



We have met the alien and he is us



James Cowan explores the
mysterious world of H.R. GIGER

FACING PAGE:
The Magus 1975
Acrylic on paper/wood
200x140cm

ABOVE:
Li I, 1974
Photogravure 70x 100cm

H.R. Giger is a quantum artist. He is the Einsteinian analog of the art world, leaping over styles, techniques and aesthetics in a great gathered bound of imaginative epiphany and technical acuity. He has alighted in his own unique universe. A universe where organic and inorganic forms are shaped by the "Bio-mechanical" aesthetic; the dialectic of man and machine, where flesh and bone join magma and metal in synergistic ballet. Steel girders support, and conduits nourish. Human forms grow fluid and metamorphic, evolving into a new realm, both disturbing and sublime. A wonderful synthesis born of a powerful imagination.

Even great artists tend to follow a path already travelled, a road lined with guide posts hammered in by those who have preceded them. In the case of Giger, this is far less the norm, than the exception. Giger has made his own road through the brush.

Inspired by the likes of Hieronymus Bosch, Alfred Kubin, Salvador Dali, Jean Cocteau and Ernst Fuchs, Giger early on set his goals upon a strong foundation - the rich tradition of fantastic art. An avid collector as well as artist, Giger knows well the world of symbology and iconography. It is within this half-millennium tradition of fantastic art dating back to Bosch and even earlier, that we must place Giger. His

It enters the rarified realm of the near magical

- All images used courtesy of Morpheus International.

Hommage a Bocklin 1977
Acrylic on paper/wood
100 x 140 cm



territory here is secure, and of no small scope. Visionary in the extreme, Giger is one of the great masters of 20th Century art, and a most worthy herald for the resurgent fantastique movement in general.

I first set eyes on Giger's art when I saw the Li 1 cover for the second issue of Omni Magazine in the late 1970s, shortly followed by a newspaper layout on his preliminary designs for Ridley Scott's upcoming film, *Alien*. I was absolutely entranced. Here, for the first time, were images that I found to be completely alien in construct. There was no human trace, tool mark, or evolutionary chain to grab onto. The word "alien," then, becomes doubly applicable to the work of this Swiss maestro.

Nothing can be more difficult than to create something as a human being, that has no human resonance whatever. There are often no apparent links to the human imagination as we have known it and no links to any chronological base. Are these constructs from the distant past, the distant future, or perhaps some alternative dimension? This alien aesthetic goes beyond talent, and even art. It enters the rarified realm of the near magical, and certainly the land of genius.

As Giger's primary publisher in the USA of books and art, as well as his representative and friend, I have spent a good part of the past decade in communication with him. We have spent long hours discussing our various projects, and exchanging our views on art and the art world. During this period, I have found a fascinating dichotomy between Giger and his work. The images one encounters in his books often give people the impression of a darkly

brooding man who takes the black teachings of the occult as his bible. This is far from the truth.

Giger is a gentle man almost to a fault, and a profoundly thoughtful and well read one. His choice of imagery is borne more from aesthetic fascination than anything else, and he is more likely than most of his self-anointed "moral" critics to help an elderly woman across a busy street. This sensitivity makes Giger's forays into the subterranean maze of our subconscious and its dark, secret places to be all the more courageous. He is no more comfortable there than are we. However, he does not shrink from shedding his light, and recording his encounters for the rest of us, too busy or fearful to venture with him on his lonely journey of exploration. He is our most secret spelunker. Tunnels and shafts are his passageways to the strange, haunting places he struggles to illuminate. Ultimately, Giger shows us just how close we are to being aliens ourselves. There is a profound mystery here.

There is the disturbing, as well. But there is also great beauty; elegant, erotic and exotic. Additionally, Giger often incorporates elements of social criticism and black humor into his works. However, it is the beauty of Giger's art that is the jewel in the crown, and one that may only be plucked through the patience of an open mind. Then, and only then, may the otherworldly elegance of this artist's work become truly appreciated. Those who shrink back reflexively, and who do not gather themselves to plunge forward again, miss the point, and the awesome wonder of it all is left for the rest of us to ruminate over, and marvel at.

The twenty years of his hard work would serve as the output of a lifetime for several artists. The obsessive amount of detail and (he absolute lack of unpainted surfaces, attest to the dedication of this man to his art. Ponder its mystery. Revel in its wonder. And above all, accept his offering of a most alien beauty.

Giger is currently working on the finishing touches to his museum in Gruyere, Switzerland, where much of his own art as well as his vast collection of other artist's work is on display.

James Cowan is the owner/director of Morpheus International and Galerie Morpheus, a leading publisher of the Surreal and Fantastique art movements and representative of some of the world's most internationally recognised artists in this field.



A. Crowley (*The Beast 666*), 1975. Acrylic on paper, 200 x 140 cm