

FLIGHTS OF IMAGINATION

The Society's exhibition at the Museum HR Giger, Gruyeres, Switzerland

The members of the committee were thrilled when we were informed that the Society was invited to exhibit at the prestigious and world-renowned Museum HR Giger at the Chateau St. Germain in Gruyeres. We knew it would be a complex undertaking but, as it was an opportunity of a lifetime, we knuckled down and set about organising the exhibition.

After a juried selection of the works the paintings started arriving at Brigid's house and were stored in her studio. *(What would we do without her kindness?)*

Switzerland is not in the European Union so we had to obtain custom documents. This was bureaucracy at its craziest. It meant unpacking every work, weighing it, noting down its size and its author then making a thumbnail picture to include in a massive document which had to be typed and reproduced in triplicate (of course). This cost the Society £320 for the privilege of doing all this work. These sorts of expenses are what make organising exhibitions so prohibitive. Many hire firms do not allow their vehicles to leave the UK so, after a prolonged search we found one that would allow the van to be used in Europe for an added premium of £220 (another extra cost) above the daily cost of hiring and insurance. When Michel collected the custom documents it was stressed that they had to be stamped by



The entrance to the exhibition - through the museum and along the balcony

customs, at the leaving port, before departing from the UK. We were booked on the 11.00 o'clock Euro-tunnel shuttle and we arrived at the terminal in plenty of time. We went in search of a custom official to be told that there were none stationed there, and one would have to come from Dover or Folkestone. That would take half an hour. Three hours later, after having waited patiently in the car-park, we finally got clearance and managed to get on the 14.30 shuttle.

The journey after that was uneventful; we spent the night in Reims, and we arrived in Gruyeres the next afternoon. Giger had graciously invited us (Michel, Eike and Christina) to use his flat, which is part of the museum, as a base. We had arrived a day early because on the Thursday, a religious holiday, traffic would be unable to enter the village.

At five o'clock precisely, on Thursday, the weary trio was blasted awake by a brass band playing under the window. Being pitch dark and, up to then, remarkably silent the sound of brass instruments seemed incredibly loud and we leapt out of bed as if the place was on fire. They played one tune and silently marched away never to be seen again.

We eagerly waited to join in the celebrations but zilch...nothing happened. We later learnt that this year another village had been selected for the festivities. The three of us spent the day unwrapping the works and stacking them in size order to make it simple to select the next day.

Laurie Lipton and I (Brigid), flew to Switzerland on Thursday. We checked into our hotel and went out to have dinner, and we encountered the intrepid trio walking down the street - it could have been an amazing coincidence except for the fact that there is only one road in and out of the section of Gruyeres where the museum is located. It is a tiny but very picturesque place. Every house is decorated in the Swiss style and the entire village is dominated by the Chateau St. Germain.

Over the meal we were regaled by the trio's adventures and arranged for an early start, the next day, to get the works on the walls. It looked like an impossible task - the store room

An artist has no need to express his thought directly in his work for the latter to reflect its quality

Marcel Proust 1871-1922

was overflowing with the art works and, at first glance, the hanging space seemed inadequate. This is where the idea of arranging the works by size proved to be a life-saver. By dint of hanging the largest pictures first, and then fitting the medium and smaller ones around them, the rooms began to



Michel, Brigid, Laurie and Eike hard at work!

take shape. It was wonderful to see that each artist on the hanging committee had such a beautiful vision as to how the works should be arranged. Unfortunately none of the visions coincided! Things were getting heated when it was suggested that we elect one person who would make the final decision. Michel was elected, and he had some tough decisions to make! Artists are lovely people but can become quite temperamental at times. After the pain was over, the rooms began to take shape - each artist's vision contributed to the overall effect, and when we stood back, the miracle had happened - we had a cohesive exhibition,

before he beamed and said *This is a very good show! All the works are excellent and yet so different and we are very pleased to have the Society exhibiting with us.*"

We all cheered as much with relief as appreciation. Later Giger and Carmen invited the organisers and some of the artists to a celebration dinner at a nearby restaurant. We all sat at a huge table and most of us had cheese fondue - a speciality of the region. Giger told me that the restaurant was very old and had been serving cheese fondue for so long that if you scraped the

The official opening was on Saturday, June 17th, at 17.00 hours. That morning Eike and Michel went into the nearest town to buy food so that we could invite some of the artists, who had travelled to Gruyeres, for lunch. We ate in the kitchen of the flat while looking at a magnificent view over the countryside and

exchanging excited news, ideas and observations. We don't often get the chance to meet overseas artists so it is always exciting when we get a chance to do so.

After lunch we changed into our finery, and gathered in the exhibition rooms to await Giger, who had graciously agreed to open the show. It is no surprise that we were beginning to be nervous - would Giger like the show? After an anxious wait we heard that Giger had arrived. There was a large crowd gathered to see him. He has film star status in Switzerland: Newsmen and television crews recorded his arrival. It was a tense time for us. He looked around

walls and ceilings you would be rewarded with cheese.

He was toying with a new creative idea - a chute from the top floor of the Museum which would allow people to slide down to the bottom in a hair-raising ride. I didn't fancy it myself. I Told Giger that Eike Erzmoneit, who was sitting opposite us, had hung every single painting. *"He is a miracle!"* I exclaimed. Giger, who was sharing an enormous cheese fondue pan with Eike, remarked that he also was a great trencherman. Eike had achieved the near impossible task of



Giger, Michel and Brigid



Various aspects of the upstairs and downstairs galleries



finishing the vast amount of melted cheese in front of them and Giger smiled at him and said that this was miracle-working too!

It was a time to be remembered - Giger sitting in the middle of the golden lights of the restaurant like a happy paterfamilias and all the artists in his magic circle suddenly becoming, for a moment, part of his family - the family of the brotherhood of art.

It was hard to leave after so many new friendships had been formed - and such an exciting atmosphere had been created - however we were left with the satisfying feeling that all the hard work and planning had paid off and the Society had launched a historic show!

Listen! There never was an artistic period. There never was an Art-loving nation.
James McNeill Whistler 1834-1903



Jurgen Geier's work contrasting with a Giger door at the Museum HR Giger

Review of the Gruyeres exhibition which appeared in the FREIBURGER NACHRICHTEN in German

IN THE REALM OF FANTASY

By Carol Schneuwly

50 artists show their personal visions in a special exhibition in the Museum HR Giger in Gruyeres

In 1995 the Society for Art of Imagination was founded in England. It is a kind of brotherhood of artists devoted to surreal and fantastic art. At the Museum HR Giger in Gruyeres the Society is exhibiting on the European mainland for the first time.

Fantastic art is as boundless as the human imagination. It is impossible to lump the artists who are active in this field into a common denominator. There are attempts to use terms such as Surrealism or Fantastic Realism, Magic Realism or Visionary Art to describe these works. Behind those and similar labels hides the endeavour to express personal visions, dreams and emotions beyond realism and abstraction, in other words, fantasies in all their variety.

LONG TRADITIONS:

There have always been artists who followed their own visions rather than the current predominant trends in art. Early exponents of fantastic art were Jan and Hubert van Eyck and Hieronymus Bosch. The work of the great painters of the Italian Renaissance such as Sandro Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci can also be placed in this tradition. Pieter Brueghel the Elder, Rembrandt and William Blake are other examples.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries it was amongst others, the French Symbolists Gustave Moreau and Paul Gauguin, the Norwegian Edvard Munch and Gustav Klimt in Austria who put their stamp on fantastic art. After the First World War surrealists like Max Ernst, Rene Magritte and Salvador Dali explored the subconscious. At the end of the Second World War the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism emerged. This was in sympathy with surrealism, and consisted of artists such as Ernst Fuchs, Erich Brauer, Rudolf Hausner, Wolfgang Hutter and Anton Lehmden.

VARIETY IN TECHNIQUES AND CONTENTS

The current exhibition "Art of Imagination" provides a fascinating insight into contemporary fantastic art.

Fifty artists from all over the world, but mainly from the Anglo-Saxon regions are showing their visions and fantasies. All artists are members of the Society for Art of Imagination, an international collective for the promotion of fantastic art. The Society wants to make this kind of art more popular with group exhibitions. On first view only one thing is clear when entering the exhibition: the immense variety that makes fantastic art both in technique as well as content so exciting. The *mische* technique, using both oil paint and tempera, is popular as propagated by Ernst Fuchs, Honorary President, and his pupil Brigid Marlin, founder of the society. But there are also the almost photographic-like pencil drawing of Laurie Lipton, the oil paintings of Jurgen Geier, the works in ink of Michel de Saint Ouen and Vincent Castiglia who mixes ink with his own blood.

The exhibition offers something for every taste. Romantic dreamlike work like Penny G's "Guinevere" or Jenny Reynish's "Secret" contrasts with something dark/nightmarish like Stephen Lombardi's "The Worm that Screamed" or Marcus Usherwood's frightening vision of "Mengele's Private Zoological Garden".

Whether the works makes the viewer happy or sad, inspire ideas or inspires anger or bewilderment one thing is clear - they leave nobody untouched.

"All exhibits are very personal" says Ingrid Lehner, curator of the Museum Giger. "The artists live their dreams and fantasies in their work without any restrictions. That is really an ability of children that many adults have lost."

In the Museum HR.Giger one can perhaps find a piece of this ability again.

THE ARTISTS ARE LIVING THEIR DREAMS

GALERIE MUSEUM HRGIGER

FLOWING LIGHT

The angelic art of Andrew Gonzalez

Daniel Woodward

The divine seeing itself in the mirror is beauty, and you are the divine and you are the mirror.

Andrew Gonzalez, of San Antonio, Texas, has been depicting the human form as temple and vessel sublimed by transformative forces for over 15 years. Empowered by an artistic mission to transform the collective imagination, Gonzalez wields with masterly sensitivity the evanescent medium of airbrush and acrylic, and succeeds in bringing forth images of the profound, heart-piercing tenderness of the angelic encounter with what he calls the transfiguring biosophic flame.

Angels are manifestations of *Logos*, divine messengers and healers, performing unfathomable illuminating and redemptive functions within the celestial and terrestrial matrix. Winged and resplendent, angels pursue the shadows of ignorance and darkness, shining, like the sun, without preference, nurturing love upon the most humble of beings, helping them to transcend their limitations. Angels help the soul to hatch out of its enclosure, its

psychic shell of recursive behaviour patterns and cycles. This heart-opening epiphany is the theme depicted in many of Andrew Gonzalez images.

In times of secular materialism, it is rare that we have the eyes to see this serendipity. That is why it is good to have paintings such as these, to remind us of celestial mercy that overwhelms consciousness with its lightness, highness and purity. Andrew Gonzalez describes one such experience, as being enveloped in a fiercely radiant golden light, moving rapidly towards its blazing white centre. I felt what could only be described as a sense of being reborn. The sweet ambrosia of the Great Spirit removes blockages and opens up sacred centres in the body that transmit and receive spiritual light. This transfiguration is the remedy to self-persecution and existential angst.

The images brought into being by Gonzalez depict both the orientation to and embodiment of the biosophic energies of celestial grace and force. In that light, we are endlessly purified, fresh and new, ever renewing, ever-resurrected

