

FEATURE

>> H.R. GIGER ON

THE ALIEN

The legendary artist talks exclusively to 3D World about his unique approach to creature design, and his awe-inspiring work on Ridley Scott's seminal sci-fi horror movie, *Alien* **BY MARK RAMSHAW**

DETAILS

NAME

H R Giger

AGE

63

LOCATION

Switzerland

URL

<http://hrgiger.com>
www.baranartists.com

SELECT CREDITS

Swissmade 2069 (1968) Armour and creature designer; *Passage* (1972) Co-producer; *Alien* (1979) Alien design and construction; *Blondie Now I Know You Know* music promo (1981) Director; *Blondie Backfired* music promo (1981); *Poltergeist II* (1986) Conceptual artist; *Aliens* (1986) Original creature designer; *Dark Seed* computer game (1992) Artist; *Alien³* (1992) Original creature designer; *Species* (1995) Sil creature designer; *Dark Seed 2* computer game (1995) Artist; *Alien Resurrection* (1997) Original creature designer

RIGHT **A design showing the Alien's second set of teeth visible on its extended tongue.** "The creature characteristics imagined by the writer are often best described in terms that are easy to relate to, such as the traits of animals," says Giger. "From there you can bend and twist the rules, often to the breaking point, to give life to a new, credible, and if the script requires it, horrifying life form."

Alien monster III, Work No. 372, 1978
 140 x 100cm, © H.R. Giger & 20th Century Fox. (Stolen painting: Information regarding its whereabouts: leslie@hrgigeragent.com)

Although celebrated as the creator of the most nightmarish, beautiful, and perfect movie monster ever to stalk celluloid, Hans Ruedi Giger is an artist, first and foremost – one whose work evokes a hallucinatory future as much as its recalls the works of Dali and Bosch. It's the way he has adapted this unique brand of Fantastic Realism to creature work that makes his designs so powerful.

Born in Chur, Switzerland, Giger gained a solid grounding in architecture and industrial design at the Zürich School of Applied Arts. Initially working with ink and oils, he switched to the airbrush in the early '70s. By 1977 his book, *Necronomicon*, was about to be published, when script writer Dan O' Bannon contacted him about a script for a certain sci-fi horror movie (see boxout). Horror and science fiction would never look quite the same again.

With Giger's creature work, there's always the sense that, no matter how outlandish the design, a sense of logic is at work underneath. He confesses this believability is difficult to achieve. "I rework a design over and over until I am convinced that under the right circumstances, in the right environment, the creature could really exist and, maybe, does," he says. "If it is not, at the end, a believable creation to *me*, then nobody else will accept it as real, either."

Another striking thing about his concept art is how well it translates into three dimensions come the modelling stage. Yet Giger says in the early stages at least, this isn't a conscious consideration. "On *Alien*, I didn't make carefully drafted plans of my paintings from every side, something that's quite important if others have to realise your designs, accurately. When Ridley Scott finally asked, 'So who is going to build these



ALL PAINTINGS: © H.R. Giger, acrylic on paper

things?', there was quiet in the room until I said I would try. Everyone was happy to agree."



His appreciation of the 3D form is doubtless informed by his experience working with interior architecture, and designing for practical objects, including office furniture. "As a matter of fact, that was the only helpful art training I ever had," he says. "With the film design, you might say I learned many of the technical aspects that I am now familiar with on the job, from some of the experts I had the chance to work with."

"IF [A CREATURE] IS NOT, AT THE END, A BELIEVABLE CREATION TO ME, THEN NOBODY ELSE WILL ACCEPT IT AS REAL EITHER"

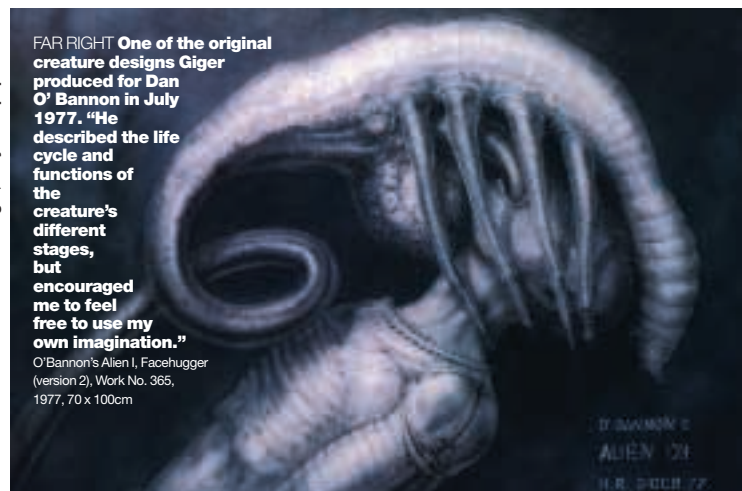
H.R. Giger

Many have tried to decode the influences and inspirations behind Giger's work. "Mostly, it comes from observations in life, from reading books, from memories, and sometimes also from dreams and nightmares," he says. "It is a very unreliable process. Every artist, writer, and musician will agree that there is no one place from which to draw inspiration. The process would not be called 'creativity' if there was a consistently reliable source, a fountain you could visit for it regularly. For that reason, the beginning of a project is always both frightening and exciting. Especially when you are required to create something from thin air."

Creatures out in the real world do provide some influence. "The nature shows on television are a good example," he suggests. "Just by changing the scale of the most harmless or threatening animal, a three-metre mouse is a nightmarish monster and 20-centimetre elephant a cute pet. While I don't necessarily copy creature movements, it is important to study and understand why a certain animal moves in a particular fashion, as determined by proportion and weight, by the joints and musculature." Ultimately, however, he believes it's the script that indicates the personality of the creature,

FAR RIGHT **One of the original creature designs Giger produced for Dan O' Bannon in July 1977.** "He described the life cycle and functions of the creature's different stages, but encouraged me to feel free to use my own imagination."

O'Bannon's Alien I, Facehugger (version 2), Work No. 365, 1977, 70 x 100cm



D. BANNON
 ALIEN I
 H.R. GIGER '77



Opened in 1998, the H. R. Giger Museum is located within the Chateau St. Germain in Gruyères, Switzerland. The Museum Bar (pictured), a spectacular total Giger environment, was opened in April 2003, the culmination of a three-year project from design through construction of its stone-like architecture and furniture

© 2003 Wolfgang Holz

which the design must then acknowledge. "Everything else is secondary and must flow from there, even though it is those added details and elements that will distinguish the

design as being surprising and original."

While he suggests understanding anatomy can be very important, he advises: "If you don't sketch regularly, you can forget it. I don't think I draw very well at all, so I repeat a drawing over and over until I like it. Fortunately, I can see when something is not right, and that's very helpful. The most important part of a pencil is the eraser."

Despite the dark themes that recur in Giger's creature design work, and indeed in all his art, he says there's no conscious effort to tap into the viewer's primal fears: he's merely exploring his own psyche. "Many times an artist's paintings are their way of analysing and confronting their own private fears, which, in reality, are not so exclusive. Most people fear decay, cancerous growths, and gestating parasites in their bodies, or being hunted by creatures with no emotions but with razor-sharp teeth.

"Biomechanical' is a disturbing concept because it suggests our dependency on machines, mechanical things we don't understand and are afraid to rely on, for our survival. The simple examples are the panic and anxiety many, including myself, experience flying on an airplane or using an oxygen tank in underwater diving. Everyone is terrified of being attached to life-support machines to stay alive."

So what, in Giger's view, constitutes a good creature design? "Something that creates a feeling of anxiety, panic and horror, although that's never my conscious aim when designing a monster. To me, if I'm able to see it objectively, my designs possess a strange beauty, a very delicate balance of line, shape and proportion. I often hope that it is this quality that I am being hired for, since a creature is even more disturbing if it is also beautiful, not just deadly."

Unfortunately, he says, that's usually not been the case. "The elegance gets lost when people not sensitive to what made the original design successful on paper, translate my designs to 3D. A slight change in shape or in proportion can result in something un-aesthetic and clumsy. In my film experience, the only time this didn't happen was working with Ridley Scott on the original *Alien*."

A recent assignment to design various elements from a Levi's spot did prove a positive experience, though. The ad features a woman on horseback leaping over a train designed by Giger and created in 3D by The Mill. Concept artwork for a new European film has also been announced, and he says he'd be happy to collaborate with a CG studio on a movie project at some point in the future.

To see more of Giger's work, visit the H.R. Giger Museum, in Gruyères, Switzerland. The permanent home to the most extensive collection of the artist's paintings and sculptures, furniture and film designs, it's the only place in the world where Giger's original artwork and 3D models for *Alien*, *Poltergeist 2*, *Alien³*, and *Species* can be appreciated up close. Also on display is Giger's private art collection by renowned masters such as Salvador Dali and Ernest Fuchs, plus the spectacular new addition to the museum complex, the recently opened H.R. Giger Museum Bar. You can find more details on the website, www.hrgigermuseum.com. ■

ALIEN CONCEPTION

H.R. Giger recalls how he designed and realised cinema's most horrifying creature



1 NECRONOM IV: THE ORIGINAL DESIGNS

Because screenwriter Dan O'Bannon didn't have financing for the movie when he first hired Giger, it was agreed the artist would concentrate on the eggs and facehugger designs. "He suggested that, eventually, I would get to design everything after a studio purchased the script, so at that point, I gave very little thought to the other designs that were going to be needed," recalls Giger. "At the time, none of us, including 20th Century Fox, realised that I had already designed the adult Alien a year before that, in 1976, without knowing it."

In the event Ridley Scott saw two images from Giger's recently released book of Art, *Necronomicon*, and realised the design for the adult Alien was right there in front of him. Ultimately, the less phallic elements of *Necronom IV* provided the blueprint for the body of the alien used in the film.

Necronom IV (Work No. 303), 1976, 100 x 150cm.



2 NECRONOM V: SKULL SKETCHES

The skull of the creature in Giger's final sketches is surprisingly close to that depicted in *Necronom V*. Even once he began adapting the creature designs to 3D when sculpting the Alien suit – which was eventually constructed using silicone rubber, transparent PVC and featuring mechanical tongue and face muscle mechanisms courtesy of Carlo Rambaldi – Giger didn't have to make any enhancements. Only minor adjustment was necessary to make the 3D version more practical.

"There was a little, just for weight and balance, as in 1978 all the effects had to work physically," he says. "The tail was the biggest problem. The solution was simply to try not showing it too much."

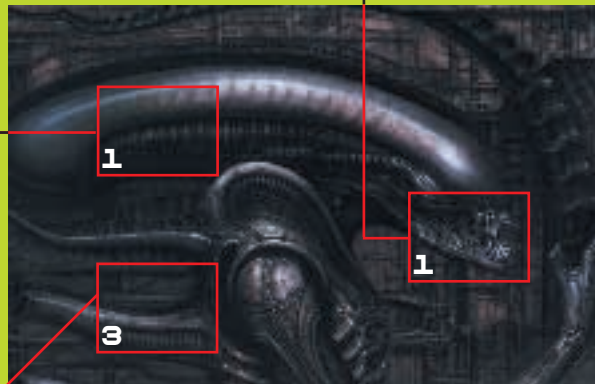
Necronom V (Work No. 304), 1976, 100 x 150cm.

ALIEN LONGEVITY

Painted after work on *Alien* was completed, this acrylic is actually the only art produced by Giger that faithfully depicts the monster as seen in the film. He returned to his most famous creature for *Alien³*, thinking it would provide a good opportunity to rethink and improve on the original design. "But, obviously, the original design seems to have worked very well, and even now, twenty-five years later, little has been done to change it, even though, now, everything imaginable can be achieved.

"That is a great freedom for any designer, but, apparently, for many designers it is too much freedom," says Giger. "They seem to feel obliged to utilise every effect possible, for no logical reason except because it is there."

Alien monster I (Work No. 406), 1979 140 x 140cm.



3 DESIGNING ALONE

Although Giger hadn't originally planned to build the Alien himself, and describes the process as something of a nightmare, he says he'd gladly endure it again. "Only after working on other films did I realise what a rare opportunity I had been offered by Ridley Scott during those months at Shepperton Studios, in a very unique and protective working environment. Once Ridley selected you, he allowed everyone to work in their own private space, left alone with their ideas, exactly the way I prefer to work."

© 20th Century Fox, courtesy of PA Picselect