Allan Poe (in those years the fantasy genre was in full swing). He thus developed an expressionist and sinister graphic style marked by black and white contrasts and populated by skulls and skeletons.

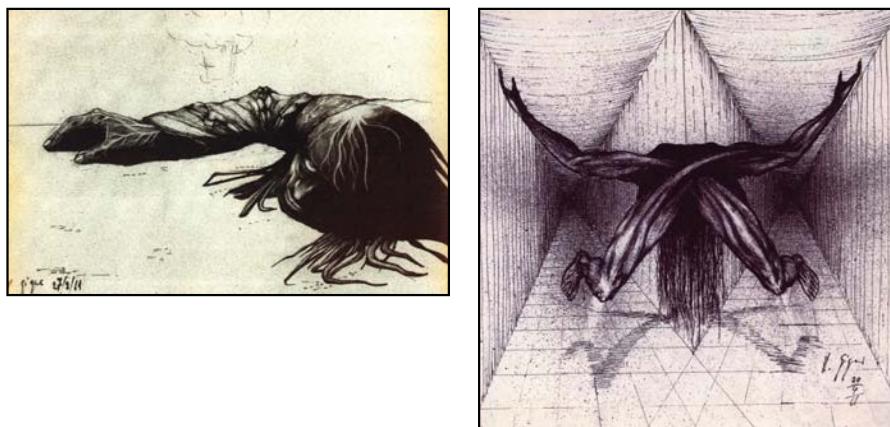
Around 1960, a wave of suicides shook the city of Chur, a fact that deeply affected Giger, as some of the victims were acquaintances of his. For this reason, that year he frequently drew themes of impalements and hangings, with macabre and horrific content, demonstrating the influence that certain events had on Giger.

From the outset, Giger was seduced by the supernatural and the fantastic, and his drawings reflect the sordid aspects of life, the dark side. He believes that unpleasant news and macabre stories predominate over the rest. In fact, if we look at the press and the news, catastrophes, deaths, pain and violence abound.

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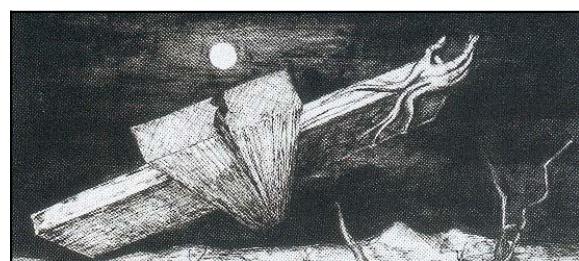


94-95-*Stockings* (1960)

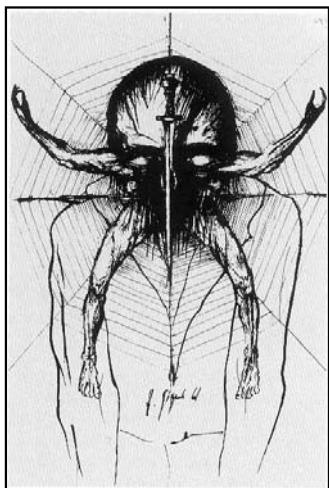


96-*Untitled* (1961)

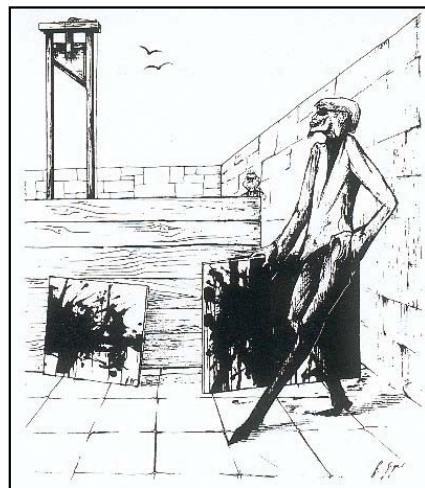
97-*Untitled* (1961)



98-*Cross* (1959-1960)



99-Untitled (1961)



100-Untitled (1961)



101-Self-Portrait (1961)

### 2.3.1.2. Series from the 19 nd 1960s

#### The Atomic Children

In the early 1960s, while working with architect Meissen and attending the Zurich School of Arts and Crafts, Giger published the *Atomic Children* series, a collection of grotesque drawings and caricatures with a strong political message and social criticism. For about four years (1962-1965), Giger published these caricatures in underground magazines such as Clou, Hotcha and Agitation, and in the Chur school newspaper. The common feature of these drawings is their black humour and anatomically deformed figures.

During these years (1961-1964), he produced the *Atomic Children* series (1963), consisting of figures he drew on the edges of his drawings, as a response to the question of atomic power. In the early 1960s, Switzerland aspired to be an atomic power, a fact that Giger considered ridiculous and which he satirically criticised with his drawings of mutilated and crippled figures missing limbs. Giger ridiculed the atomic issue with this kind of anti-nuclear manifesto, offering a scathing critique of the Swiss system and society. He uses highly expressive, grotesque resources to create these little monsters and creatures resulting from government experiments, treating the real and serious problem with humour. These children are shown in hostile attitudes and attack the social customs of the time.

Below we quote the manifesto that illustrates the critical and political attitude that accompanies the reproductions of these figures in his book *Arh+:*

"We, atomic children

We are grateful to our parents, Who during the  
great boom

And following Swiss atomic regulations  
Threw themselves to the floor according to  
their reflexes  
And very politely counted to fifteen, Because  
otherwise we would not exist  
We, the atomic children, do not want to moralise, We  
do not want to reproach anyone,  
We simply want  
For you to get used to us and learn to Love us.  
But we cannot guarantee anything,  
Because as soon as we are the majority,  
You will be the abnormal ones  
And you may have to suffer for it.

H.R.G. 1963

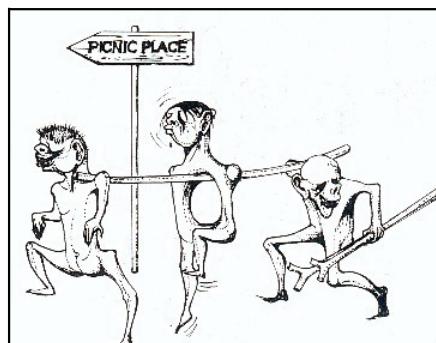
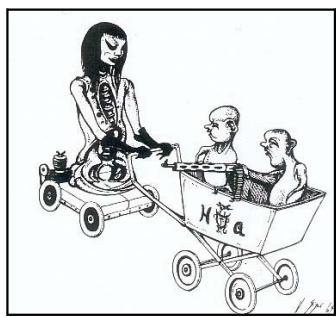
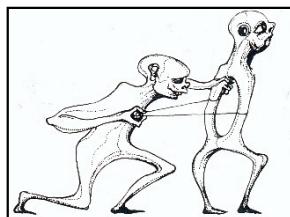
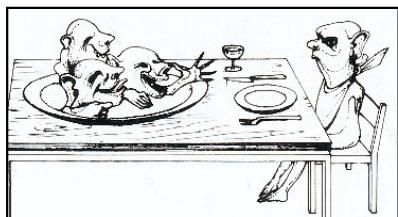
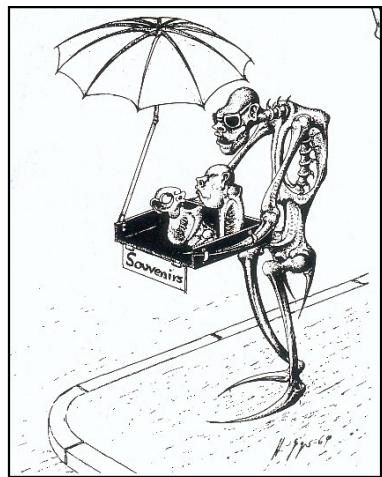
Opposition/living democracy (Monthly magazine on politics and culture)

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Giger uses caricature to metaphorically describe his country's society, which aspires to be an atomic power, something typical in a global context dominated by latent war and scientific and technological revolution. Giger observes this issue with great irony. This theme appears constantly in almost all of his work, which revolves mainly around contemporary man and all his problems, his role in society, and his political and rebellious stance. In these satirical drawings, we find a young artist, just starting out in his career and still in training, in a period of technical apprenticeship. These atomic beings are mutating into a new species as a result of the effects of radiation and atomic bombs. They are monsters, grotesque beings reminiscent of Bosch's hellish universe and demonic iconography. Their figurations are simple, plastically unelaborate, with a rather expressive interest, seeking to evoke a literary response. It should be remembered that they are not presented as a series or set,

but rather appeared regularly in magazines as Giger created them during his classes or practical sessions with Meissen.

The atomic children form a small gallery of atomic teratology. Some have been reduced to bones, others are mutants. Black humour is very present in this series: skeletons are found in hammocks by the side of a swimming pool sunbathing. In another cartoon, some children knock on an old woman's door, who looks out; on the upper floor, another child prepares to activate a guillotine to decapitate the old woman while the other waits with a basket to collect the head. A hand emerges from an Easter egg and throws a grenade at another egg from which a child has emerged with the message 'Happy Easter!'. In a wagon, two children armed with a machine gun are pushed by the torso of a woman with black hair and gloves, who is standing on a mechanical spine [105]. Other children use their classmates as slingshots or take them to the picnic area [104, 106]. Another plays with a vampiric system that consists of hitting a fellow child locked in a wooden box with a mallet so that a saucer rises and the bell rings. The combination of bodily fantasies, deformation and black humour with political content is interesting (it is the era of the Cold War and nuclear fear). Giger also includes himself among the *Atomic Children*: "we... don't want to moralise...". From these cartoons he moved on to A4 illustrations. From 1964 onwards we find more complex works, magazine illustrations, drawings and designs that reflect a remarkable aesthetic and stylistic evolution.



102-106-Atomic Children (1961-1963)

## A Feast for the Psychiatrist

In 1966, he published a series of works under the title *Ein Fressen für den Psychiater (A Feast for the Psychiatrist)*, ink drawings resulting from his readings of Freud and his dream experiences<sup>166</sup>, created between 1964 and 1966. During these years, he developed the seeds of his biomechanical style, the product of his particular anatomical analyses and reinterpretation of the human body. Some of Giger's classic and most repeated archetypes were produced during this period, such as the *biomechanoids* and the *bullet children*.

In this series, he used the A4 format, increasing the size of his drawings. His personal works began to take up more and more of his free time, which he combined with his reading. It is clear that the academic training he was receiving during those years influenced him in some way, as his drawings, which followed a similar theme, gradually gained in detail and compositional complexity. His earlier drawings were the product of a hobby. Now there is a greater artistic and creative intention and a desire to evolve in terms of expression and style, a constant desire to improve.

The series consists of a dozen ink drawings on *Transcop* paper. It was also published in underground magazines and was included in a publication edited by Giger himself, his first individual publication of drawings.

Here, Giger works with Freud's dream interpretations, altering their outcome in his drawings. These visions reveal artistic influences such as Francis Bacon, for example in the drawing *At the Doctor* [112], and literary influences such as Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*). In another image entitled *The Exhibitionists* [111], a young woman observes ghostly, cadaverous figures opening their coats to reveal their internal skeletons in a room from which organic structures resembling flesh hang. Other plates show grotesque beings sitting at a bar or playing in

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<sup>166</sup> Giger kept a diary of his own dreams.

pool tables as in *Tilt* [108], with twisted skeletal figures. It is like the setting of a grotesque horror film, with black humour. In addition, the texture of the wall, or in this case the pool table, is organic, formed by an amalgam of anatomical elements. In *En el abismo (In the Abyss)*, three figures wrapped in black cloaks balance on fantastical, supernatural forms. In *Los diez milares superiores (The Ten Thousand Above)*, beings with exposed bones converse in an enclosure while drinking [110]. The supports for the figures are reminiscent of those used by Dalí in some of his paintings. This kind of X-ray view of bars reflects his peculiar vision, which distorts human beings, transforming them into grotesque characters and monsters. As we have seen, these were places that greatly inspired him in his youth and where he let his imagination run wild. In *Supermarket*, bullet children parade seated in front of women [109].

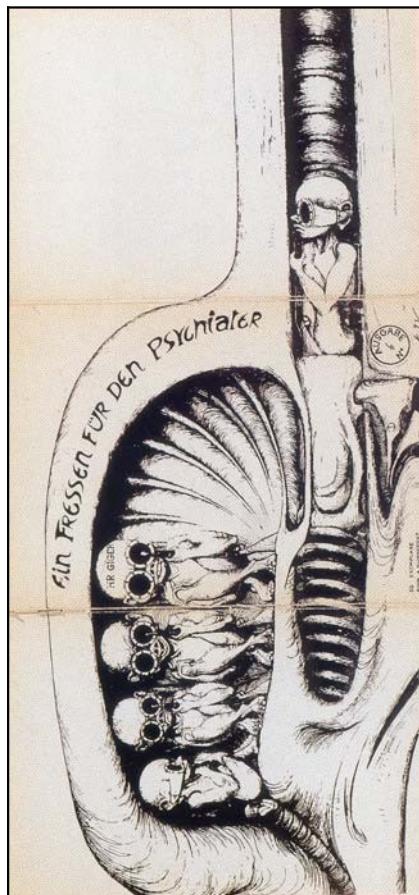
Another interesting illustration is *His Master's Voice*: in a setting of passageways and staircases leading nowhere, with mutilated figures plunging into the void in their wheelchairs, carrying a record player and headphones (they are listening to music). The title of the work is located to the right of the composition on an organic wooden cross with spider web iconography. The influences of Bacon and Beckett are reflected in Giger's metaphysical quest, as they are two complementary authors who define existentialism (a philosophy that interested him greatly at the time).

The cover of the folder [107] presents an early version of what would become his famous work *Pistola paridora* (Birthing Gun). He had previously made a drawing with a very similar idea. In this version, he depicts the uterus that he would later transform into a gun and the bullet children (they also appear in his *Pozos* series, but full-length). They were produced at a time when Giger was attempting to analyse the influence of his dreams on his work based on Freudian premises; he thus discovered that the thoughts and ideas of the moments of wakefulness before sleep are very important. He tried to influence his dreams through various exercises before going to sleep, in order to corroborate Freud's theories.

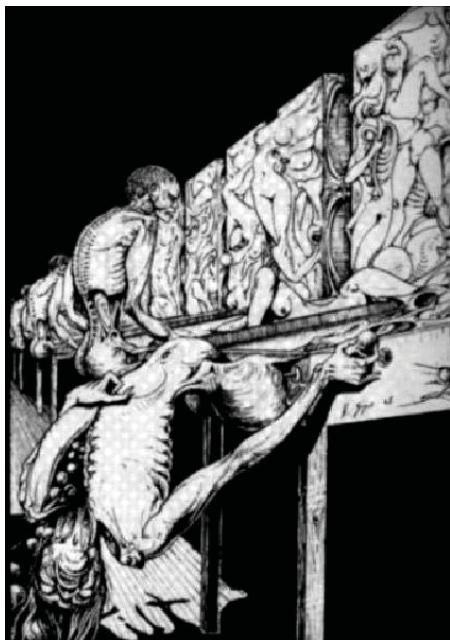
Giger transforms the body, manipulating it to create fantastical figures with literary roots. They are related to horror and mystery novels. His

primary sources of inspiration are dreams, the dreamlike experiences that surface in the subconscious and which Giger tries to bring to the surface. Freud's writings are undoubtedly an important reference point for evaluating Giger's work, especially for these early series of drawings.

In 1966, he produced illustrations for *Cthulhu News* magazine, including two drawings based on *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The 120 Days of Sodom* and *The Attempt to Publish a New God*. These creations blend his influences from Gothic novels and science fiction, creating ghostly beings and astronauts.



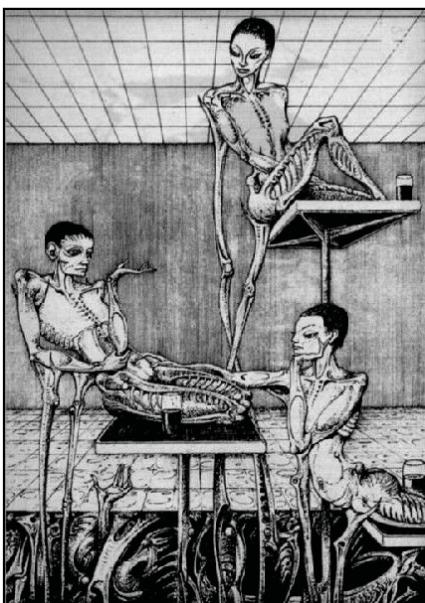
107-Cover of the portfolio of drawings *A Feast for the Psychiatrist* (1966)



108-*Tilt* (1965)



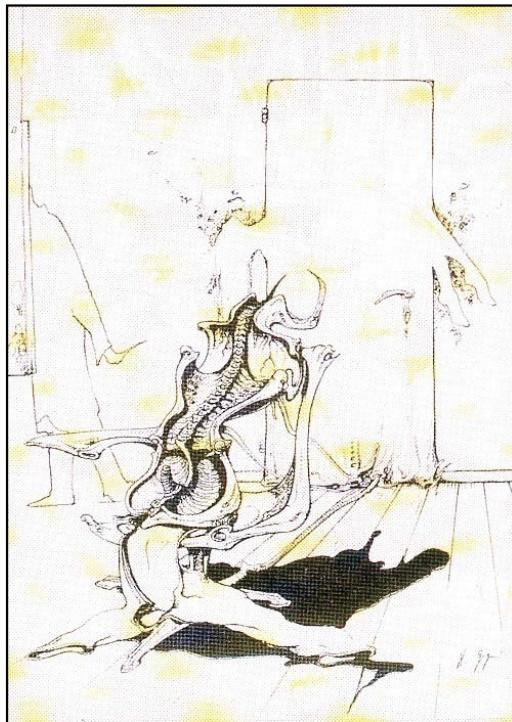
109-*Supermarket* (1965)



110-*The Ten Thousand Above* (1964)



111-*The Exhibitionists* (1965)

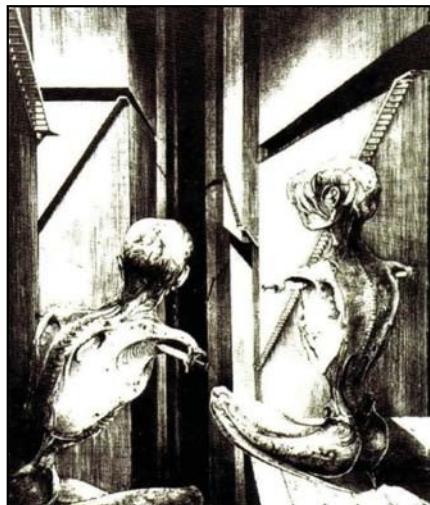


112-*At the Doctor's* (1965)

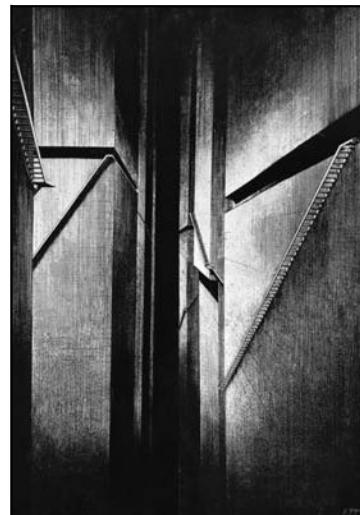
## Wells

His first important ink works are those that make up the *Wells* series (1966), in which he once again draws on dreamlike experiences. These are his first large-format works (80 x 63 cm). The drawings appear in the documentary film *High*. He achieved a certain degree of recognition with them, as the museum in Chur purchased two pieces from the series, which are now part of its collection. He used fine lines to achieve the effect of depth in the endless walls and wooden staircases. In this series, Giger developed an imaginary underground world, with hidden chambers, staircases and passageways, thus creating a funereal and mortuary aesthetic. They emerge as memories of his parents' house, which had a staircase with a mysterious window. "At that time, I was a bit of a sleepwalker and had recurring dreams that haunted me (...). In my dreams or on my sleepwalking walks, that window was open and I

They could see immense bottomless pits, submerged in a yellowish, sickly light. Along their walls and leading into the void ran wooden staircases, extremely dangerous, without handrails, and steeply inclined. Now, since I began to draw such imaginary abysses, the window remains closed during my dreams" <sup>(167)</sup>. Another source of his fantasies was the basement. It was said that Chur had two underground tunnels leading to the city centre, and the Giger basement was part of it. The exit that was previously open was closed, allowing Giger to give free rein to his dreams. However, in his dreams, "the tunnels were open and led to a monstrous labyrinth, in which all the dangers of the world awaited me" <sup>(168)</sup>. This imaginary and disturbing world of tunnels and passageways is inhabited by strange beings, such as members of the Ku Klux Klan pierced by the iron bar of a foosball table, children armed with rifles who rush into the void, Siamese twins, mutilated beings without arms or legs [113, 115], and ghostly spectres that wander through space[116]. The architectural setting consists of labyrinthine walls and staircases [114]. His readings, which feature castles with torture chambers, also influence him.



13-Pozo VI (1966-68)

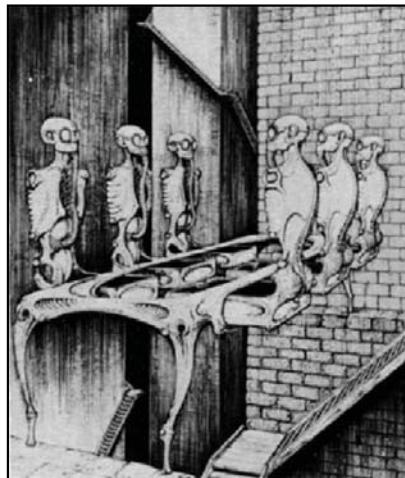


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114-Pozo VIa (1966-68)

<sup>167</sup> *Arh+*, *Op.cit.*, p 34.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*



115-Well V (1965)



116-Well VII (1966)

### 2.3.1.3. The influence of science fiction

Between 1966 and 1968, his artistic and iconographic discoveries in the field of drawing culminated in some of his most emblematic works in this area. From then on, he began to take a greater interest in painting, undergoing a transition phase towards a stage in which he would work mainly in this medium. During these years, he developed many ideas, creating personal drawings. He thus moved away from his work as a magazine illustrator to pursue his own interests. He adopted an expressionist style, related to black and white photography that suggests past eras, with finishes reminiscent of antique engravings. The influence of science fiction, motivated in part by the development of the space race in vogue in those years, translated into an interest in and subsequent elaboration of alien anatomy.

In *La voz de Amerika I* [117], he created figures of torn human limbs in anguished poses, in dreamlike, fantastical settings typical of science fiction in their mode of representation, floating above a series of planets. In the first, there is a kind of biomechanical record player, with a human arm acting as the arm of the record player and a dagger as the needle. The arms of the main figure appear separated from the torso with syringes stuck in their arms, in what could be a composition of Christ on the cross with his arms outstretched, but instead of nails, syringes are stuck in them. In addition, the face appears to be turned in a forced manner, which, due to the facial features, which are confused with those of a skull, evoke a scream, in the expressive style of Munch. Above his head is a kind of crown of thorns that looks like a flying spider. Other expressive elements include the barrel of a submachine gun embedded in the trachea and a chemical container floating behind in the background. One of the figures wears glasses, the other a bandage and a cigarette between his lips.

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The drawing *Underground* [118] illustrates the idea of the perversion of human nature through science. An underground laboratory, as indicated by the title, with bodies lying on beds connected by tubes to organic structures resembling hospital drips. The bodies are stylised and androgynous in appearance, despite being face down, with long hair: one of them is wearing suspenders, denoting certain feminine traits. On the left, closer to the viewer, a sinister figure emerges from the shadows, creating a mysterious and theatrical appearance, like a guard or an executioner (reminiscent of the character of the Phantom of the Opera). The steps of the staircase in the foreground are related to the series of wells he drew during these years, still influenced by his readings of Freud, the treatment of his childhood memories as the passageways and tunnels of the pharmacy during his childhood. The beings with cables connected like umbilical cords could well have inspired filmmaker David Cronenberg, as they anticipate the protagonists of his film *Existenz* (1999).

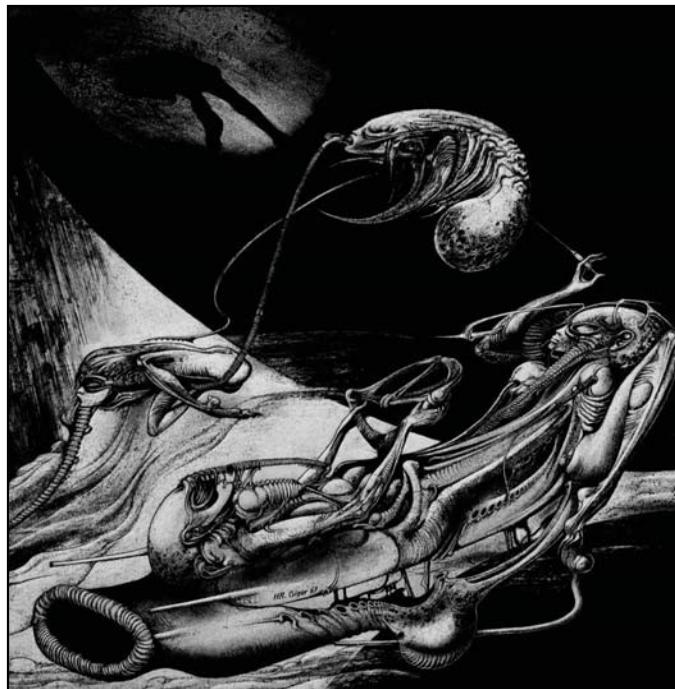
He drew extraterrestrial figures, tubed female beauties like *Alpha*, with a technified body and a skull fused with a parasitic organism. In *Astro-eunuchs* [122], he continues to work on alien morphology and develops creatures that will evolve into the monster we see in *Alien*. In *Underground* [126], there is a figure encapsulated underground with a tube connecting it to the outside world, through which it breathes. In a new drawing entitled *Atomic Children* [124], the figures are stylised and elongated, a technique that Giger would later use extensively in his paintings. He also drew organic landscapes and post-nuclear cityscapes.



117- *The Voice of Amerika I* (1966)



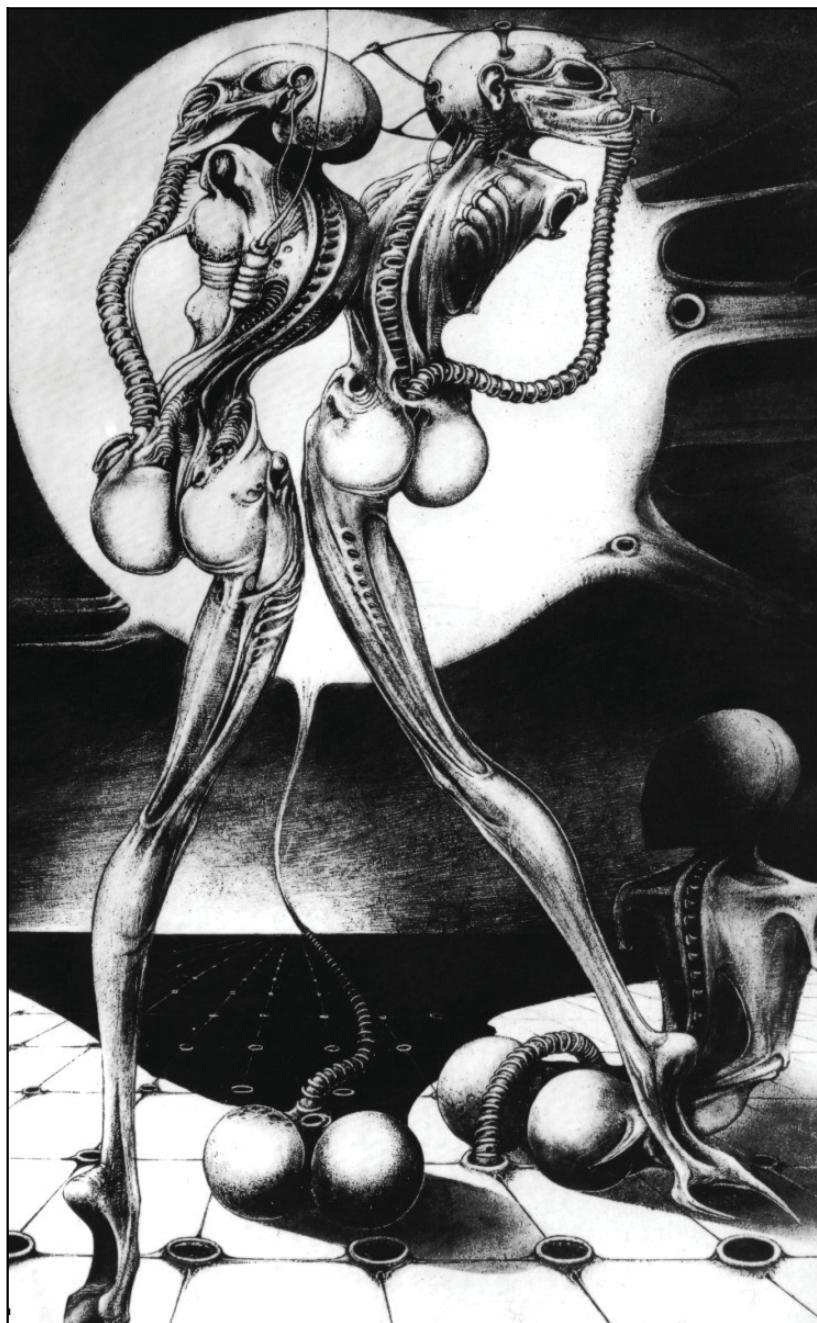
118- *Underground* (1966)



122- *Astro-eunuchs* (1967)



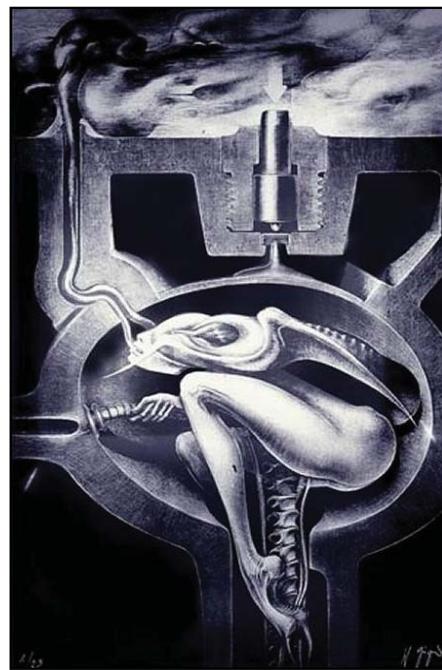
123- *Mother with Child* (1967)



124- *Atomic Children* (1966-1968)



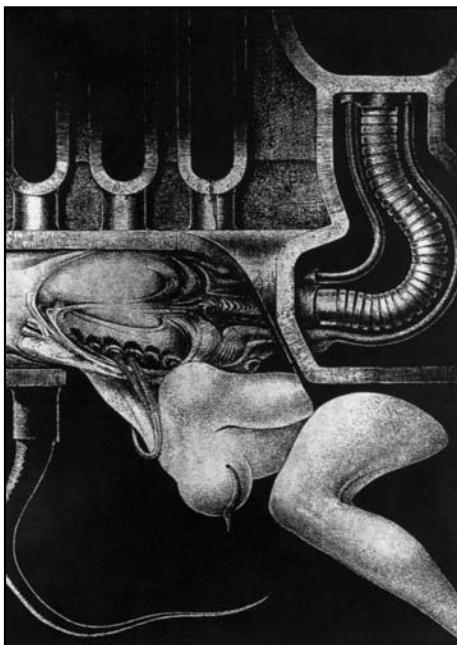
125- *Organic Matter III* (1966)



126-*Underground* (1968)

### *Biomechanoids*

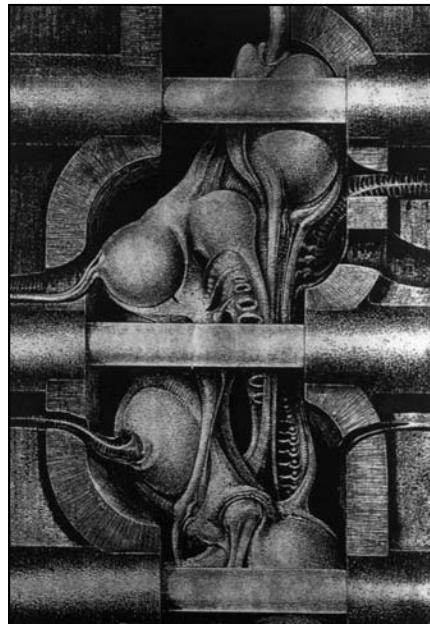
The *Biomecanoids* represent his most evolved beings in his early drawing phase, especially in the series of the same name. The forms become more corporeal, and metals also take on a greater presence. This series is more claustrophobic than the *Pozos* series. Now there is hardly any space for air to circulate, and breathing is done through tubes. These are mutating female bodies that are fragmented and imprisoned by metal plates and heavy industry [119-121]. The whole is imbued with strong sexual symbolism. Curved lines, like those of furniture, predominate in the designs.



119- *Biomecanoide* (1969)



120- *Biomecanoide* (1969)

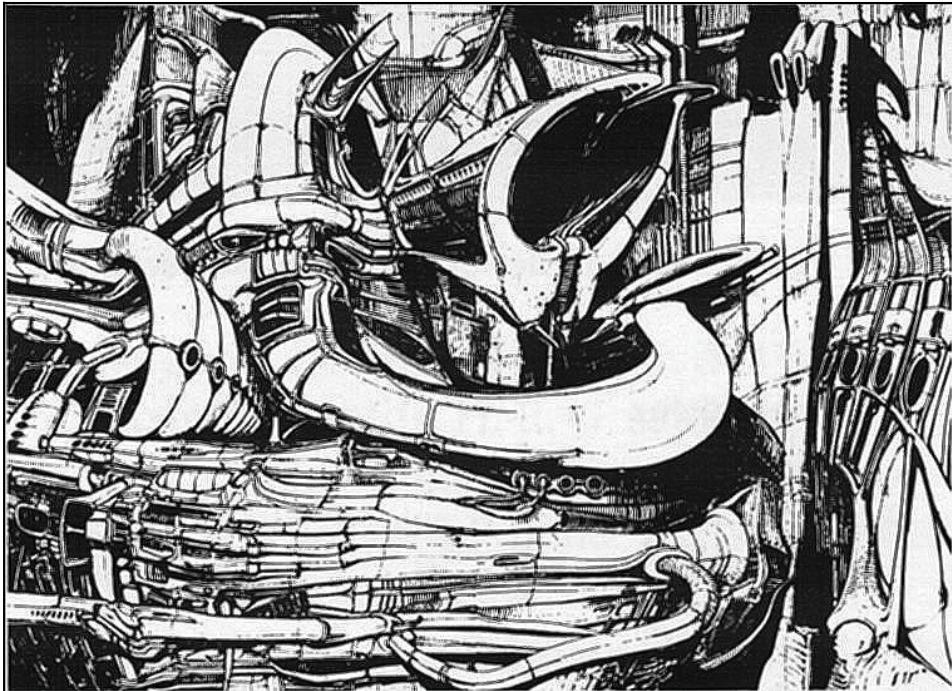


121-*Biomecanoide* (1969)

#### 2.3.1.4. 70s

The drawings of biomechanical landscapes from early 1971 are the prelude to his airbrush creations and the numerous landscapes he would develop at that time. In these drawings, there is already a definitive fusion of forms, a symbiosis of nature and technology, of organisms and devices. The fleshy forms of the body, such as the lips or the vagina, border artificial structures. The interior of the body forms new architectures that now become fantasies. Channels and orifices encrusted with objects such as levers and radiators, antennas, cables. It is a kind of hallucination caused by the overload of drawings and elements that fill the surface.

Later, during the 1970s and early 1980s, his drawings were mainly related to cinema, with his conceptual sketches for films such as *Dune* and *Alien*.



127-Untitled (1971)

#### 2.3.1.5. nd 1980s

In the 1980s, he returned to personal drawings after a long hiatus of a decade in which he focused more on painting. He now used a more nervous line, with a style reminiscent of his airbrush paintings, as in *Back to Mother* (1986). In this drawing, he uses the comic book format (57 x 46 cm), with panels depicting different scenes in sequence, showing erotic scenes, condoms, foosball mechanisms, with many objects and bodies intersecting. It suggests intense, high-speed movement.

A selection of drawings made around 1985 can be seen in his book *Skizzen* (1985), which contains dozens of pencil, ink and pen drawings. Erotic scenes abound in this period, with phalluses and vaginas, penetrations, and glimpses of self-portraits. The ink drawings are more confused, with less clarity of form than the pencil drawings. The shapes are intermingled again, resembling architecture.

In 1988, he produced a new series of drawings entitled *Expanded Drawings*, as he took old ideas and developed them in search of new possibilities. He photocopied previous sketches and drawings and reinterpreted them, creating superimposed drawings: "this way of working caused an unstoppable chain reaction, as he always photocopied the results of the transformations and worked on them again. Therefore, we can speak of expanded drawings, taking into account the evolution from the primitive sketches to the final result" <sup>(169)</sup>. As we have already mentioned, this technique is not new, as the Austrian artist Arnulf Rainer used it in the 1950s (and Dalí before him), retouching his photographic portraits to intensify their expression.

Giger retouches the photocopies with wax paints (Neocolor), lithographic chalk and graphite, achieving more colourful results than in his previous works, which were dominated by monochrome. Most of these compositions are abstract in nature, with rapid, swirling movements.

### 2.3.1.6. 90s

In the early 1990s, he abandoned the airbrush and began drawing on A4 sheets, which he sometimes stuck together to form large planes. This allowed him to send large-scale sketches and ideas to film studios. He worked with broken lines due to the poor resolution of the fax machine: "after 20 years of airbrushing, I have started to devote myself to making sketches in which I specify all the details necessary for my designs" <sup>(170)</sup>.

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<sup>169</sup> [www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com), *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

In 1991, he published a new portfolio of drawings entitled *700 Years Waiting for CH-91*, featuring 50 lithographs, to mark the anniversary of the Swiss Confederation [130]. In it, he devoted many drawings to erotic themes inspired by Sade (he created at least 11 illustrations on *Justine*): with scenes of penetration and perversion involving mutilated bodies. Giger continued to work with small formats [128-129]. This was a new exercise in irony with doses of black humour, with politically incorrect scenes alluding to the family, as in *700 Years Waiting for the Pill for the Family*, or to drugs, as in *700 Years Waiting for Auschwitz-Platzspitz* [131].

In 1992, the *Tarot Baphomet H.R. Giger* appeared, with 24 illustrations from Giger's imagination, themes he was working on at the time in other disciplines such as the Zodiac Fountain and biomechanoids. It brings together various fantastic iconographic elements such as the ghost ship and the myth of the bat.

He produced a drawing entitled *Beer War* (1993) in which he caricatured Bishop Haas of Chur, a figure much criticised by Giger, six times. It is found among an amalgam of elements such as condoms, horns, clocks, trains and jockey sticks.

All the designs he works on are first formulated in drawings, such as the clocks in the *Watch Abart* exhibition, biomechanical sculptures, pins, and his film collaborations (*Species*, *The Killer Condom*), his train in the garden (he makes various sketches of wagons and fantastic shapes) and the museum in Gruyères. On the occasion of *Watch Abart*, he made a multitude of pen drawings. Also in 1992, he published a deluxe edition of his sketchbook with ironic drawings such as that of King Ubu, in which Giger portrays himself.

In 1996, he created several *informative blackboards for Güllen*, in which he once again used his dark humour to unapologetically attack Swiss morality: he criticised animal abuse, sexual relations with animals and the Swiss family, which gathers in front of the television.

He also created his own comic strip, *The Mystery of San Gottardo*. This work brings together his most important drawings from the 1990s, with hundreds of drawings and designs. It mixes different formats and concepts: on the one hand, the novel, to tell the story; on the other, the comic strip with illustrations and

cartoons. He also combines the concept of the storyboard for a possible film adaptation, with the visualisation of scenes and ideas. All this makes it a unique and unclassifiable work.

In 1999, he produced new series such as *Window Lickers*, his tribute to the rock band Rammstein, new erotic drawings and Kafka's *Metamorphosis* as an illustration for an exhibition.

In recent years, he has continued to draw new series. He will produce a new series of biomecanoids entitled *The Professionals* and will work for a long time on his designs related to the Gruyeres bar. He draws as before, at home, usually on his bed and listening to music. Above all, he makes sketches and erotic drawings, which make up most of his graphic production.



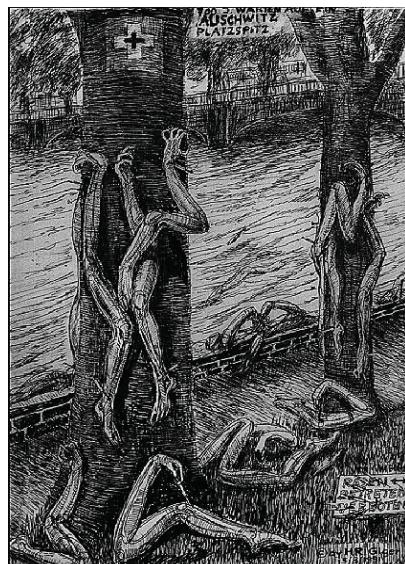
128-Illustration for Marquis de Sade 4 (1991)



129-Illustration for Marquis de Sade 8 (1991)



130-700 Years Waiting for CH (1991)



131-700 years waiting for Auschwitz-Platzspitz (1991)

### 2.3.2. Painting

His work as a painter overshadows his other artistic endeavours, as painting occupies the central part of his oeuvre and is the artistic medium in which he produces the most work. In addition, he fully develops his plastic language, which was already well defined in his drawings, and his iconographic/symbolic repertoire to a greater degree. Giger comments that "without painting, I would not exist," so this facet is vital to him, adding that thanks to painting "I don't need a psychiatrist"<sup>171</sup>. In another documentary, he states about his art, "I am a painter," "people who see my work for the first time are frightened, they are things that are not seen, they are dreamed"<sup>172</sup>. He has around 400 paintings, of which at least a hundred are devoted to designs for cinema.

The evolution of his style can be observed: from geometric motifs and the reduction of figures in oil painting to the creation of colourful compositions and more complex structures. During the 1970s, his classical period of "splendour", he consolidated his style and made his most interesting artistic discoveries.

In this chapter, we will include his personal work, that which he creates of his own volition. We will look at his commissions in film designs and graphic work. In his commissions, he applies his style, which is inseparable from the rest of his work, but we will study it separately.

Giger has often used series as a means of working, in which he has worked on different forms and themes that have led him to complete paintings over a long period of time, which he groups under the same title. He has at least 10 notable pictorial series, among which are some of his most emblematic and important paintings. An analysis of these works reveals the pictorial evolution of his art and the different phases it has gone through.

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<sup>171</sup> Documentary by Alex Bohr, *Das Phantastischen Universum H.R. Giger*.

<sup>172</sup> Documentary by Robert Kopuit, *Die Traumwelt H.R. Gigers* (1981)

### 2.3.2.1. il

Giger had produced an oil painting on wood in 1962, which would be a precedent for his work as a painter from the late 1960s onwards. It is entitled *Vampira*, and depicts a figure with bat wings and an abstract background in shades of grey and blue, in which a skull can be seen.

Between 1967 and 1969, he began working with oil paints, experimenting and painting six small landscapes on cardboard using this technique, teaching himself without much prior knowledge. They feature organic shapes and reddish, dark, blue and grey tones. These are fantastical landscapes in which he mixes organic structures and skeletal forms reminiscent of 1960s science fiction illustrations.

Giger comments on the technique: "When you enter the world of art, sooner or later, whether you like it or not, you are confronted with oil painting. For me personally, oil painting is too slow. Besides, I never took classes in this speciality, so perhaps I haven't worked with the right technique... I used petrol as a solvent to dilute the colour, which gave me very dramatic textures" <sup>173</sup>.

For him, it is too slow a process because he works with glazes, superimposing layers of colour, does not use drying agents, and the process becomes cumbersome and lengthy.

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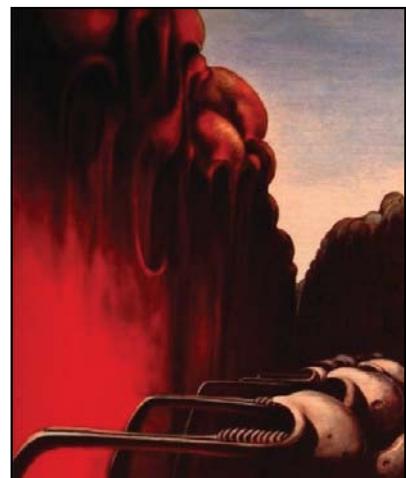
<sup>173</sup> [www.hrgiger.com.](http://www.hrgiger.com/), *Op.cit.* p. 40.



132-*Vampira* (1962)



133-*Landscape* (1967-69)

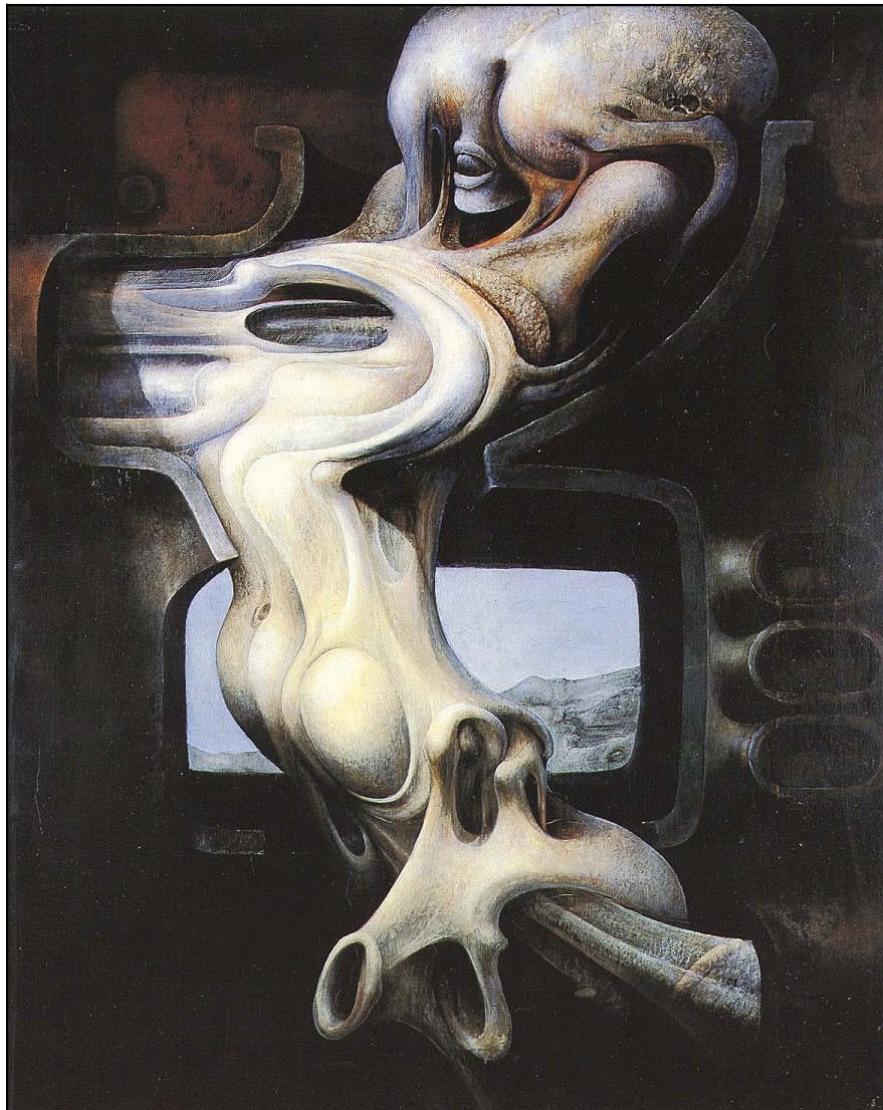


134-*Landscape* (1967-69)

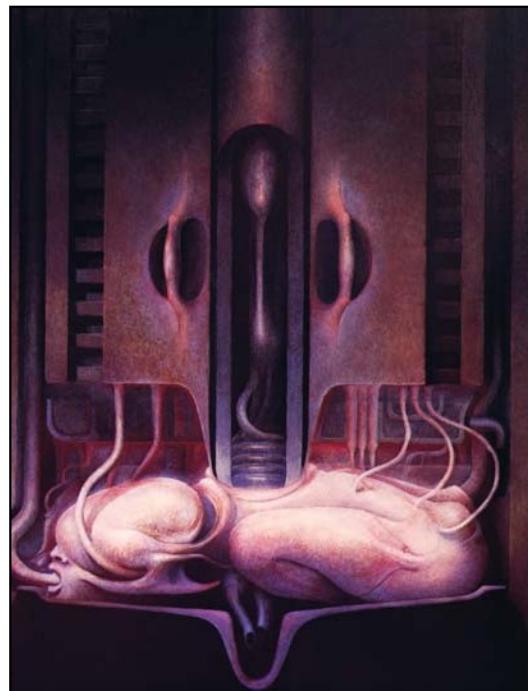
He subsequently produced three oil paintings entitled *Homage to Samuel Beckett*, in which he continued to experiment, this time on wood, which would be the medium he used from then on. He addressed figures in transformation or metamorphosis. In these paintings, forms dissolve, seemingly attacked by disease, corporeality is lost, phallic shapes emerge, and machinery becomes the frame in which these figures are enveloped. The focus is on these three main figures, who appear anguished and tormented as they writhe while dissolving. These works connect with the figurations he created in his series of engravings *Biomechanoiden*, produced around the same time. In fact, the third painting in this series is very similar to *Biomechanoid* (no. 103). *Homage to Samuel Beckett III* (1969) again depicts a form breathing through a tube, its body connected to a machine. The figures have more volume than those in the *Biomechanoiden* series, which appear to be sections of scenes with flatter elements and forms. At the same time, he produced other *Landscapes* and works such as *Humanoid* (1970), *Phalellujah* (1968-69) and *Head III* (1969), using more defined anatomical features, bodies and heads that are transformed into phalluses and enclosed between machinery and iron chambers. In *Humanoid*, a female body looks out onto an empty landscape, wearing a kind of skin-like clothing that blends in with her skin. The effect of atomic radiation seems to have transformed the environment and the body. In *Phalellujah*, the heads are surrounded by a strange organism, a kind of octopus that clings to the head (similar to the facehugger in *Alien*), but instead of showing pain, they stick out their tongues in a sign of pleasure and ecstasy. These oil paintings are reminiscent of Egyptian funerary art, with shapes encased as in sarcophagi related to tombs, with metal windows. They are also reminiscent of the dissolutions of forms by Dalí and Bacon. The feeling of claustrophobia grows in these paintings. They also have a strong sexual implication, related to phallic forms.

Despite his lack of technical knowledge, he achieves works of great technical skill and careful execution with interesting chromatic effects and a polished finish. Giger had to discipline himself and contain his creative impetus, as the oil technique is slow:

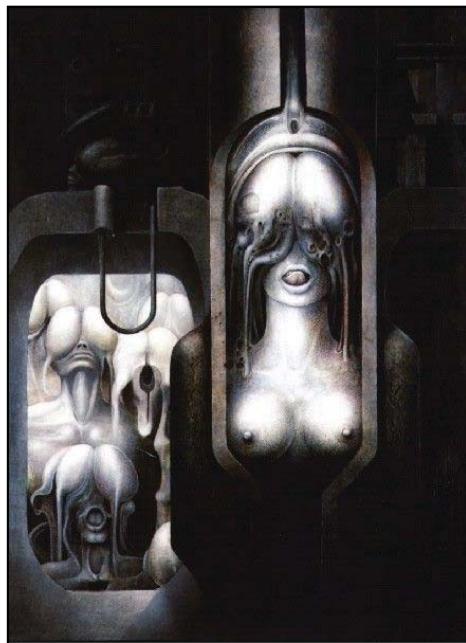
you have to wait for the layers of paint to dry before you can apply more, which slows down the creative process. As he was unfamiliar with the technique, he used petrol as a solvent, which may explain the qualities he achieves in the rusty and reddish tones. The results must have been satisfactory for the artist, as he continued painting and started new series. Next, he would create the *Pasajes (Passages)*.



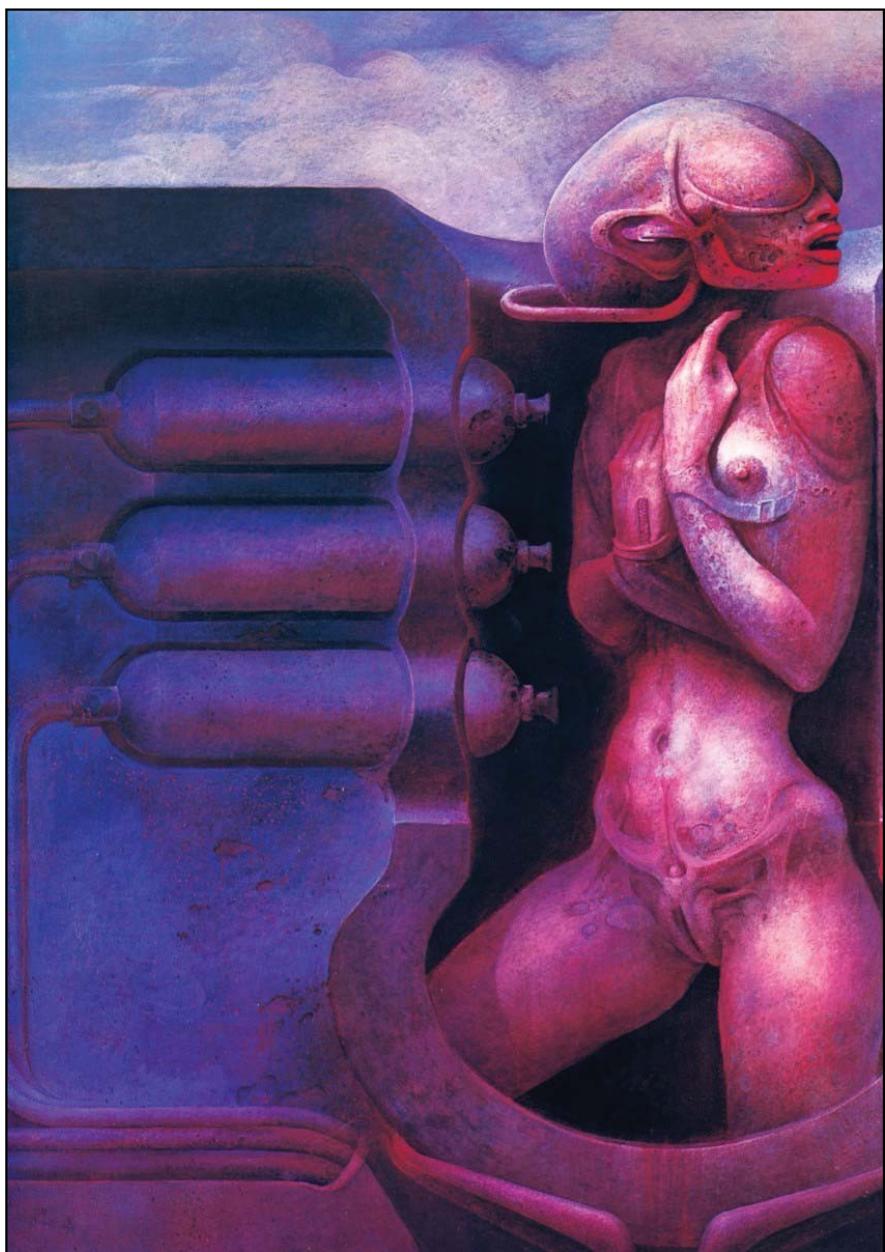
135- *Homage to Samuel Beckett I* (1968)



136- *Homage to Samuel Beckett III* (1969)



137- *Phalellujah* (1968-1969)



138- *Humanoid I* (1970)

### Passages

By the time he began the first *Passages* series in 1969, he had perfected his own technique. In this series, he depicted everyday objects such as bathtubs and toilets, which initially appear realistic, and with which Giger explored the effect of the passage of time on surfaces and metal objects. This series is related to various dreams and nightmares he had during those years in which these elements of his home appeared. Giger applied various psychedelic experiences to these paintings.

In this series of *Passages* (1969-1970), consisting of nine paintings, human figures are omitted. Everyday objects are depicted that appear to be covered in layers of human skin, which led him to call *them wet cell paintings*. *Bañera* (1970) and *Cocina con desagüe y WC* (1970) are some of these works that may allude to his memories of youth, in which he associated the bathrooms at the Zurich School of Arts and Crafts with places that smelled of sex, and established psychological connections with the trauma of birth and the maternal womb.

The living has disappeared, the material remains: iron, on surfaces or hinges, meticulous holes with enlarged details. These are industrial products, without any organic presence. There is a transformation from inorganic to organic.

The series is related to nightmares and hallucinations such as those described by Giger himself: "I was lying on the bed watching Li dance in a yellow suit, which splashed the room with rays of yellow light. The space was filled with red geometric shapes and the paint on the wall was peeling off in layers. The walls pulsed to the rhythm of my heart. The first symptom of anxiety appeared when I suddenly had to pee, and I went to the bathroom. The rim of the toilet bowl slowly grew towards my penis, as if it were a vagina and was going to castrate me. At first I found the idea amusing, but suddenly the whole room began to narrow more and more, the walls and pipes took on the appearance of shifting skin with ulcer wounds, and repulsive little creatures glowed at me

glowed at me from the dark corners and crevices" <sup>174</sup>. These experiences are reflected in paintings such as *WC* and are related to the castration complex and the myth of the *vagina dentata*.

Giger suffers from claustrophobic nightmares (hence perhaps the psychedelic effects) which he will try to overcome by creating this series: "The first *Passages* paintings were created in 1969, as a result of a series of dreams. In most of these dreams, I was in a large room with no windows or doors. The only exit was a dark metal opening, which, to make matters worse, was partially blocked by a giant safety pin. I got stuck trying to pass through. The exit at the end of a long chimney, which could only be seen as a tiny point of light, was, unfortunately for me, blocked by an invisible force. So I found myself trapped as I tried to pass through this tube, my arms pinned against my body, unable to move forwards or backwards. At that moment, I began to lose my breath and the only way out was to wake up. Since then, I have painted some of the images from these dreams in the *Passagen* series (I-IX), and as a result I have freed myself from recurring memories of this particular birth trauma. But the *Passagen*, which for me symbolise maturity and decay, accompanied by all stages of pleasure and pain, have not yet alleviated my fascination"(175).

Giger asked his mother what his birth had been like and "remembered that I had always tried to get out, but couldn't. So the object seen in *Passage I* [141], which is shaped like a hook and prevented me from entering the world, is surely part of a forceps! How horrible!" <sup>176</sup>.

The painting entitled *Passage Triptychon* [139] brings together different motifs from the series, such as the toilet, the sink, the pipes and the taps. The toilet motif already appeared in one of the drawings in the *Atomic Children* series. In *Bathtub II* [140], if the perspective is viewed from above, a man can be seen urinating and looking at his belly, revealing a human body, again in relation to his dream experiences.

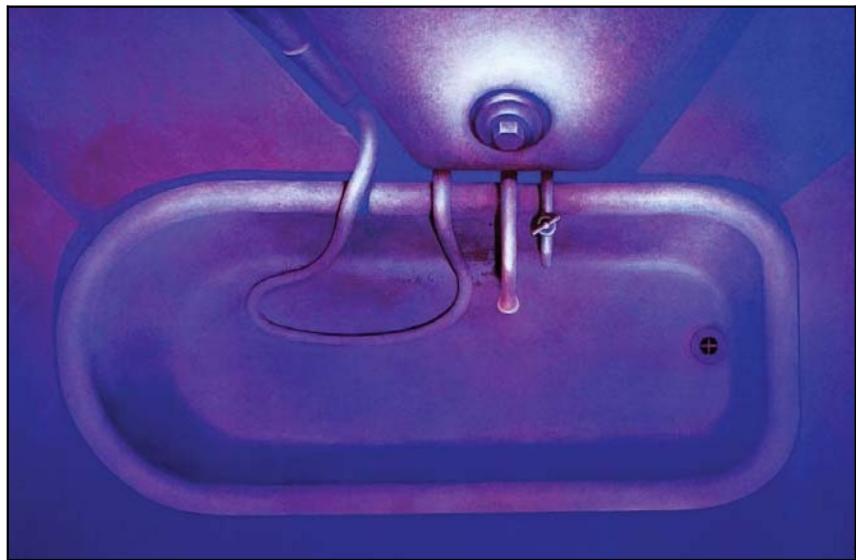
<sup>174</sup> H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon*, *Op.cit.*, p.14

<sup>175</sup> H. R. Giger. *Retrospektive 1964-1984*, *Op.cit.*, p.34.

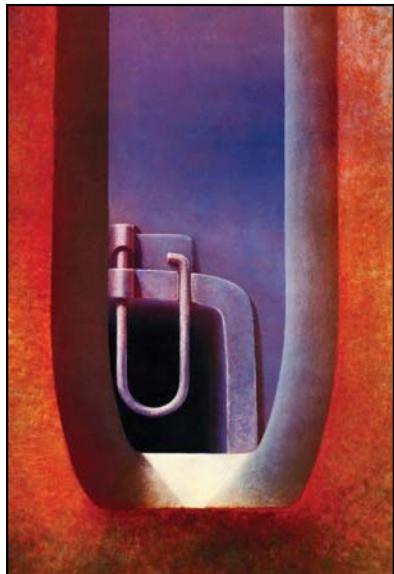
<sup>176</sup> Arh+, *Op.cit.* p.68.



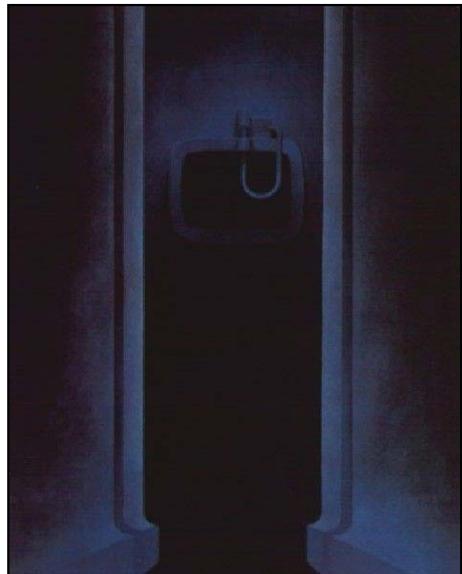
139- *Triptych* (1970)



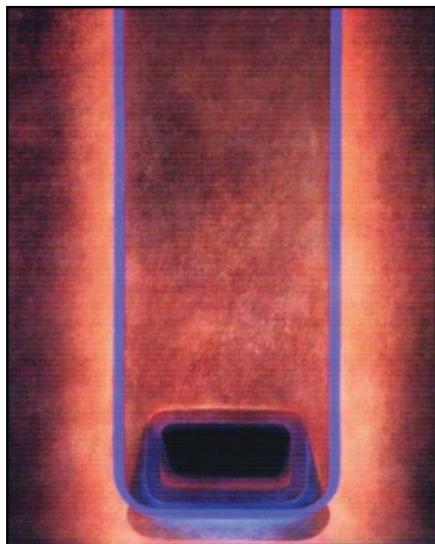
140- *Bathtub II* (1970)



141-*Passage I* (1969)



142-*Passage IV* (1969)



143-*Passage VI* (1969)



144-*The Four Elements* (1970)

## 2nd series of Passages

The end of this pictorial transition is marked by the second series of Passages. Begun in 1971 and completed in 1972, now using an airbrush, the series was inspired by images of a refuse lorry that Giger photographed on a trip through Cologne, just as it was collecting rubbish. Giger was travelling with Li to London to visit his friend Fredi Murer, with the intention of shooting a documentary about Giger's visual world, which would be titled *Passages*. In Cologne, they stayed at the home of their friend from the rock band Floh de Cologne. "There, I saw a German rubbish collector in action for the first time. I was so fascinated by this mechanical-erotic routine, the final solution for those bins full of rubbish, that I immediately took some photographs" <sup>177</sup>.

The truck collected the bins and emptied them, a movement that impressed Giger, who would associate it with the sexual act [145-146]: Based on the image of the deposit, he would make chromatic variations, constantly repeating the motif, which would have clear geometric lines that perfectly frame the composition. Squares, circles and parallel lines act as axes. Giger comments, "with the help of psychedelic painting, I tried to adapt them to all kinds of real situations in order to preserve as much objectivity as possible in these artefacts, as if they had been made to measure for me" <sup>178</sup>. He refers to the 23 paintings he made on this theme of the rubbish collector, in a very realistic, almost photographic style. Through the use of different shades, he creates erotic effects and enhances this sensation with his retouching. These paintings were conceived as a sub-series of the *Passages*, as he numbers them from X to XXXIII, following the numbering system used in the previous *Passages*.

The motif can be associated with the crematoria of the Nazi concentration camps and, in a more apocalyptic reading, with waste and the abject, associating the rubbish bin with the penis (*Passage XVII*) and rubbish with the

<sup>177</sup> H. R. Giger. *Retrospektive 1964-1984*, Op.cit., p.34.

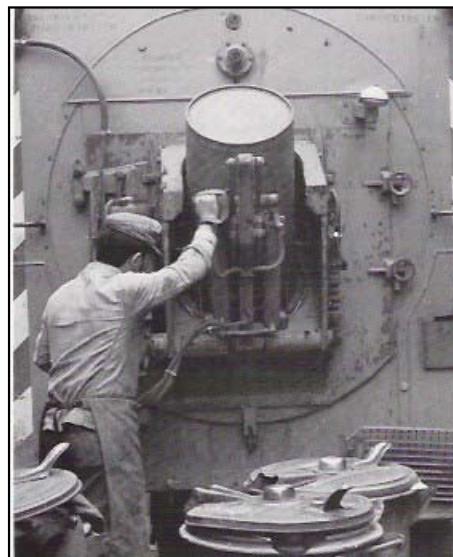
<sup>178</sup> Arh+, Op.cit., p.70.

semen (*Passage XXII*) [147], and the collector with the vagina (*Passage XXIX*) [148] and the womb, the place where the filth of the world goes. The motif of the womb as a sewer and a monstrous place will be explored further by Giger, as in his series of temples, where he repeats this same motif of filth in a painting, making it a theme he works with continuously. A more advanced version in monstrous terms will be the *Alien* spacecraft.

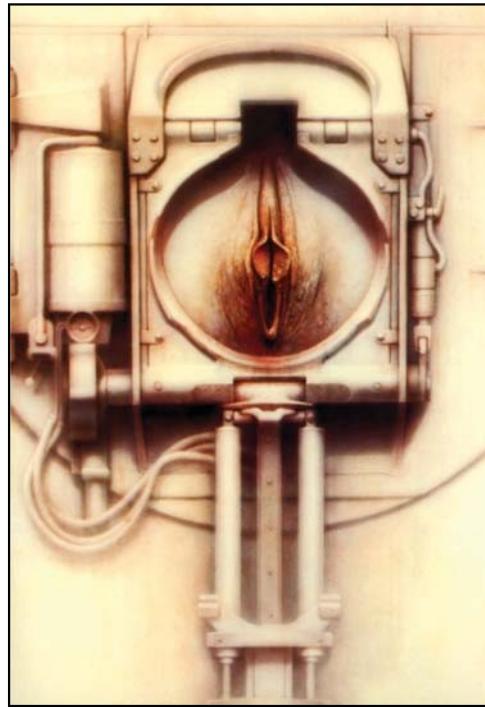
In this series, he also works with surface textures and transparency effects. He studies how biological and technological elements merge in a more sophisticated way, becoming confused, producing confusion and unease, instability, altering in a certain way our perception of the organic, which appears mechanised.

With the use of greens, he produces new chromatic effects, such as moss covering metal, the passage of time, or the triumph of nature. The machine comes to life, appearing animated. He also applies flesh colours, earth tones, as studies of the human body. They are techno-organic machines. His paintings have an aspect of internal healing/sanctification, as he worked from dreams and nightmares.

The *Passages* led to a simplification of motifs and, in general, of his oil paintings. In the *Passages*, there is a profound thematic and formal change in Giger; the mutants disappear and are replaced by everyday objects such as the bathtub or the mirror, but endowed with a magical aura. His next step, the mechanism repeated in the *Passages* series and inspired by rubbish chutes, creates an unsettling creative discipline in which the limitation of forms is imposed.



145-146-Garbage collection in Cologne. Photos by Giger (1971)



147-Passage XXII (1972)

148-Passage XXIX (1973)

### 2.3.2.2 irbrush painting

Without a doubt, the most emblematic period is that defined by the use of the airbrush, that is, between 1972 and 1990. To narrow it down even further, we could point to his peak period, his most prolific years in which he achieved technical and compositional perfection, between 1972 and 1977, which are graphically captured in *Giger's Necronomicon*, an essential book for delving into the artist's world and appreciating the dense content of his enigmatic works. The book reproduces some of the works from his most important series.

Giger's visual imagery during this period is overflowing with artistic and iconographic references, as well as a multitude of images and figures that populate his paintings, in contrast to his second series, *Passages*. During these years, he produced his most characteristic biomechanical creations and his most baroque works, to define in some way the colourful variety found in his compositions, in which few surfaces are left uncovered. The aesthetic and visual appeal and the great evocative power of the striking images produced during these years give an idea of Giger's unique world, his concerns and artistic approaches, which are dominated by a dark and sinister figuration full of esoteric and occult elements in which a struggle between Eros and Thanatos is eloquently glimpsed. The suicide of his partner Li in 1975 caused the artist to fall into a depression that he would only overcome by concentrating on his paintings and new projects such as his first international film attempt, *Dune*. The culmination of this period was Giger's work on the 1979 film *Alien*, in which, with a now highly mature style, he achieved some of his greatest artistic successes by translating his concepts into three dimensions for the medium of film, which perfectly suited this creator's ideas.

In 1972, he began to use the airbrush, also known as a spray gun. For Giger, it was the most direct means of executing his thoughts and showing his inspiration, and he mastered it, according to him, when the technique was not visible. With

the airbrush, the surface is sprayed with acrylic paint, emitting a layer of spray with which the contours of the figures are drawn.

It is an industrial device with magical connotations for Giger, as it is capable of altering a surface, drawing on it without touching it, in the same way that a gun changes the physical characteristics of an element by firing without touching the target, performing the act from a distance. Giger discusses his relationship with the device and the automatic execution of his drawings, allowing his hand to carry out the dictates of his mind and opening his thoughts in a deep state of concentration.

"The work sessions began in the afternoon and usually lasted until the early hours of the morning. I started using black acrylic and later switched to Indian ink. I began the work from the top left and worked my way down to the bottom right. The drawing emerged spontaneously without any sketches or prior ideas, trying to disconnect my thoughts as much as possible so that they could come out of my mind free of censorship. Many critics, who liked the *Passages* series, were horrified by this kitschy, baroque, ornate style and saw the drawings as a retrograde step towards a type of outdated surrealism<sup>179</sup>.

But the importance of these paintings lies in the fact that they allowed Giger to discover new structures and establish accurate connections with the architecture of the human body on the one hand, and with the technological world on the other. "I also realised the tremendous frankness of the *airbrush*, which allowed me to project my visions directly onto the pictorial surface, freezing them immediately"<sup>180</sup>. Giger describes the operation of the airbrush as an automatic task: "Over time, working with this instrument becomes as automatic as driving a car. One becomes a mere automaton, a machine, functioning even when the boundaries of lucid thought are crossed, such as in a state of intoxication"<sup>181</sup>.

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<sup>179</sup>H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon*, *Op.cit.*

<sup>180</sup>H. R. Giger. *Retrospective 1964–1984*, *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

It is actually a very sophisticated and highly accurate painting tool. It is also a tool shrouded in a certain mystery, due to its obscurity in the art world and its complex operation compared to traditional painting media. It is basically used to apply paint sprayed by a jet of pressurised air. The handling of this mechanical air propulsion and the mode of operation on the surface requires a high degree of drawing skill. In Giger's case, this forms a whole concept, as he directly executes his inner dreams or nightmares, like an automaton, without prior reasoning. Only once the work is finished can it be interpreted. This is a surrealist method, as it is mainly inspired by the world of dreams. He brings to light, from the depths, everything that disturbs and terrifies him<sup>182</sup>. This is a form of therapeutic exorcism through which he frees himself from the nightmares that haunt him. On other occasions, he works on an idea or a theme and develops a programme to follow.

The *aerograph* was invented by Charles Burdick in 1893. This brand name has become the generic name for all instruments of the same type. It is a new and modern artistic tool that has been around for just over a century. However, it has a long tradition in the world of illustration and advertising. Its original function, photo retouching, has expanded, and many illustration professionals now use it. It allows for impressive results given its degree of precision. It is very effective for capturing parts of nature, man-made objects, fantasy and science fiction themes, and industrial design, and it reproduces the motifs represented with great accuracy, achieving exaggerated realism, or hyperrealism. The gun emits a fine spray of ink when a button is pressed, creating a stained area with an adjustable diameter. This fact, together with the fact that the instrument can be brought close to the pictorial surface and its application varied by pressing the button, makes it possible to obtain figures, lines and dots half a millimetre thick, i.e. very fine and thin lines, together with wide and dense lines. If the pressure is increased and we move away from the

<sup>182</sup> "It is evident that psychic automatism is the royal road to penetration into the deep layers of the mind. Furthermore, it has the advantage of predisposing the spirit to probe the world and life in a new way, which consists of trying to detect an 'enigma' beneath the normal appearances of everyday life." DUROZOI, G.; LECHERBONNIER, B. *Op.cit.*, p. 27.

surface, the result is larger areas with shadows that dissolve into nothingness at the sides.

One of the pioneers in the artistic application of the airbrush was Man Ray in the 1920s, retouching some photos. Later, Alberto Vargas used the airbrush to create the prototype of American female beauty in the 1940s, the *pin-up girl*, who became an icon for the advertising world that was developing at that time. The hyperrealists of the 1960s and 1970s also used this tool. The most famous school in the representation of the human body through airbrush techniques is the Japanese school, with prominent figures such as Jun'Chi Min Murayama and Hajime Sorayama. The latter has also developed a very suggestive erotic figuration, creating a kind of robot girl with a very futuristic design and aesthetic.

Giger, who has cultivated various disciplines, undoubtedly stands out for his use of the airbrush as a means of expression, giving this instrument a new artistic direction. When he began using it in February 1972, very few people were using it, so Giger embarked on a new field of experimentation in search of new expressive possibilities. His friend, fellow painter Hugo Schumacher, introduced him to the tool he was using to retouch photographs. Giger began to experiment and devoted many hours of work to it until he mastered the new painting technique, which allowed him to execute his works more quickly and capture his dream world with great precision, as well as all the formal and iconographic complexities of his works. At that time, he was working on the second series of *Passages*, which he would complete using the airbrush.

At the same time as he was finishing the *Passages*, he began to paint some of the doors in his house, such as those in the bathroom, entrance and kitchen, and to improvise, exploring the artistic possibilities of this tool, which stands out for the photographic quality that can be obtained with mastery of the device. At first, he experimented a couple of times a week. His early works already reveal a great skill for drawing (since he draws rather than paints). The device itself holds its own magic and mystery. This is what fascinates Giger, the execution of paintings without

skimming the surface of the paper, spraying paint as if his thoughts were landing on the work directly from his mind. During the first few months, he used Indian ink. He later introduced white acrylic to achieve new effects in his paintings. He created a multitude of works with the airbrush during the 1970s, including designs for the films *Dune* and *Alien*.

### Technique

Giger is one of the first artists to use the airbrush technique (also called airbrush or spray gun) freely, freehand, drawing directly on paper spontaneously without prior ideas or sketches, disconnecting from everything and immersing himself in his world, as if in a trance, which we see manifested in his works, constituting a kind of personal psychogram.

In this regard, Leonardo da Vinci's words on creative freedom, quoted by Austin Spare in his essay *Automatic Drawing*, are illuminating:

"Among other things, I will not lose my scruples about discovering a new method to assist invention; which may seem unimportant in appearance, but renders a considerable service in opening the mind and placing it in the essence of new thoughts, and this is it: if you look at an old wall covered with grime, or the unusual appearance of some irregular rocks, you can discover various things, such as landscapes, battles, clouds, unusual attitudes, piles of cloth, and so on. From this confused mass of objects, the mind is furnished with an abundance of perfectly new designs and themes"<sup>(183)</sup>. Giger's approach to drawings and paintings will delve deeper into this technique to free the imagination and create new forms.

Previously, as we have already noted, he used a technique in which he sprayed ink with a toothbrush and a sieve, which then allowed him to scratch part of the ink with a razor blade, lightening the dark areas and dotting the details with a technical pen (see drawings from 1966 to 1969).

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<sup>183</sup>SPARE, Austin O. and CARTER, Frederick. *Op. cit.*

For a restless artist like Giger, when he has an idea in mind, he wants to get it down on paper as quickly as possible. That's why he was so enthusiastic about discovering the airbrush, as it allowed him to execute his works quickly, at least the general ideas, since working on the details requires many sessions.

In 1972, Giger bought his first airbrush, a 015 mm model from Efbe, powered first by a carbon dioxide bottle and later by a compressor. Initially, he also used a brush for the *Passages* series.

He began the work in the upper left corner and moved diagonally down towards the centre. In this way, figures and silhouettes gradually emerged until they acquired an effective presence in the work. The airbrush allowed him to project his visions directly onto the canvas, freezing them immediately. These instant images or *cerebral negatives* contain the same enigma as photographic prints that capture a moment of reality. Giger has not denied the use of photography in some of his works, such as the cover for Blondie's album *Koo Koo* or the biomechanical portrait of Li in which he uses prototype, but more than this function for certain paintings, what is interesting is the concept of truthfully capturing his dreams. He attempts to photographically capture his nightmares by illustrating his dreams as photos. He wants to turn them into visible reality, bringing to light the depths of his psyche, his fantastic and dreamlike worlds. This explains the hyperrealistic style of his compositions, showing us in a very figurative way something as difficult to describe or express as dreams.

"With the airbrush, I developed the most direct method, playing with distance and proximity in the backgrounds, with pressure on the paint; this is how very fine lines and clouds magically emerge. This is the surrealist variant of my painting, without prior concepts. It is a kind of automatic writing, which comes from the gut; this is how I produced the paintings with the most disconcerting results. But there are also motifs in which my ideas were conscious, sought after, clear to me before I painted them, for example my paintings with babies. In reality, I

did everything at the same time, working with concepts or operating in a surrealist way. The same goes for three-dimensional objects or designs. I don't make any distinctions"<sup>184</sup>.

"Producing art on commission is impossible for me. When I paint, it is first and foremost for myself, because I want to see something new from Giger again. So I lie in bed, read, dream, leaf through art catalogues and listen to music. In suspense, I wait to find the determination to start work. I hesitate with the decision again and again; it can last for days. But once I have started, the blank areas bother me so much that I do not stop working until everything is covered. I am stimulated by my obsessions, the satisfaction of curious details, new discoveries, connections, or simply the possibility of visualising personal expectations, fears, and problems in order to free myself from them. That is why the format of the painting is sometimes the only thing I decide in advance. I let the content surprise me.

Between 1990 and 1991, he abandoned this technique and, with it, painting as his main artistic expression, to explore other facets such as drawing, design, sculpture and fantasy storytelling. Giger had already exhausted the expressive and technical possibilities of the airbrush and decided to abandon it as a working tool: "In the end, I stopped painting with an airbrush. In the USA, this type of painting is like a hobby or sport. It is very appropriate for science fiction, magazines, etc. But much of it is not art to me, rather illustration. With the airbrush, it is easy to make kitsch; it is very prone to it. It is a technique predestined for producing kitsch. Many have said that you can't make art with an airbrush. That's not true! You can make art with anything if you master it and use it correctly"<sup>186</sup>.

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<sup>184</sup> SIEGERT, Steffen. *Besuch bei HR Giger*. AHA Magazin [online]. 31 October 2000 [Date consulted: 28-3-2004]. Available at: <<http://www.newaeon.de/index.php?act=viewChapter&chapterID=6003>>

<sup>185</sup> H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon*, *Op.cit.*

<sup>186</sup> SIEGERT, Steffen. *Op. cit.*

## Resources

-Use of photography. Hence, the starting point for many of his paintings is realistic, and he then proceeds to superimpose his fantasy world onto real elements. There are examples in which the relationship between painting and photography is more than evident, as he starts with the photographic image and then incorporates shapes, such as the paintings dedicated to the painter Friedrich Kuhn, the second series of Passages, the cover Koo Koo for Debbie Harry, and his biomechanical portraits such as those of Li, Golowin, and Lovecraft.

-Models: his girlfriends, especially Li and Mia, have inspired many of the female figures in his paintings. In addition, for the bone and biomechanical forms, he had four or five skeletons in his studio. He thus studied the plasticity of bones, developing a whole poetics around them.

-Various graphic documentation, mainly books of medical and anatomical illustrations and books on industrial machines and devices.

## Working conditions

-Artificial light (halogen lights, spotlights). He practically never paints outdoors, but rather in an enclosed space, which is his studio/workshop.

-He usually works while listening to loud music (jazz, ELP, rock, Rammstein), which puts him in a special mood for painting.

-He has never claimed to be under the influence of drugs or other substances. Others have commented that he did, as it was normal at the time. It is important to remember his relationship with psychedelia and Timothy Leary (known as the prophet of drugs).

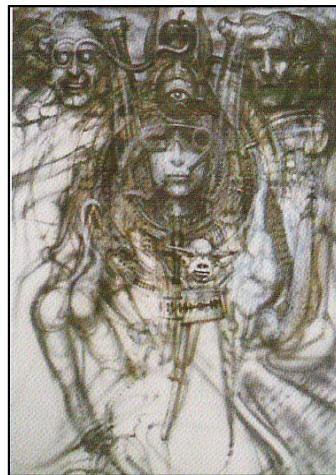
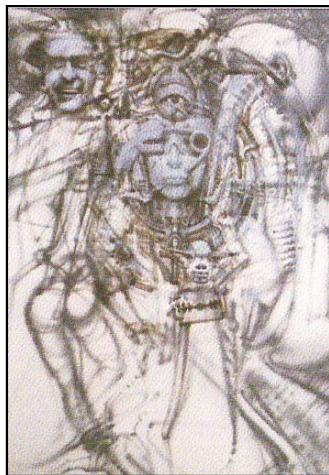
-Execution of series based on themes or programmes, or use of the surrealist technique of automatic writing, working without prior ideas directly from the unconscious.

## Modus operandi

In some of the documentaries about Giger, such as Passagen, we can see how he executes his airbrush technique. We analyse an example **[149-153]**, the sequence of the execution of the painting *Iluminatus I*, a mature painting from 1978, shortly after completing his collaboration on *Alien*.

- 1-fixing of main motifs, contours and silhouettes **[149]**: central head and circle as compositional centre inscribed in a pyramidal shape. Above the head is an eye, surrounded by a swirling movement. On the left is a head that is a portrait of Timothy Leary (photograph). He also draws lines of other figures, bodies
- 2-completing elements around the central figure **[150]**. On the right, he replaces a piece of the body that was previously visible with a portrait of Lovecraft
- 3-He paints more figures (bat-men) in the foreground, creating depth **[151]**.
- 4-He decides on the final figures and their construction and details them. He adds Golowin's portrait behind Leary's portrait **[152]**.
- 5-Final effect: mist and smoke. A sense of emerging from darkness **[153]**.

The result is a work with various heads and figures laden with iconographic and literary connotations. The gloomy composition is created from top to bottom, using diagonals and various geometric elements.



149-153-  
Sequence from  
*Iluminatus I*  
(1978)



## Style

The fragmentary presentation of some figures, which sometimes emerge from a cloud or fog, and the use of a range of muted and dark colours contribute to the depiction of those dreams that we are sometimes unable to remember and reconstruct completely.

Giger's hallmark, in addition to his biomechanical aesthetic, is his elaborate drawing technique and the striking finish of his airbrush paintings. He uses a highly refined technique. Two elements stand out in the process of creating forms:

- The mixture of elements, in symbiosis, fusion...
- The use of multiple references when configuring his paintings and, to a greater extent, when executing series following an idea or theme, as in the case of the "Temples".

## Composition

The compositions of this airbrush stage are very baroque and present an intense horror vacui. The organisation is generally marked by accentuated verticality, by the modus operandi of the author who works from above, descending diagonally towards the lower parts, choosing various symmetrical axes, which are enhanced by figures, sometimes with a formal mannerism in the stretches and elongated figures. These deformations give a mystical and spiritual character, profound as in El Greco and the Vienna School.

## Support

From 1972 onwards, he began to work on a special type of paper used for industrial design (Schollerhammer brand), which was waterproof and which he glued with transparent glue to plywood panels, 12 mm cabinetmaker's boards. He also glued the back of the board so that the paper remained taut.

## Formats

In his triptychs, he uses large formats measuring 240 x 280 cm (*Passagen tempel*) and 420 x 240 cm (in two *Spell*). On many occasions, he uses a medium format of 100 x 70 cm or landscape format 70 x 100 cm (as in many of the paintings in the *New York* series, his second *Passagen* and in his 1973 *Landscape*), 100 x 140 cm and in others larger, 200 x 140 (for emblematic works such as *Li II*, *Biomechanical Landscape* from 1976, *Chidher Grün*, *Vlad Tepes*, *Dance of Witches*).

## Colour

Monochrome dominates his early paintings, playing with contrasts between black and white, using black acrylic paint and drawing the main lines with an airbrush, which he then polishes and elaborates until more complex forms appear. This technique allowed him to make corrections without them being physically noticeable in the finish of his paintings, as the fine layers of sprayed paint covered the surface. He played with chiaroscuro, achieving effects and qualities in his paintings that moved towards greater realism, with photographic quality, creating industrial products as if he were an automaton.

He began to produce large-format works while decorating the walls of his house with paintings. His first work was perhaps *Aleph* (1972-73), painted exclusively with diluted ink using an airbrush, in which one can still see his uncertainty in using this new technique. Later, he would apply white acrylic paint, achieving some of his best pictorial creations in his large triptychs *The Spell* and *Passagen tempel*. During the 1980s, he also used red colours for the paintings in his *Victory* series and continued to create designs for films such as *The Mirror* and *Poltergeist II* using an airbrush and stencils.

Regarding colour, Giger comments:

My representations are not very colourful. In my thoughts about the underworld, I see it as multicoloured, in colours... but it is very difficult

to work in colour. If you try to represent moving forms, you have to be moderate and discreet with colours. Otherwise, it all becomes tacky and in bad taste. I have worked almost exclusively with black and white using an airbrush. Sometimes, when mixing one colour over another, shades ranging from blue to brown emerge. But in reality, I like things with colours, those colours that almost glow. I also tried to do things like that, but I'm not very good at it. I'll leave that to Ernst Fuchs"<sup>187</sup>.

### 2.3.2.3. Experiments in black and white airbrushing

In his early airbrush paintings, Giger is experimenting with his new tool, learning how to draw with it and capture his world. He begins to explore and try to master the technique. With his acquired drawing skills, he will continue his technical training so that he can project his images onto paper. The format grew as he needed more space to work. This can be seen in three of his first paintings that appear in *Giger's Necronomicon*. We will try to chronologically appreciate the evolution of his art, which at this point was about to take a qualitative leap. In these works, he incorporated figures, shapes, bodies and faces, which he mixed with bone elements, producing a kind of photographic negative. *Assuan* (1972) [154] is another exercise in which he fixes his fantasies. This painting has an experimental character in which he tries out ideas and gives the impression of being unfinished. In the centre of the composition is a woman with bat wings. She is a vampire who also has blood on her lips. Her legs are in a birthing position, as if she were about to give birth. A spider appears in the painting, reinforcing the allusion to motherhood, and inside the woman's body there is a phallus. There are other elements such as a series of stylised female legs, bullet children and other goddesses/magicians mixed with bone structures.

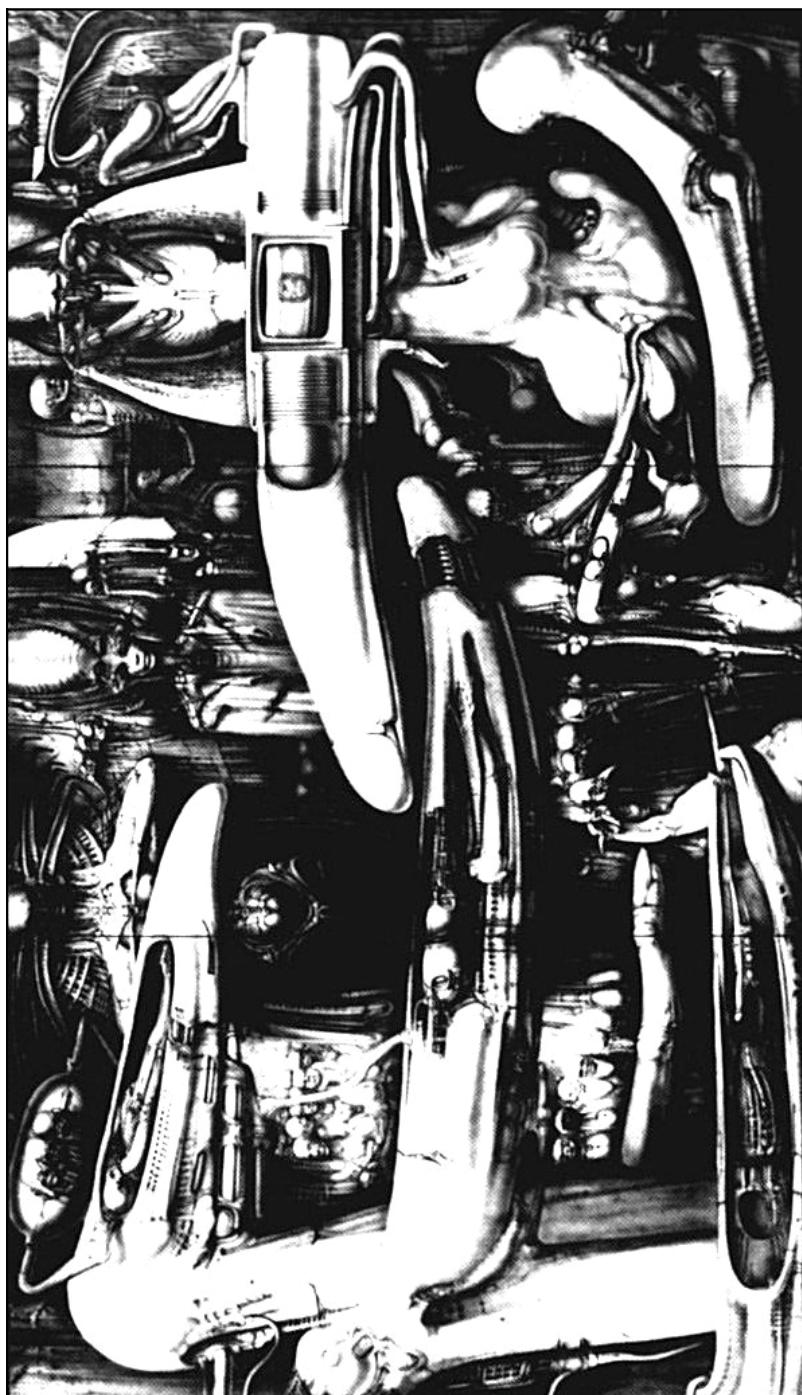
In *Chiquita* (1972) [155], he had already practically defined his style, which had become more sophisticated and improved compared to his earlier paintings, appearing more polished. Some of the figures we see here would be revisited by Giger in later paintings. The phallic shapes, mechanical penises, which can be seen

<sup>187</sup> SIEGERT, Steffen. *Op.cit.*

are reminiscent of some seen in the paintings of Dalí and El Bosco. The characters are connected to his science fiction works. They fill the entire surface, which is crowded; no more figures can fit. He also depicts technified bone surfaces in the process of metamorphosis. In *Super Star*, painted at the same time, he also works with fabrics and costumes. A bone cross supports a suit. The scene is completed by other fantastic forms and beings that seem to come to life, slowly emerging from the painting.



154- *Assuan* (Detail) (1972)



155- *Chiquita* (1972).

The work that closes these "Black Paintings" (due to their lack of colour) is *Aleph* (1972-73) [156], whose title suggests mystery. He alternates this work with others in which he decorates some of the doors in his house (*Water* [157], *Entrance (Entreeé)* and *Kitchen* [158]) with the series of "epidermal landscapes" (children's heads, skulls). In the decorative works for his home, he developed female figures imbued with mysticism and full of symbolic attributes.

In *Aleph*, his style is more consistent and a stylistic evolution can be observed when compared to his previous paintings. He seems to have greater mastery of the airbrush and his figures are presented in a more solid form. It is also enriched by the use of accompanying iconography. He goes into great detail with the heads that appear in fantastic forms. The work seems to become more surreal and symbolic, constructed like a psychedelic vision. The painting is traversed by geometric elements such as crosses and triangles, arranged in vertical lines that intersect with horizontal ones.

In its composition, the centre is dominated by an inverted cross from whose lower part two genitals emerge, from which a large phallus emerges. At the top there is a triangle with an eye inside. On the arms of the cross there are two triangles. One of them contains a star that looks like an intersection of arms and legs. The other triangle contains a cluster of human figures, with legs and skulls crossed.

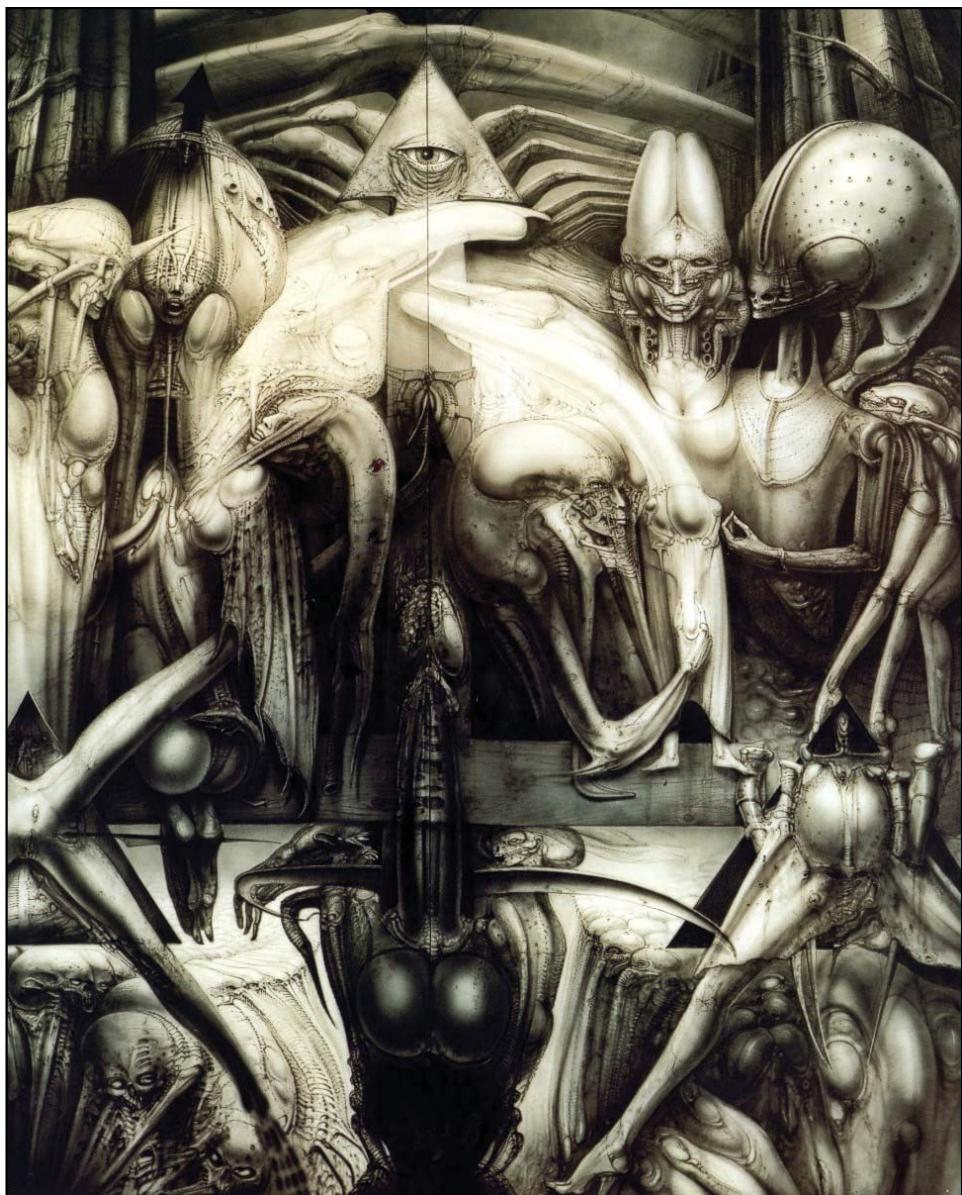
Four figures appear on either side of the cross, in pairs flanking it. From left to right:

- 1- Only their heads are distinguishable, as the rest represents a fusion and mixture of elements such as a leg, a cloth stretched backwards and a unicorn's horn.
- 2- The head looks like a ship about to take off, due to the upward direction indicated by an arrow. The face, whose open mouth suggests ecstasy, is surrounded by two glands.
- 3- A female-looking figure with breasts, wearing a penis-shaped mask/helmet, highly biomechanised with tubes, connections and decorations on the face.

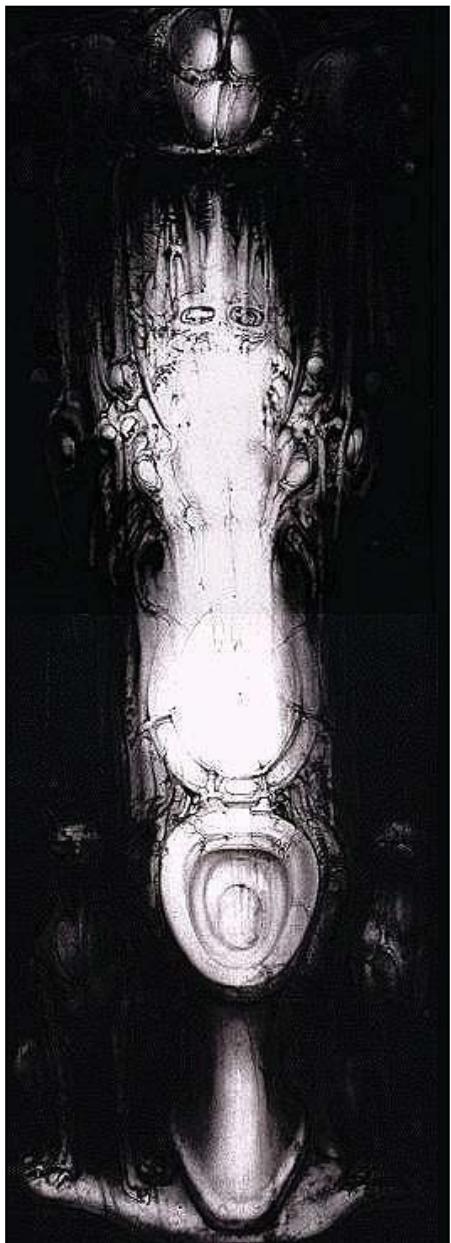
4- Skull with a large biomechanical helmet with a tube coming out of the back. It wears a kind of choker-breastplate reminiscent of Egyptian style. One arm of this figure is visible and on its shoulder appears a polymorphic creature with three arms.

At the top, there are fantastic architectural structures with flying buttresses, evoking great heights and seeming to come from other civilisations. On the left are some Ku Klux Klan figurines. These architectural structures anticipate the bone constructions we will see in the *Spell* series. At the bottom, the earth or hell opens up, with skulls, bones and demonic creatures.

The *Aleph* suggests a world of fantasy, of dreams that will turn into a nightmare over time since 1975. It is an apocalyptic representation with cabalistic content, as indicated by its title. The painting is reminiscent of Bosch in its mixture of creatures and fantastic figures. The composition is clearly horizontal, with lines running from top to bottom. The lack of colour adds a more sombre character to the painting, accentuating the contrasts of shadows and the black/white dichotomy.



156- *Aleph* (1972-73).



157- *Bathroom Door* (1973)



158- *Kitchen Door* (1973)

#### 2.3.2.4. Landscapes

Between 1972 and 1974, he produced a series of paintings that he simply titled *Landscapes* and named *Skin Landscapes (Hautlandschaften)*. There are a total of 28 panels, almost all in 70 x 100 cm format (six of them in 21 x 30 cm format). Among these are some of the most famous and controversial compositions of Giger's career, such as the landscapes with children's heads or the landscape with penises (which earned him censorship after being published on an album by the American punk band Dead Kennedys). There are also several works described by critics as *intrauterine postcards*. The treatment of skin, disease and overpopulation are the main themes of the series, in which Giger deals with various anomalies and pathologies with strong psychological implications, such as the repetition of penises, children's heads and intrauterine landscapes (achieving very effective pinkish tones). Among the works is a composition that is more reminiscent of the iconography of the pre-airbrush period, in which various metal structures imprison three skulls, *Paisaje XIX*.

Many people dream, but most are afraid to make their dreams public. My *Skin Landscapes* are my protest against the systematic poisoning of our environment... these landscapes are nothing more than the transposition of human skin onto our surroundings... What led me to paint children's heads; what scares me most is overpopulation with all its horrifying side effects such as epidemics, collective hysteria, hunger and, in general, the destruction of the environment... For me, the greatest criminals against humanity are those who, with the help of religion, prevent abortions, hiding from everyone the death that begins with life." <sup>188</sup>

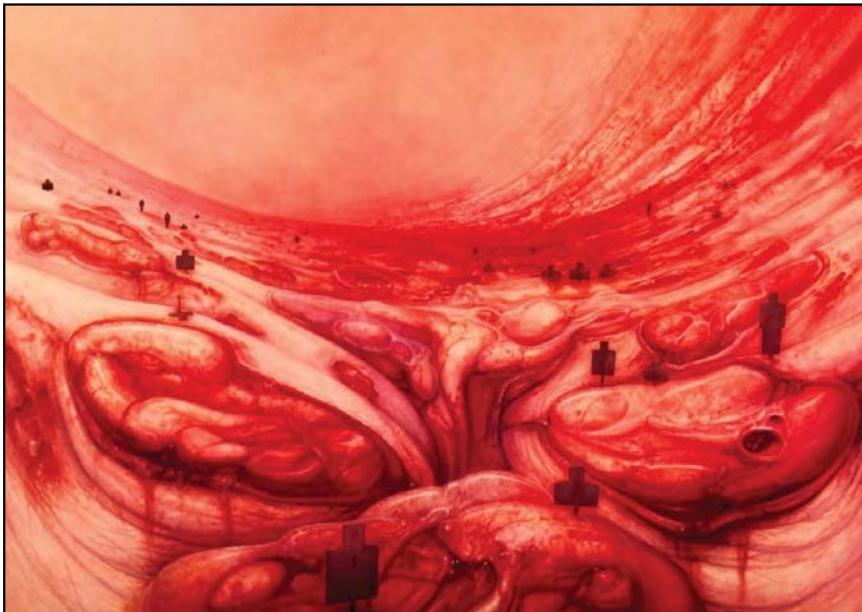
During military service and shooting practice, Giger comments that his superior told him to rest his eye on the green landscape and that he would then see it clearly and red. "I began to observe and see the landscape in colours ranging from red to pink.

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<sup>188</sup> Giger in *Giger's Necronomicon*, video documentary, 1977.

in a colour between rotten and the colour of pebbles." I discovered that the appropriate medium for illustrating the landscape of the earth would be to transfer human skin to it. Other representations of our infected planet have a sentimental effect on me and often leave a false impression of how things really relate to us and the world."<sup>(189)</sup>

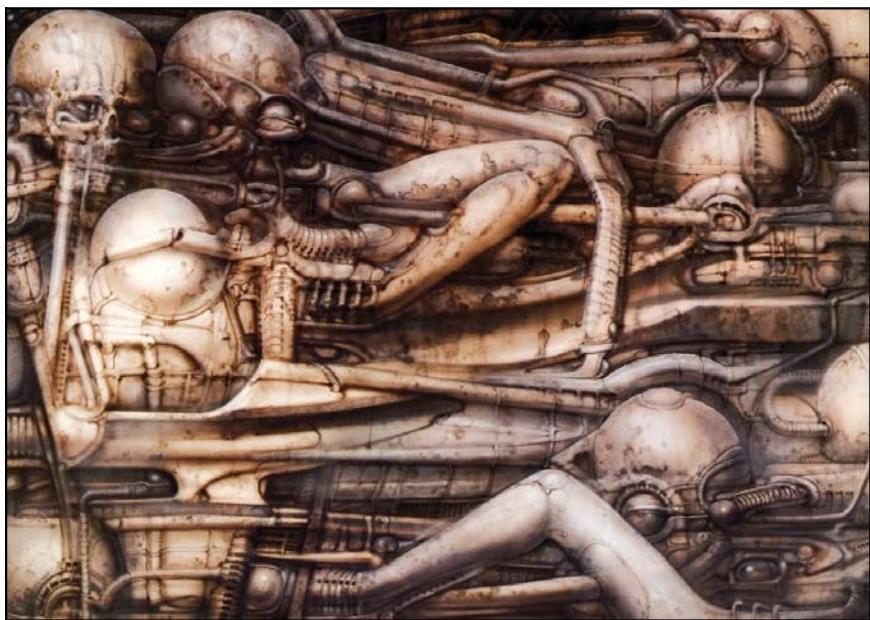
This series reveals Giger's obsession with the repetition of motifs, as if he were a machine producing standard patterns in series, thus alluding to the multiplication of forms that takes place in nature. His comments in the book *Passagen* are revealing in this regard.



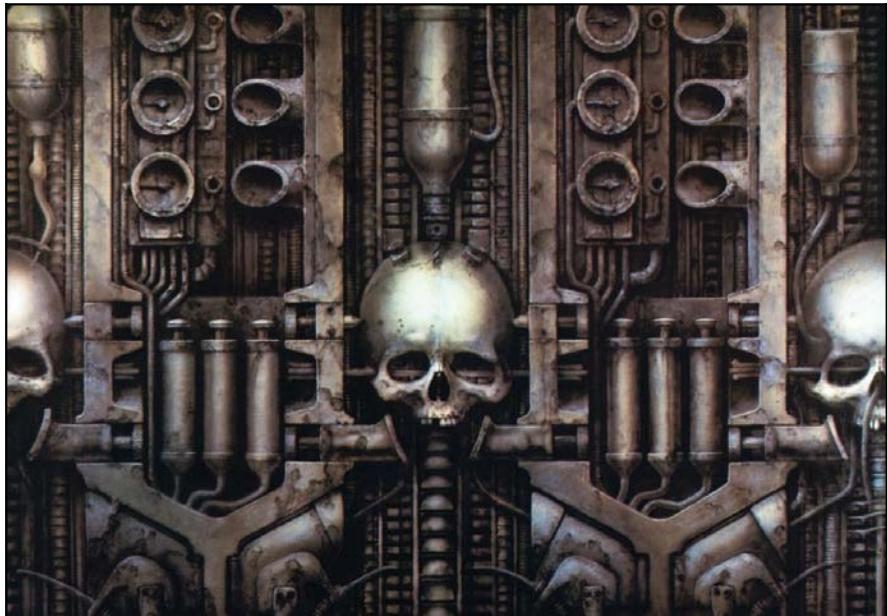
159- *Landscape X* (1973)

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<sup>189</sup>H. R. Giger. *Retrospektive 1964-1984*, Op.cit. p.48.



160- *Landscape XVII* (1973)



161- *Landscape XIX* (1973)



162- *Landscape XX* (1973)

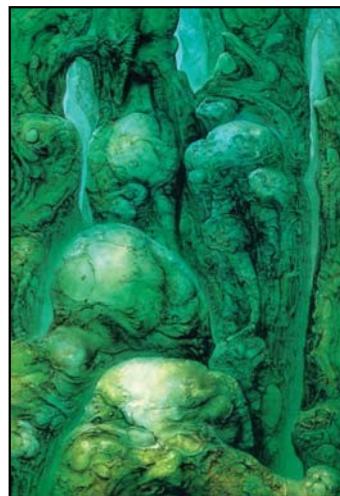
### Green Landscapes

In 1975, he produced four paintings in green, the *Green Landscapes*. Two of them are dedicated to *The Lord of the Rings*, in reference to Tolkien's work: a *Shoe-work Landscape* and a first *Homage to Böcklin*, painting the first version he would make of *The Isle of the Dead*. These are very organic paintings, reinforced by the use of green, which connects more with the forms of nature. Everything is covered in green, and the metallic surfaces disappear. The main motif of the second series of *Passages*, the back of the rubbish truck, reappears in *Isle of the Dead*. Giger comments on the landscapes: "When I look at my green landscapes, I am overcome with nostalgia. The places where I used to play as a child, particularly the areas altered by landslides around Flims, have taken on a certain magic in my memory. I avoid revisiting them for fear of not being able to look at them with the same eyes I used to, or of finding them altered. Everything seems magical when seen through the eyes of a child (...) the dark and gigantic forest of Flims is shown as monolithic ruins as tall as houses, damp and neglected, covered with moss, forming a labyrinth

inaccessible to the eye. I always feel that beneath that great umbrella there must be a second Angkor (the ancient ruined city buried in the jungle of Cambodia). (...) Today, most of these magical places have disappeared or changed so much that they are unrecognisable <sup>190</sup>. The subjects in these paintings take on a monumental appearance through the use of a very low horizon.



163- *The Lord of the Rings II* (1975)



164- *The Lord of the Rings I* (1975)

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<sup>190</sup>H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon*, Op.cit.p.40.

## Biomechanical landscapes and biomechanoids

During the 1970s, he developed the theme of biomechanical landscape, to which his style adapted with ease, creating different works that reflected his vision of nature and technology. The expression of biomechanics reached its peak. The technological and the organic merged, creating an amalgam of elements in which the forms were difficult to identify. They were serpentine shapes, resembling a nest of beings mixed together, alive and moving. His *Biomechanical Landscape* (1976) is one of Giger's most accomplished works of his entire career. It is also a large painting (200 x 140 cm) and the only one currently in the collection of the Kunsthaus in Zurich. In the centre of the very colourful composition, four motor heads organise the space. Around them are bones that twist in various ways. It is impossible to distinguish between the mechanical and the biological, as there is a fusion. This example is one of the paradigmatic works for explaining Giger's concept of biomechanics. He produced several works with the same title, which are generally improvisations using the airbrush technique and automatic writing.

This concept is also evident in his *Biomechanoid* paintings, which Giger titles some of his compositions as work no. 308, in which a human figure, usually female, is possessed by machines. Another work, *Espace I* from 1976, depicts other technological elements with organic forms.

Throughout the 1980s, especially during the second half of the decade, he painted various biomechanical landscapes and biomecanoid figures, experimenting with new forms and the use of stencils. In 1983, he created two 100 x 70 cm *Biomecanoids* on wood, which continued the biomechanical and biomecanoid theme, constructing new forms. In 1985, he created red (biomechanical) *landscapes* measuring 48 x 34 cm, dominated by architectural structures.

In 1984, he produced four landscapes, with simplified motifs, the use of stencils and moving structures in a reduced format of 48 x 34 cm (on paper). In 1983, he created *Biomecanoide con 3 cabezas* (*Biomechanoid with 3 Heads*) (3 ghostly figures in a landscape with machines), *Biomecanoides* in a format of 70 x 100 cm, on wood.

He also completed a work begun in the previous decade, *Biomecanoid I* (1983), measuring 100 x 70 cm, which we include in this section because of the use of stencils, a technique he did not use in the 1970s. Here he repeats the posture of his 1975 *Biomecanoid*, although here it has a touch of cyberpunk woman.

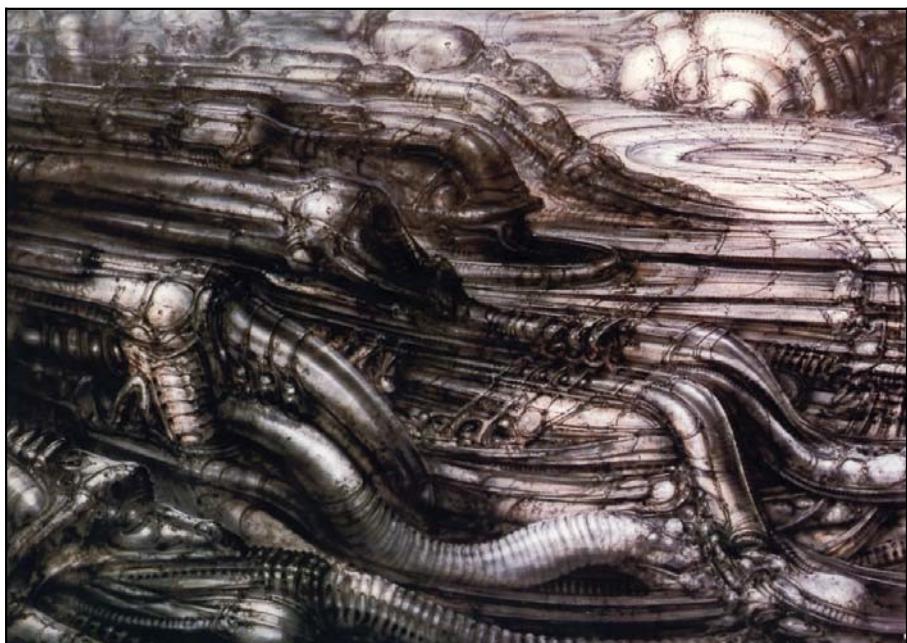
In 1987, he created new *Biomechanical Landscapes* on paper in a small 42 x 29 format, creating new forms that follow the guidelines of his previous landscapes from this decade. In 1987, he painted two new *Biomechanical Landscapes* measuring 100 x 140 cm, reminiscent of the series on New York.



165- *Biomechanical Landscape* (1976)



166- *Biomechanical Landscape I* (1979)



167- *Biomechanical Landscape III (Trains)* (1979)

### 2.3.2.5. The triptych

#### *The Spell*

Between 1973 and 1977, Giger produced a series of paintings entitled *Spell-Tempel* (*The Spell Temples*), considered by himself and critics to be one of the pinnacles of his airbrush art<sup>191</sup>. In his previous series of temples, which he used to decorate the walls of his home, he showed a certain insecurity in his execution of the works, which appear to be experiments from a phase of self-learning. In *The Spell*, he displays confidence in his execution and great attention to detail, the result of a complex thematic programme and the development of a concept prior to the creation of the paintings. Thanks to his technical mastery of the airbrush, he is able to establish qualities and nuances with greater precision.

The four original pieces are currently on display at the H.R. Giger Museum H.R. Giger Museum in Gruyères, hung in a special room that allows them to be viewed side by side, creating a special ambience and a mysterious atmosphere. The paintings are large, especially those numbered II and IV, whose dimensions of 240 x 420 cm give an idea of the large format used. The others, I and III, measure 240 x 280 cm, i.e. they are the same height but with smaller side panels. Each painting is composed of three panels screwed together to form triptychs.

In *The Spell I* (1973–74), the main figure, with feminine features, is embedded in a cruciform metal shape. This is located at the beginning or end of a passageway with walls formed by bone structures. The figure's arms are mutilated. Its hands, separated from the body, are tied with straps and connected to the cross by metal droppers. The upper part is crowned by a skull that seems to form a tribal totem made up of elements that descend to the figure's head. From the eyes spring

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<sup>191</sup> "In particular, the *Spell-Tempel* and the *Passagen-Tempel*, in which I used white acrylic paint, are now among my major works, which I will find difficult to surpass." [www.hrgiger.com](http://www.hrgiger.com), *Op.cit.*, p. 4

organic curtains that form wings and give the figure a vampire-like appearance. Hands at the top seem to receive/brace the viewer. The figures are intermingled and fused with each other, characteristic of Giger's language. The bones on the walls form ribs and architectural structures, providing depth and spatial sense to the whole. The image has sculptural qualities, resembling a relief.

*The Spell II* is more complex and has a more complicated composition. It is structured in orthogonal lines accentuated plastically by elements with pronounced straight lines. Three female figures dominate the composition, reminiscent of the Trinity: one full-length figure occupies the centre of the composition, tied by the feet to an inverted cross, her crowned head expanding exaggeratedly to the sides, indicating grandeur. Above her is the head of a billy goat with a phallus planted on top of it. The other two women are seated and attached to a table that engulfs their lower limbs, balancing the composition with a pharaonic crown on the left and a wing on the right. These figures are in the foreground. In the background, the skeletal structures from the previous painting once again form the architectural passageways.

In the centre of the metal table, there is an upside-down head that seems to be screaming. A multitude of iconographic elements are distributed throughout the work: daggers on the table, condoms on both sides of the main figure, totalling seven, and mutilated human bodies.

There is a marked compositional balance and a studied distribution of the figures, following straight lines and compensating for the structures.

This painting combines a Gothic/occult setting, which seems to describe the underworld, with a ritual scene, which resembles a black mass. Noteworthy are the allusions to Christian ritual, the altar, the cross, Veronica/Shroud and the body of Christ (which emerges alongside a bright light from a penis that the priestess takes in her hands). However, there is a reversal of meaning, as it seems that the birth of the Antichrist is about to take place.

In the new version of *Giger's Tarot*, Akron offers interpretations, such as that of the priestess who appears in the centre of the *Spell II* composition: 'a transparent-looking figure with gleaming metal armour, extending from the neck in a labyrinthine structure, a turban- or crown-like headdress. Above her is a goat's head, the figure of Baphomet, who was revered by the Templars but declared by the medieval church to be the personification of Satan. An erect member protrudes from her forehead; the priestess holds the head of a giant phallus. This is depicted in such a way that it simultaneously resembles a vagina, whose slit transforms into the body of Christ in her hands. In this way, Giger transforms the Christian motif of the Immaculate Conception in a truly cynical way: the body of Christ emerges from the phallus and gnaws at the priestess's breast like a virus. This sexual symbolism reveals one of the most sensitive points of Christian theological dogma, disrespectfully changing the representation of the Immaculate Conception into its opposite<sup>192</sup>.

The third painting, *The Spell III* (1976), has a different format from the others, as it imitates a T-shaped cross, which may be an allusion to the Tau cross, but due to formal necessity, as the upper part depicts a garment with outstretched arms, corresponding to the costume of an alchemist or magician. The centre of the composition is occupied by a skull holding a dagger between its teeth in an aggressive and warlike attitude. Six arms emerge from the skull, four of which cling to handles and the other two have snakes coiled around them. A transparent substance is projected upwards. At the bottom, there is a suggested bottle cap, from which a serpentine shape emerges, possibly alluding to the loss of corporeality, an empty body that disappears.

This figure is framed within ancient clothing and appears to be floating in the air between narrow walls formed by bones, as in the previous paintings.

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<sup>192</sup> AKRON & H.R. GIGER. *H.R. Giger Tarot*. Taschen, Cologne, 2000.

It could be a *djinn*, a magical being that lives in the air and flies with agility. It has six arms, which emphasises its oriental character. In addition, the stopper is reminiscent of the wonderful lamp. Another element that emphasises this orientalism is the crescent moon. The glass that projects upwards is related to alchemy, and inside it there appears to be a transformation into a gas. Another recurring motif is the sacred heart pierced by daggers, the contrite heart, a symbol of repentance. The figure above the skull is a demonic being and may be Baphomet, with long horns.

The fourth painting that completes the series, *The Spell IV* (1977), was created four years after he began this series, which is one of his longest-running. The triptych is the same size as *The Spell II*, and in the museum it is located opposite it. The composition is dominated by a central figure, a winged goat, above which is a female figure inscribed in a pentagon. This being is riddled with iconographic elements: a phallic shape that transforms into a rifle, snakes, a pedestal formed by five skulls, a syringe, and metal bracelets. Her throne stands on a metal piece inhabited by rats, a symbol of decay. At the ends of the piece, two female figures sway on mechanical seats that resemble those used in childbirth, merging with them. Above the female figures are two pentagons (the left one inverted). Serpentine beings and other symbolic figures diluted in a fog move through the composition. The frame is once again the bone wall that merges with the metal architecture.

The goat's attitude, which seems to be giving a blessing, is reminiscent of the Christian Pantocrator. This demonic figure corresponds to Baphomet. Giger often uses the method of inverting concepts, as in his representations of religious iconography, in which he reverses the paradigms of Christianity. Inverting an image means negating its meaning, as in the case of the inverted pentagram or the Christian cross, which becomes one of the emblems of the Antichrist. Baphomet would be the inversion of good into evil. Baphomet sits on his throne on top of five skulls, the middle one wearing a bishop's mitre, which points vertically towards a machine gun

(directional sense, vertical). Two snakes surround it (Caduceus), but they do not come together. The machine gun is a current metaphor for what is blocked and deformed. The figure has breasts in the shape of demon heads, both of which carry a hand grenade. Between her horns she carries a torch that returns the ethereal body of Lilith, goddess of the art of magic and ghosts, named in the Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian traditions, winged and strangling, prostitute and vampire, demon, witch and serpent. She comes from the sacred depths and is the stigma and pallor of the Christian church, which persecuted her for centuries. She is not only the ghost of evil but also the path that leads to absolute wisdom<sup>193</sup>.

We see the goat and the goddess in the centre between two intertwined pentagrams. From there, the arrow expels the goddess's hair towards the top. /point of the pentagram pointing upwards (victory of matter over spirit), while the male's horns point to the tips of the inverted pentagram (triumph of matter over spirit) and the arrow becomes visible above the male's head.

Akron gives the following description of *Spell IV* in the Tarot of Baphomet:

"Conceived as a triptych, the work consists of three panels that represent various spheres of creation. To God's right is Paradise, the illuminated sphere embodied by the bright vertical pentagram. To God's left is Hell, symbolised by the dark inverted pentagram. God himself represents the human plane of existence, the reality in which polarities mutually penetrate, struggle, or emerge (represented by the interconnection between the two pentagrams). The symbolic and allegorical drawings of the figurative representations refer to the realm of death and rebirth. This painting shines as a representative example of the aesthetics of the Apocalypse, to which Giger constantly refers in his *work*.

The composition is reminiscent of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, as it is also a triptych with an apocalyptic theme, so it would be a coincidence that the right-hand side, the darkest, represents hell, and the

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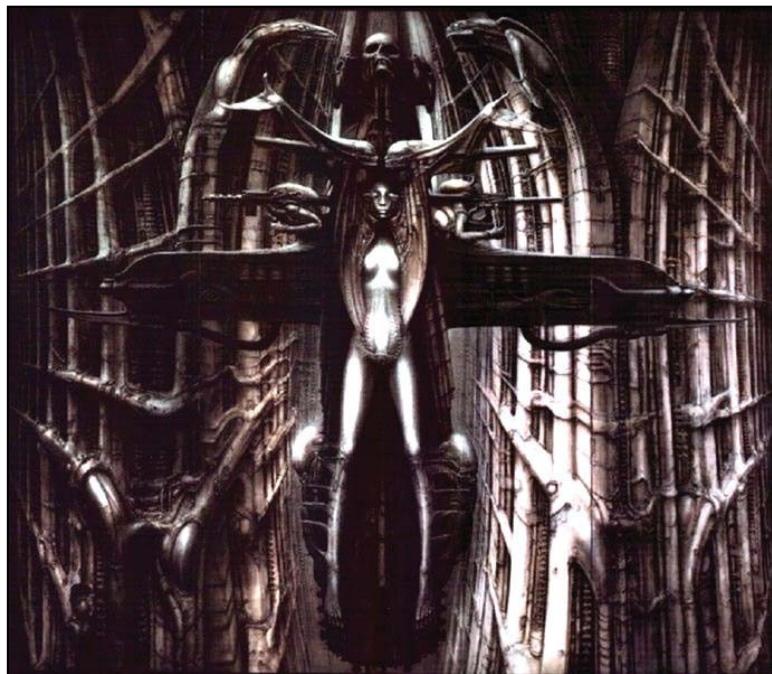
<sup>193</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup>*Ibid.*

whiter left side represents paradise. In any case, it can also be interpreted as a balance between white magic and black magic.

The four paintings are part of a complex thematic and iconographic programme in which anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures coexist with monstrous beings, organic forms (human anatomy, bones) with inorganic ones such as the multiple metal elements. All the figures are charged with strong symbolism and offer a wealth of information. The collection offers multiple interpretations on several levels, since the greater one's knowledge of magic and the occult, as well as symbolism, the closer one can get to these works.

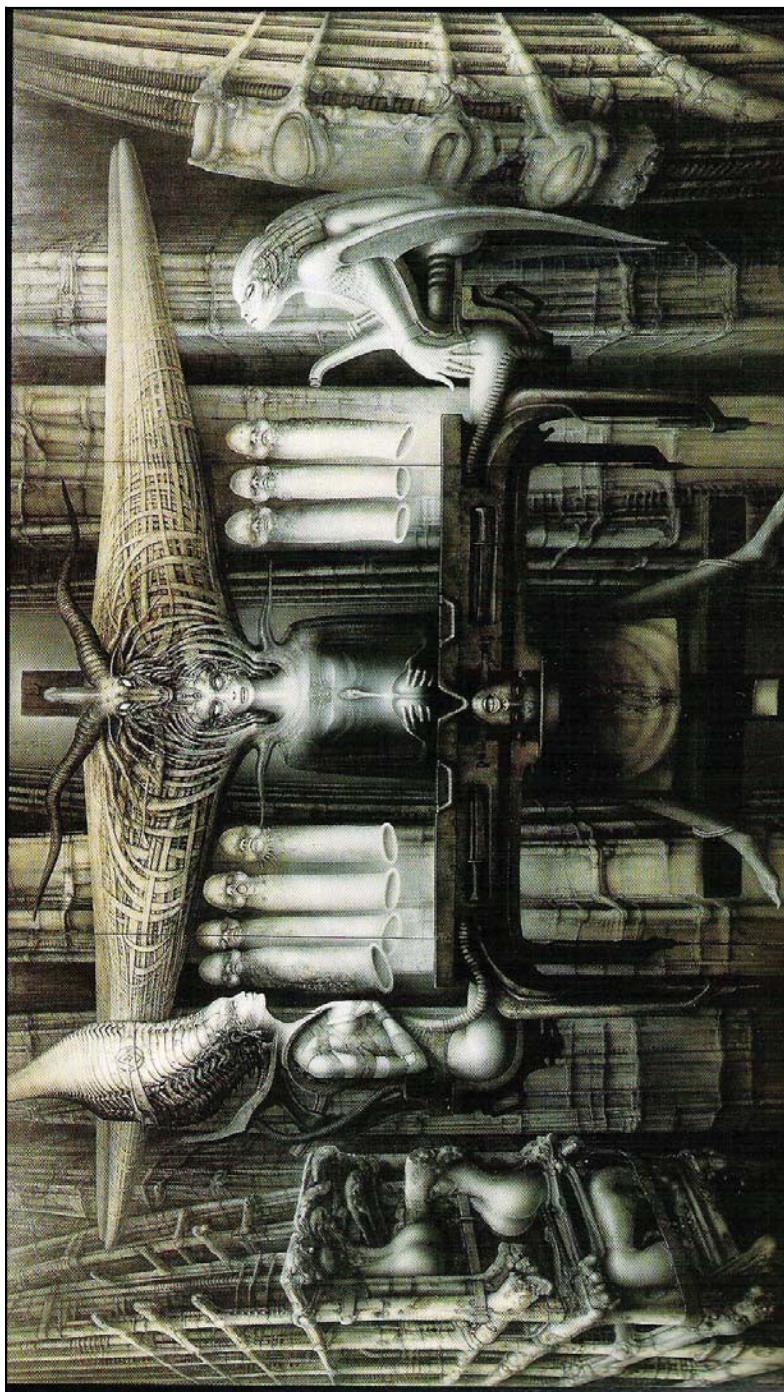
*The Spell* is undoubtedly one of Giger's most ambitious works, due to its iconographic and symbolic complexity, created at a time when he had already mastered the airbrush technique. Approaching these paintings requires a study of the main iconographic and literary sources used by Giger during these years, as well as an introduction to texts on magic and the occult, which would be the dominant theme in the collection. Giger plays with polarities and balances between the positive and the negative, giving the work a strong spiritual charge. At this time, Giger followed Crowley's hermetic principle, 'as above, so below'. The framework provided by the bone structures can be interpreted as the collective memory of humanity and the past, which is what remains archetypically within us.



168-*Spell I* (1973-74)



169-*Spell III* (1976)



170- *Spell II* (1974).



171- *Spell IV* (1977)

## The Temple of Passages (Passagen Tempel)

Four large-scale paintings make up the series, forming an *environment*, a Giger space. He created them between October 1974 and May 1975 for an exhibition at the Zydow-Zirkwitz Gallery in Frankfurt. The interior space has a square surface area measuring 280 cm on each side and 240 cm in height. It is accessed through an Egyptian-style sarcophagus-shaped opening. The plan was to cover the entrance with leather and torn bags with feathers. Visitors have to force their way in, which produces the effect of reliving their birth/delivery<sup>195</sup>.

The ensemble consists of four panels that form a whole representing a cycle: *Entrance*, *Life*, *Death* and *The Way of the Magician*. It represents a journey through the different stages (passages) that living beings, specifically humans, go through.

Giger himself provides a general description of the series in his book Giger's Necronomicon. The four paintings are axially symmetrical: "the entrance, which is also the exit, again shows the shape of a sarcophagus between the rails of a primitive swamp of organic/technological material. It represents the passage of dissolution". An amalgam of legs, heads, bones and metal can be seen. "The left side shows life in its brutal reality. Pairs of sick children with raised fists, placed on top of each other, form a giant phallus projected from an equally enormous zip that divides a technological landscape with figures with prostheses." On either side of the phallus are two figures: on the right, a winged jellyfish stands in front of a being with IV drips instead of arms; on the left, a female figure holds a head in her hand. Below her are two workers with machine guns as prostheses. On the other side is a jester carrying a giant dildo.

He continues, "The right-hand side shows death. It is the mechanism of a rubbish truck, the perfect gateway to hell, the path of everything that has outlived its usefulness. Experience has shown me that Germans very often associate this mechanism with the ovens of the camps

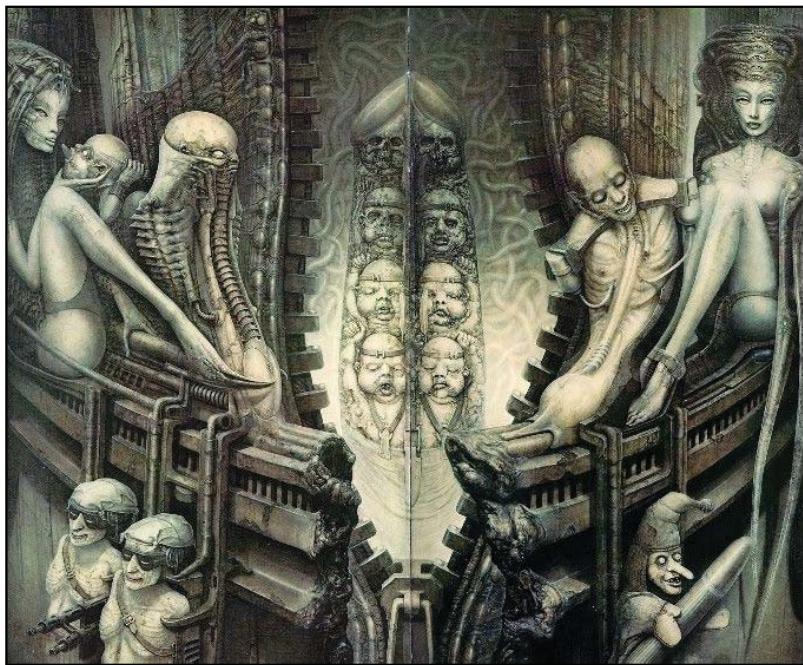
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<sup>195</sup> H.R Giger's Necronomicon, *Op.cit.*, p. 64.

This passage is flanked by corpses of thieves emerging from a sea of bones, whose shapes are reminiscent of the cypress trees in Böcklin's painting; the final passage, opposite the entrance, forms *The Way of the Magician*, the path that must be taken to achieve man's most desired goals and meet God at a certain level. At the end of the seven steps, flanked by biomechanical virgins, is a throne bathed in diffuse light" <sup>196</sup> .. The throne and the light indicate ascension. The steps are also organic, with bones and eyes. Two female figures, on devices that control them, flank the throne. One of them, with a gun to her temple, is a tribute to Li, who had committed suicide shortly before the series ended.

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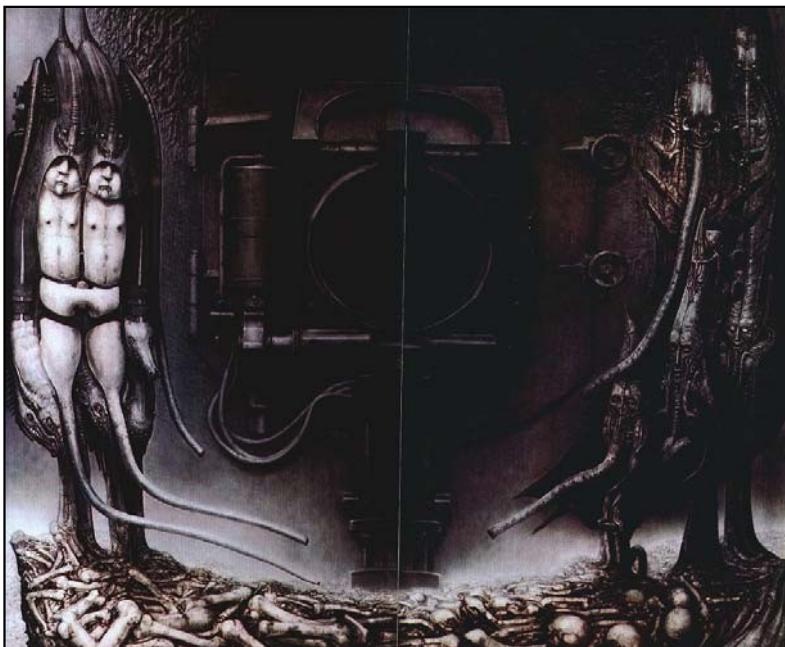
<sup>196</sup>*Ibid.*



172- *Temple of Passages (Life)* (1975)



173- *Temple of Passages (Entrance)* (1975)



174-

*Temple of Passages (Death) (1975)*



*175- Temple of Passages (The Way of the Magician) (1975)*

### 2.3.2.6. Works with occult themes

In addition to the large triptychs, Giger produced a multitude of paintings with occult and esoteric themes. These were closely related to his reading at the time, which was connected to the world of magic and the occult. Among the most interesting paintings are *Baphomet* (1975), *Aleister Crowley* (1975), *Chidher Grün* (1975), *The Magician* (1977), *Witches' Dance* (1977), *Spiegelbild* (1977) and *Illuminatus I* and *II* (1978), which are among his best known and most reproduced works. They give off literary readings above all, with the figure of the devil and the demonic taking on a plastic image. It is a vision of the world of darkness and obscurity.

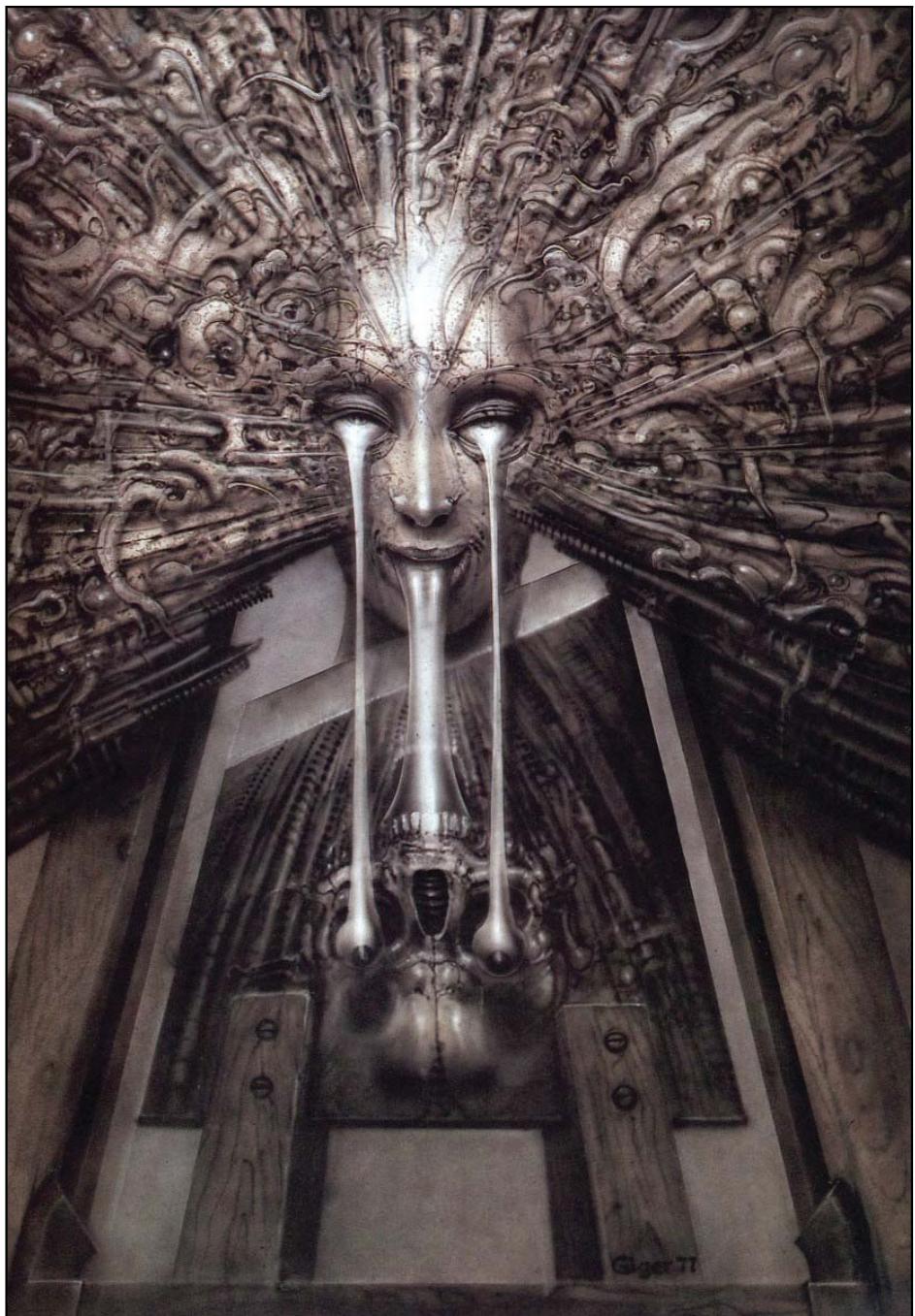
On his connection with tarot and the esoteric, he comments: "I knew Sergius Golowin; he taught me and my friends about magic, the occult and the esoteric: it was the end of the 1960s. That's when I became interested in this whole area. I created paintings, drawn from the unconscious, with things that I myself could not explain. They were stimulated by esoteric literature, by Eliphas Levi and also by Aleister Crowley. People said I seemed to be an initiate in the subject. But I am not at all. I just did it from the heart; perhaps there is an inner knowledge in these things that was already there before"<sup>(197)</sup>.

### Mordor

Between 1975 and 1976, he began the *Mordor* series, inspired by Tolkien's work, which he was reading at the time, as well as the combination of the words Mord+or. The series consists of 100 x 70 cm paintings in which he explores monstrous and fantastical themes, combining familiar elements from his repertoire and creating new ones: body parts, skulls and grotesque beings continue a process of mutation and appear to move. Organic forms take on a powerful presence.

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<sup>197</sup>SIEGERT, Steffen. *Op. cit.*



176- *Spiegelbild* (1977)

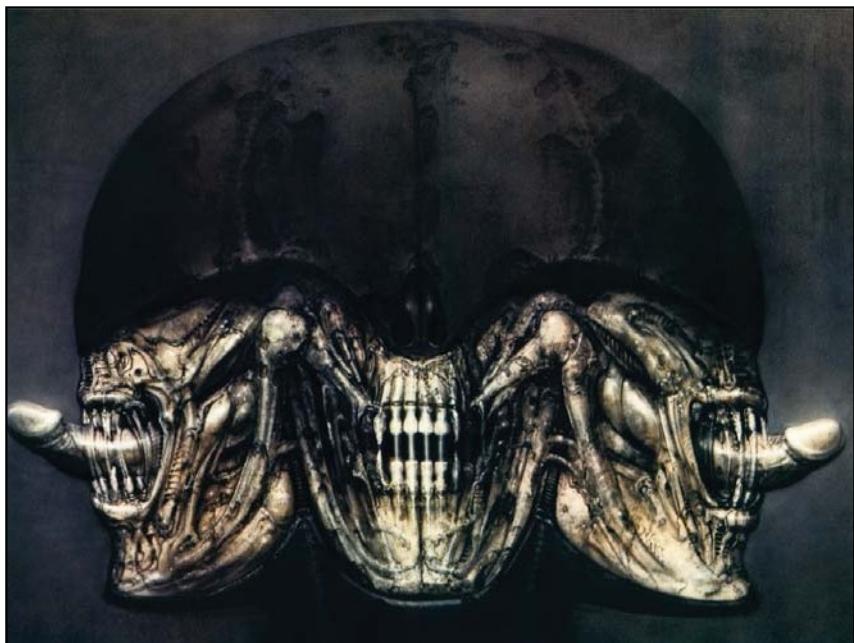
## Necronom

In the *Necronom* series, he becomes even darker, with an insectoid character. The suffix *necro-* means dead. It is related to the term *necrophilia* or attraction to death. In 1976, he produced six paintings measuring 70 x 100 cm. They represent a further step in his exploration of the mortuary and magical themes he had been working on in recent years, an evolutionary stage in his artistic and thematic inclination. He had been working on the symbolism of death (*Li*), magic and the occult, and Satanism (*Spell*). The dominant theme in the *Necronom* series is the monstrous. It depicts phallic monsters [177] from science fiction and the biomechanical monster with dreamlike implications. *Necronom IV* and *V* show the gestation of *Alien*. The monsters in the series served as inspiration for the film.

These are larger format works (100 x 150 cm). It seems that he executed these paintings consecutively. There is an anthropomorphism, human figures combined with elements typical of a reptile, an insect or with elephant tusks and mechanical shapes (tubes) as well as metallic ones (wristband, bracelet). They are threatening monsters with aggressive jaws that bite phalluses and tubes.

*Necronom III* depicts the head of a monster with ivory tusks (like those of an elephant) [178]. It opens its mouth in a threatening manner; its eyes are hidden. The image resembles the figure of a helmet advancing forward (inspired by a painting by Bacon). They define very well what the Gigerian monster is, its fantastic construction, at least in this year 1976, as he will produce more. They are mechanical monsters formed by joining organic elements. There are three much smaller paintings (30 x 21 cm) that complete the series.

After completing the series, he created three new *Biomechanical Landscapes* under the influence of the *Alien* world, where he merged forms from his biomechanical imagination that flood the surface of the paintings.



177- *Necronom II* (1976)



178- *Necronom III* (1976)