

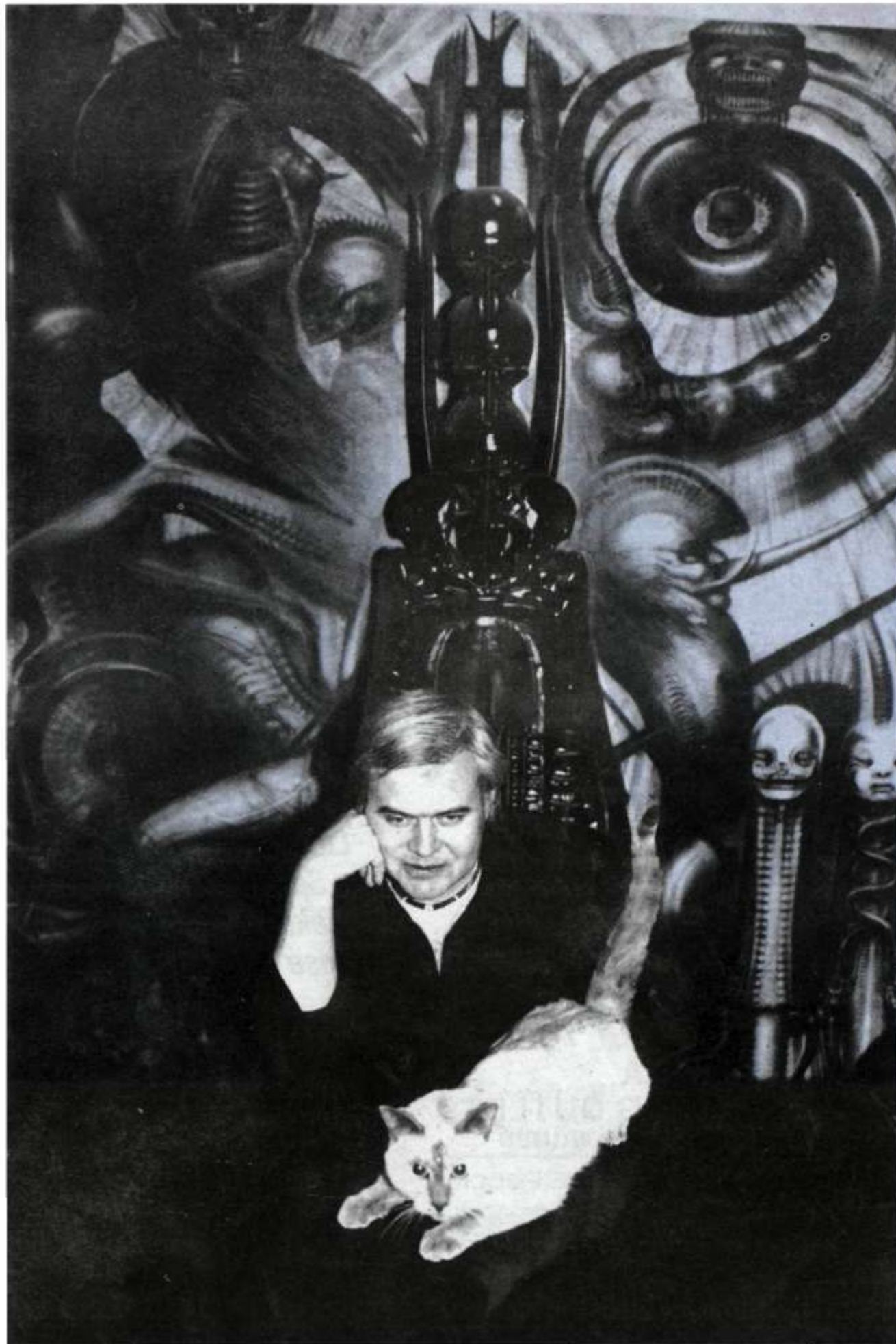
Easy Reader

Volume XVIII, Number 50

FREE

60,000 Circulation

July 14, 1988



Even the pictures illustrate only one or two phases of its endless variety, preternatural massiveness, and utterly alien exoticism.... There was something vaguely but deeply unhuman in all the contours, dimensions, proportions, decorations and constructional nuances of the blasphemously archaic stonework.

-H.P. Lovecraft

Giger's work disturbs us, spooks us, because of its enormous evolutionary time-span. It shows us, all too clearly, where we come from and where we are going.

-Timothy Leary

DEMON MASTER

by Les Paul Robley

Hans Rudi Giger was nothing like I expected. The meek, cherub-faced artist who greeted me at the door seemed so at odds with the horrors he painted for a living.

He began the interview by offering a grand tour of his home in Zurich, Switzerland, reacting to my growing excitement as if I were the first to witness his strange, yet beautiful one-of-a-kind furnishings.

Upstairs was a dinette set surrounded by biomechanical "Alien"-styled chairs. A unique glass coffee table was held up by six crucified Christ figures, three right-side up and three upside-down, representing the holy and infernal trinities.

► 26

Giger

A deformed Swiss camera housing had been mutated into a nightmarish metallic cyclops. All around hung panoramic gray-black triptyches of famous works from his *Necronomicon*. This book of early drawings served as inspiration for the creature in "Alien" and has influenced many subsequent films of the genre.

Sleek, beautiful women with up-turned eyes and a deathlike palor, steely serpents that grew into phal-luses, twisting labyrinthine plumbing fixtures that metamorphosed into diseased ribs and vertebrae. Amid all the harmonious depravity, Giger's two Siamese cats, Muggi and Noneli, posed like Egyptian statues as my Minolta snapped away. (He often uses them as models for his paintings, I discovered later.) Then, rounding a corner, I ran smack into the full-size adult creature from "Alien." Its double jaws gaped wide and its arms were extended in the horrific "Mammy" pose from the film.

Giger was eager that I see and photograph two preliminary designs from his latest film project, "The Mirror." Serving as conceptual artist, the movie is based on a number of his most gruesome illustrations from *Necronomicon I*.

The story by co-writer/director William Malone involves an an-



Giger at work with his aribrush on another of the Bosch-influenced demonic-erotic paintings which have become his trademark.

Photo by Les Paul Robley.

cient mirror that acts as a portal to another dimension. This parallel universe is the world of H.R. Giger. Sitting in Giger's study, engulfed by his sickening organic creations, rotting babies, goat-headed demons, congested surreal landscapes and coiled metallic guts, I felt like I was being cast in the nightmare world of "The Mirror," as I asked my first

question....

LPR: For "The Mirror," which paintings are they using specifically?

GIGER: They are using some of my best paintings for the film. You see them through the mirror in three-dimensional form. The people from The Mirror saw it in my book *Necronomicon I* and wanted to use it in their film. It was also

the "right stuff" for Ridley Scott to bring to "Alien" (particularly, the mutants from the painting Necronom IV). One of them, "The Spell," I began in 1972 and finished in '76. I've done about three or four of these environments. They are always about this size: 420mm long and 240mm high. I make them in three pieces so I can get them out of the house. (He also uses a dumbwaiter system to move the artwork while he paints, a method borrowed from Salvador Dali.)

LPR: Will you actually work on the set for "The Mirror?"

GIGER: Now I have not much to do on the film. For me it's the best when someone takes my images and brings it to life in the film, and I don't have to invent another thing. That's very nice.... I hope they use independent people for the effects and not a company, so I can become involved and control everything. Because it never ends up looking like my stuff. It always looks a little influenced by the man who is doing it. If he has spent his whole life modeling apes, the shapes look ape-like. The biggest problem is to find someone who can make my stuff look exactly like it is.

LPR: Who is doing it for the film?

GIGER: I don't know. I heard there are some people who worked on "Alien 2" or "Aliens." But I would prefer to bring along my man who modeled my home environment and furniture: the table, chairs. Des Fries is the best for me because he knows my work.

LPR: Will you work on "The Mirror" yourself and sculpt as you did on "Alien?"

GIGER: No, I don't think so. Just oversee. But I like to be very much involved in the film because I never was satisfied with what they did with my work in the past. I was horrified about "Poltergeist II." I couldn't find anything there. ... But that was probably my mistake not to be there. So, this time, if they want to transform my image they can't change a lot. But it's difficult to see how my paintings look from the side. So, prob-

ably, I have to give some advice and make some sketches of how they look dimensionally.

LPR: What did you think of the changes made to the designs of your creatures in "Aliens?"

GIGER: I thought the whole mechanization was very well done. Though, I was a little depressed because nobody asked me to work on this film. I was in Los Angeles at the time working on "Poltergeist II" and I asked around about "Alien 2." People told me they didn't know, that it was in England. For me it would be the most logical thing to work on that film. I also heard they didn't ask Ridley Scott about this movie.

LPR: You received compensa-

tion, though. . .

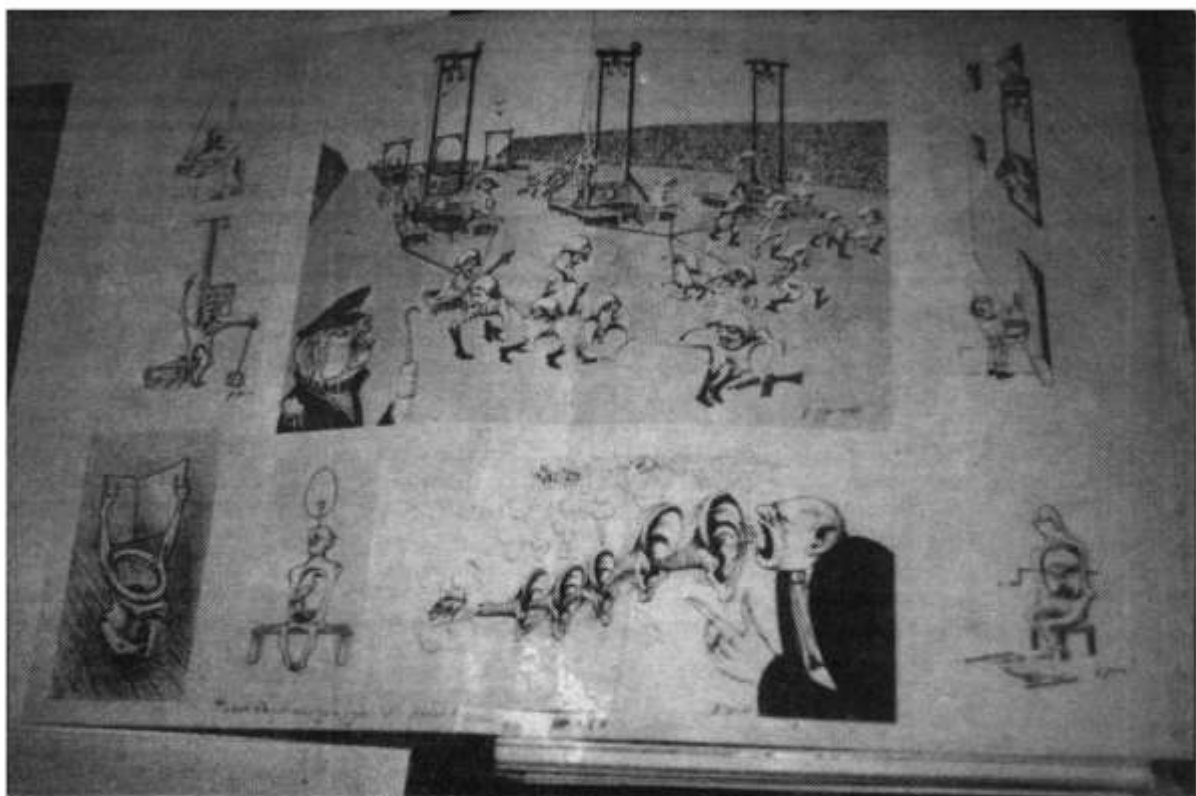
GIGER: No! Nothing. They put my name in the credits as designer of the old "Alien" concept, but I never got any money.

LPR: And they're your monsters!

GIGER: In the contract, Fox can make as many films as they want. It's always the company's rights and they do what they want.

LPR: Can we talk a little about the story of "The Mirror?" Do you know much about it?

GIGER: No. (laughter) I only saw a short 5-minute promo of the film in Italy. It shows some of my works and what I did on "Alien." It has a different mirror than my three-angled one. I was too late to



Sketches on a board show the origins of what become Giger paintings. Photo by Les Paul Robley.

Giger

427

show them so the crew made their own. It's an old mirror with a face on top and some hands and clouds around it. But, it's not my mirror. I don't like this mirror.

LPR: What does your mirror look like?

GIGER: The mirror is like a box.

It's closed by a door made up of two hands. It's composed of three angles, and when they pull the cover off, the evil comes out and you see the other world.

LPR: Are they using your concept?

GIGER: I don't know. I told them to do it. (laughs) We haven't seen each other, the man who makes this film.

LPR: How do you feel about the way in which your paintings have been recognized on the international art scene, and the way you've been recognized? It's now fashionable for people with a lot of money to buy copies of your work.

GIGER: I like to be recognized through magazines, such as *Cinefantastique*. I don't do a lot of originals each year. Only 25 small paintings.

LPR: Which artists have influenced you?

GIGER: First, it's always Hieronymus Bosch. And Dali, Gaudi and Alfred Kubin (an illustrator of the early 20th century). He wrote "The Other Side" and a movie was made from it called "Draumstadt." I prefer art nouveau and those from the Vienna school.

LPR: What about contemporary fantasy artists?

GIGER: I like comics and that man in Italy, Liberatore.

LPR: What are your favorite films and directors?

GIGER: You know the film "Blue Velvet?" David Lynch is still one of my favorite directors. And Ridley Scott. I'm not so crazy about fantastic films. I prefer reality.

LPR: Were you disappointed you weren't asked to work on David Lynch's "Dune," since you had previously done drawings for Alexandro Jodorowsky's version?

GIGER: David Lynch himself made drawings. Friends of mine asked him if I could work on "Dune" but he refused. He was not pleased because he thought we had stolen his "Eraserhead" baby creature for "Alien." But it can't be true because Ridley Scott had never seen "Eraserhead." I saw it, but I don't know. Maybe he was jealous. But, I think, it's unnecessary for him to make such statements because he's so good. I like



Giger sits beneath the triangular mirror which was the inspiration for the next movie to feature his works. Photo by Les Paul Robley.

all of his films so much. I am a great admirer of David Lynch and I would very much like to work for him.

LPR: Do you read any American science fiction, fantasy or horror?

GIGER: No, just books that are translated into German.

LPR: Which particular authors have inspired you?

GIGER: Lovecraft, for one. My books I gave the titles *Necronomicon I and II*, and in almost all of Lovecraft's stories the *Necronomicon* (a legendary book of magic) is mentioned. Also, I like Gustav Meyrink who wrote *Der Golem*.

LPR: How often do you go outside your dreams and ideas and use outside subject matter for your paintings?

GIGER: It depends what you do. If you've drunk too much wine and take some sleeping pills, it could create a melange that brings you outside this room or makes you go in through the walls. I don't know really how it works, but it often happens to me, things like that. I'm very curious how it works, but I never found out.

LPR: What about your use of Mordor from "Lord of the Rings?"

GIGER: I like this book very much, and I was looking for a title for my works. It was a nice name for my paintings so I adapted these words for them.

LPR: How do you describe yourself as an artist?

GIGER: I'm an artist not very "in." Just on the fringe. Fantastic art is never in. It's always a little on the side. There are just a few people who like fantastic art. In Zurich I think I'm alone. Switzerland is not a very fantastic land. If someone talks about Switzerland, it's always just about banks and money and mountains. Not about art_____

LPR: Harry Lime said it well in "The Third Man:" Their only

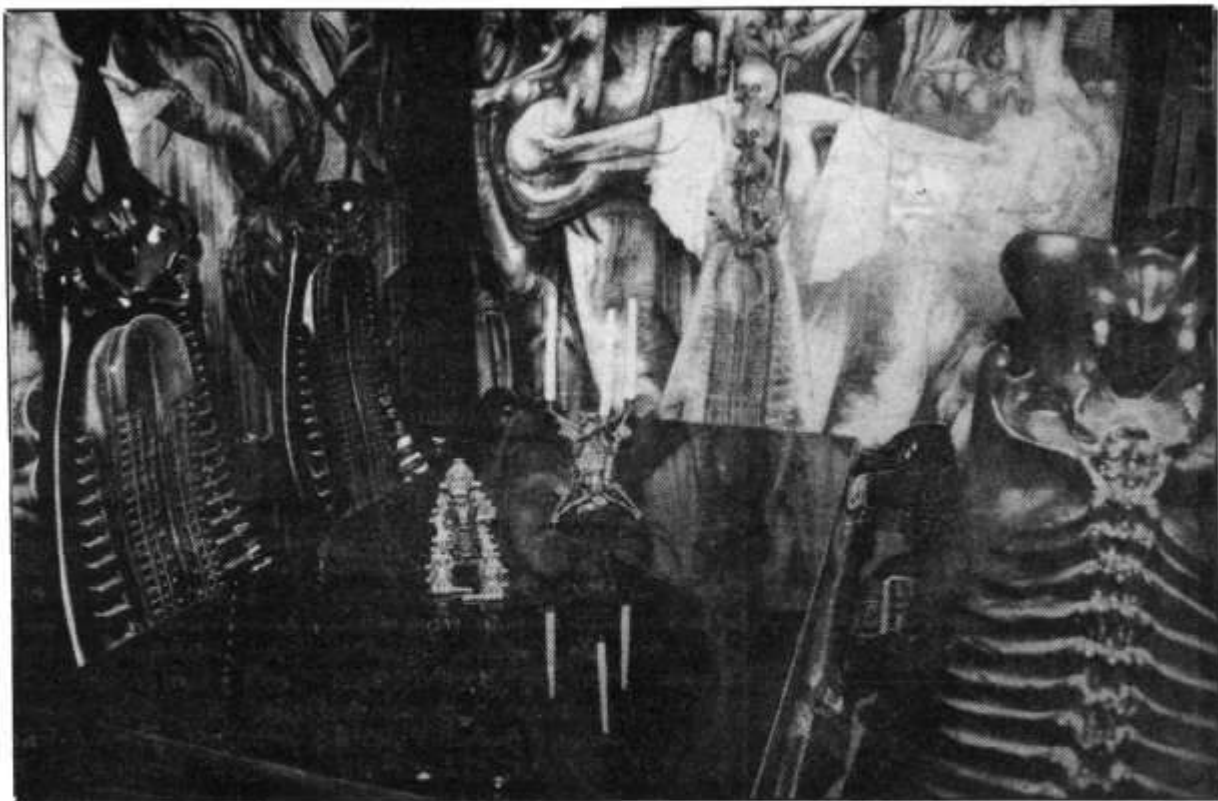
claim to fame is chocolate and the cuckoo clock.

GIGER: (laughs) Now if you go to the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt and they hear you're from Switzerland, they call you "Kucku-herschling." It's a box used in the kitchen meaning Suisse-Deutsche.

LPR: That's funny, since cuckoo clocks originate from the Black Forest in Germany, not Switzerland, like everyone thinks. Does

your mother know what you paint for a living? What does she think about the phalluses and dead babies?

GIGER: She likes my work very much because she's my mother and, therefore, must like what I do. (laughs) Sometimes she's a little bit ashamed of what I do. If there are other people around, she sometimes has to defend my work, but



Pelvic table and chair set designed and executed by Giger and now sitting in his Zurich studio. Photo by Les Paul Robley.

Giger

429

normally she likes very much what I do.

LPR: Does she have any pictures in her home?

GIGER: Yes, but not these great sizes.

LPR: You describe your work as "biomechanical" creations...

GIGER: Uh-huh. Sometimes it looks a little bit like techniques from the last century. Similar to David Lynch. There are tubes, pipes and not very well-working machinery.

LPR: Do you have many admirers here in Europe or are they mostly from the States?

GIGER: I have a lot here. The most I have in Japan. I have a fan club there.

LPR: Why Japan of all places?

GIGER: Probably because the Japanese people like very much the heavy stuff and cruelty in my paintings. Maybe because of Godzilla... I don't know. I've found that young people—ten to twenty years—are very well informed about me. So, I'm very happy. All of my books have been translated into Japanese, too.

LPR: Your paintings are incredibly detailed, almost masochistically so. You put so much intensity into them. This must be a tremendous amount of labor for you. Have you tried to ease this intensity over the years? Or have they become more detailed?

GIGER: At the moment I don't do these three-piece wall paintings. I do small ones. They are not magical like "The Spell." It depends. I work best under pressure.

LPR: Your book *NY. City* has so much detail. It's very congested, filled with rhythmic patterns. Aside from *Victory* and a few other works, you paint in very muted tones. Do you ever plan to use vivid colors?

GIGER: Sometimes I try to use colors, but it doesn't work really. I find that black and white or monochromatic works best for me. Color is against the force. A painting like "The Spell" would be terrible in colors.

LPR: Yes, you'd lose a lot. Just like certain films such as "Psycho" would never look good in color.

GIGER: Yeah, horrible.

LPR: How do you paint? Do you make sketches first?

GIGER: No. It's all airbrush sprayed on paper which has been glued to wood. I use mainly ink and white acrylic paint. Then I put lacquer over it to make sure nothing wet can destroy it. If someone asks me to work for a film, I do some sketches in bed and then I go to work it out. But when I do the

giant murals, I work just fresh without any sketches. I start on one side of the painting and work to the other. I look to make sure it's all linear and the angles are right, but I have no idea what's coming out.

LPR: That's amazing. They look so symmetrical.

GIGER: I use paper that measures 420 to 240mm. There's no bigger paper than that. But I can't go out with the paintings. They're really made for this room.

LPR: What about the smaller ones? Do you use the same method?

GIGER: Yes. I just start from one side and go to the other. I paint whatever comes to my mind. I have no pre-planning. For instance, the ones with the penis and the baby heads, I thought I'd just like to do that.

LPR: You've said many of these images come from your dreams. Do you have very bad nightmares?

GIGER: Often, yeah. Like everybody, I think terrible things.

LPR: My dreams are never this bad.

GIGER: No? This one (referring to "The Spell") is not bad. Do you feel bad here?

LPR: No, I don't feel bad here. I like this type of artwork. It's very interesting. To me, though, it is a scary place. I mean it's not somewhere I'd like to spend my holidays.

GIGER: Yeah, that's true.

LPR: How painful is it for you to part with one of your paintings when you have to sell one?

GIGER: I don't sell the large paintings. I sold a whole environment to a collector and that was quite hard. These in this room I will never give away. I want to keep the whole thing together. When "The Spell" went to Japan on exhibit, I had another behind it that took its place.

LPR: Do you paint to music?

GIGER: No. The only one I like really is Miles Davis. I like piano, organ and violin.

LPR: You've also painted album covers for pop artists. During the '70s, you designed covers for *Brain Salad Surgery* by Emerson, Lake and Palmer, and *KooKoo* by Deborah Harry.

GIGER: I did a lot of lips and people with no eyes for Emerson, Lake and Powell, but it never came out. I did about eleven lips.

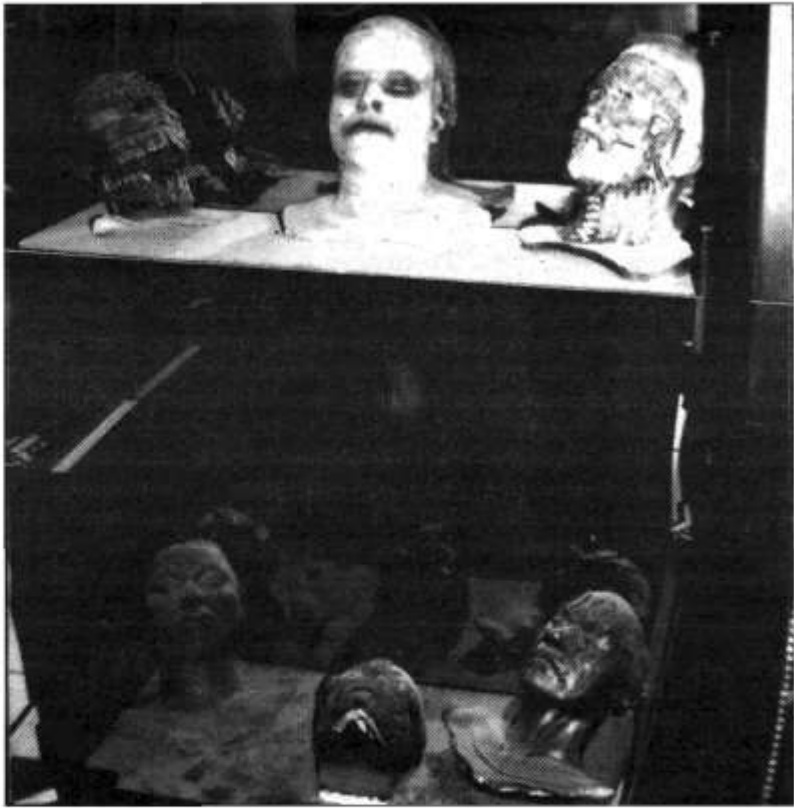
LPR: Guns are present in much of your work. What has been your fascination with them?

GIGER: Guns are like an air pistol or an air brush. You can do something from far away and not be directly in contact with your subject.

LPR: Do you shoot?

GIGER: Sometimes. We have not much occasion here in the city.

LPR: What about your fascination with dead cigar-chomping babies and phallic symbols?



A collection of masks done by Giger form a strange tableau set against mirrors. Photo by Les Paul Robley.

GIGER: People have always said that I look like these babies a little bit.

LPR: A self-portrait?

GIGER: Probably. I don't know why I did these. At the same time there was a problem with oil and gas in 1973. Do you remember?

LPR: Yes, the energy crisis.

GIGER: So, you can see many burners in my paintings. That's the only thing I know and the other things must have some reason behind them. Also, the contraceptives now are very "in."

LPR: Especially with all the "STOP AIDS!" posters I've seen in Switzerland. You should do these posters.... People might take more notice what with your style of painting.

GIGER: (laughs) Yes. Do you know this poster I did they made so much noise about in America? (Giger shows the Dead Kennedys poster that was banned in the States. It is a veritable meat factory of penises and vaginas. More disgusting than erotic, the sexual imagery is very different from his other works.)

LPR: Have you done any research in the supernatural as a basis for your work?

GIGER: Not really, but sometimes unexplained things have happened to me....

LPR: Do you believe in it?

GIGER: In a way, yes.

LPR: Have you ever had a supernatural experience?

GIGER: Yes. As I told you sometimes I could go out of my body and fly about 50 or 40 centimeters over the ground from my bed to another place and my perspective was about that. I could see my feet in the foreground.

LPR: This happened many times?

GIGER: No, not many times. About eight times.

LPR: Why do you consider your work "upbeat," especially with this lurid obsession with death and the dark side?

GIGER: What is this word, "upbeat?"

LPR: Uh, happy or positive. Do you feel your work is that way?

GIGER: No, I don't think so. Happy colors are mostly green, blue and red. My colors are more akin to an old basement, like rotting potatoes, or worms from the potatoes. My paintings are inside paintings, what I think inside.

LPR: Do you feel your work is more pessimistic, then?

GIGER: Probably, yes. It depends on which level you are on. If you are on the ground, it could be negative. I think my work is positive because it's not a destroyed landscape. The ladies are shown like in a peep show; they are not so ugly, but shown in a nice way.

LPR: How would you describe something that is not positive?

GIGER: Boring things. Visions of hell and Hieronymus Bosch are all positive because something is happening. The terrible thing for me is if nothing happens; no movement.

LPR: You mean like still-lives? Have you ever tried to paint flowers or normal pictures like bowls of fruit?

GIGER: Yes, I try.

LPR: What do they look like?

GIGER: Nice. I did some in colors for my mother.

LPR: Since you've been painting, have you noticed any improvements in the way your art is received?

GIGER: I think so, yes. I can see that because there are so many Americans who copy my work in the film business.

LPR: How do you feel about that, especially when you don't get compensated for it?

GIGER: One way I'm happy that people recognize what I do, and in another way I'm not very happy because nobody says that's my idea or my creation. If someone adapts my stuff directly, if they say I am influenced by Giger, it's okay. But, if they say nothing, then I am not very happy.

LPR: And the fact you get no money for it, does that make you angry?

GIGER: There are a lot of American filmmakers who copy my work, and they send me a letter and say it is nice to have you in my film (laughs). So, I can't say anything. It's nice to be there. You know, sometimes people have the same idea at the same time. Also, my stuff is not completely fresh. I have seen Gaudi. I have seen Kubin, Dali....

LPR: What are you working on now besides "The Mirror?" Any paintings or books?

GIGER: I did goblins for a Japanese film. I made some drawings, two airbrush. I'm the only foreign person working on the film. My name H.R. they can't translate into Japanese.

LPR: At what age did you begin painting?

GIGER: About 18. I made some surrealistic sketches or atomic cartoons of how we'd look after nuclear war. People with no arms and they made jokes about this.

LPR: Did they look anything like your paintings now?

GIGER: I have a model for a new book that shows what I did in 1962 and '63.

LPR: How has your work changed over the years since you began painting?

GIGER: It became, I don't know, more clear, perhaps. If you saw *N.Y. City* (produced in 1977), you'll see how the style has changed.

LPR: When will your new book come out?

GIGER: I don't know. Probably in about four or five months. In May of '88, the same time as my show in Berlin, I hope.