

# H.R. GIGER



## ALIENATED

**Biomechanical modifier  
H.R. GIGER watches the clock.**

BY STEVEN CERIO

**M**ost rock fans know H. R. Giger's work from his designs for the *Alien* film series and his album covers for such heavy hitters as Emerson Lake & Palmer, Deborah Harry, and Danzig. The universally-recognized space monster that haunted the starship *Nostradamus* was the direct result of Giger's fertile, fevered imagination, and the brooding bitch on *Brain Salad Surgery* emerged from his quasi-misanthropic mind. But those burning images are only a fraction of Giger's self-contained universe, where biomechanical surrealism pervades dehumanized characters whose hearts and minds have been replaced by tubes and wires. Part pornography, part pop science fiction, Giger has scared and influenced a generation of artists and film buffs.

In Giger's universe, machines often appear to be parasitic upon humans in unending episodes of domination. He depicts a humanity that is weak and in need of robots for essential tasks such as eating and fucking — humans are perpetually relegated to life-support systems. That's one of his work's turn-ons, but in fact, Giger feels that he is portraying a positive relationship between machines and humanity. Despite the fact that it is symbiotic, it is horrifying — a vision of hell from the future.

To say that Giger's images are erotic is an understatement. Heavy S&M abounds. Phallic shapes grow from the

fleshy floor as vaginal ovals appear atop volcanos. However, in his interviews he downplays any sexual symbolism by saying that most people have a tendency to see penises in every column and vaginas in every hole.

H. R. Giger is important because he is a fantastic surrealist obsessed with life, sex and death. There are never depictions of flesh alone; flesh is always accompanied by machines. Humanity is slowly being replaced by metal and circuits. Botched babies and imperfect cocksuckers wait patiently for their turn to find sexual and spiritual fulfillment through mechanization.

Currently, Giger has given up painting in favor of sculpture and drawings, and is compiling a book which will contain photographs of tattoos of his elaborate images. His most recent exhibit, *Watch Abart*, at New York's Alexander Gallery, displayed his Swiss fascination with clockwork and his interest in Daliesque surrealism. Oversized spiked timepieces and macabre holograms greeted visitors as the space was transformed into a chronological twilight zone.

Giger's business relationships have sometimes been as turbulent as the dark world he has created. For example, he was in a legal dispute over the blockbuster film *Alien 3*. Giger contended that the film's producers failed to properly credit him for his monstrous designs; consequently he was denied an Academy Award nomination. He is now involved in litigation over copyright infringement concerning artwork used by Glenn Danzig for the cover of his album *How The Gods Kill*. Giger claims Danzig used the image for merchandising without permission. Hopefully minor legal adjustments will fix this malfunction before the machine shuts down.

Vilified by American puritans for riveting, taboo-ridden images like the poster included in the *Dead Kennedy's Frankenchrist* album package or his own seminal book of psycho-satanic airbrush paintings, *Necronomicon*, Giger remains the undisputed champion of the fever dream. We spoke with this renown alien artist about sex and art in Hell.

**SECONDS:** After your recent show at the Alexander Gallery, there were many complaints about the twenty-five dollar door price. That wasn't your idea, was it?

**GIGER:** Oh my God, no! The gallery owner was upset because I promised to come by the gallery one day to meet some fans. Then something happened and I couldn't get there. I was told there were some kids waiting for me, and they were playing football in the gallery and making a lot of noise. The gallery was furious and afraid that things could get damaged. The owner said, "I need protection — more security for the art. To cover it, I need to charge a twenty-five dollar fee." There were so many kids, he was frightened. I heard that here in the States even museums don't charge that much. I told him, "You can't do that," and he got all sour. It was very difficult to convince him. In the end, I said I'd take the risk on myself if something happened, and then he gave the show for free. No one wanted to pay the twenty-five dollars. They all went down the

hallway to see the Robert Crumb show for free. The gallery wouldn't display the one sculpture I had done that wasn't in metal. They said the polyester and rubber are not quality materials—only metals. They said you can't show that uptown. It was the last piece I made, so I didn't have time to do it in metal. That's the reason why they didn't want to use the show poster we gave them, because it showed that same piece.

**SECONDS:** *Tell us about your WatchAbart exhibition.*

**GIGER:** I wanted to call it *Giger's SwatchAbart*, but Swatch wouldn't let me use their 'S'. At the time, I was negotiating with them. They wanted to work with me, but later on they became afraid because they felt my images were a bit too strong for their philosophy. Swatch is one of the best watches because they are very cheap and I can take a shower and swim with it on. That's why I'll always wear one.

**SECONDS:** *Is there a nationalistic inspiration for the watches?*

**GIGER:** Perhaps. Watches are a unique thing. They're different from other objects because they run in time, which has to do with life. One of Dali's best paintings was the work in which he likened watches to melting Camembert cheese. I made my crosswatches unfunctional art objects with four bands.

**SECONDS:** *You met Dali at one point, right?*

**GIGER:** Several times, but he didn't always recognize me. He always thought I was Austrian, because I worked in a detailed style like the Viennese Fantastic artists such as Ernst Fuchs. When I was at Dali's house, he presented me as a painter from Austria to the girls in his home—he gave the girls any name he could find because there were so many people visiting that he couldn't remember their names. The people would all come after 5 P.M., when he was done working. There were all sorts of artists and good-looking people, all sorts of gangsters. He liked to be surrounded by musicians. Amanda Lear wrote a book about him. For some time she was his lover. At the time, they didn't know if Amanda was a guy or a girl. David Bowie brought her in and told Dali she was a man in order to make her more mysterious.

**SECONDS:** *I read in one of your books that Dali tried to seduce your old girlfriend.*

**GIGER:** Yes. He was very successful because people always did what he wanted; they treated him like a king or a priest. They also wanted him to play the king in Alexander Jodorowski's version of *Dune* that was never filmed. Dali was supposed to get paid I-don't-know-how-many millions for each hour.

**SECONDS:** *What school of art do you consider yourself from? Fantastic? Surrealist?*

**GIGER:** Both schools are relevant. Fuchs seemed to be technically the best out of the old masters. He's a good friend of mine. We're opening a museum in a castle a few kilometers from Vienna. It'll be the first international Museum Of Fantastic Art and the first show will be called *The Treasure Of Morpheus*. It will open in 1995. There will be three hundred artists with four works each. One

of the artists is Mati Klarwein, who did the covers for Santana's *Abraxas* and Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew*. I really enjoy his work.

**SECONDS:** *What is the relationship of your art to psychedelia?*

**GIGER:** I think there's a relationship. Not so in the colors, but I have some older works that look very psychedelic.

**SECONDS:** *What have drugs done for the art world?*

**GIGER:** You know, drugs are forbidden in Switzerland. Even psychedelic drugs that open you up are forbidden. LSD was invented by Albert Hoffman, who is Swiss. He had his first psychedelic experience on a bicycle, after accidentally getting some LSD on his fingers. He didn't know what he had discovered. He was looking for something that would help women in labor. He changed the world. Many artists symbolize the psychedelic experience with a bicycle. This man is now 88 years old. I met him about six months ago. He's very healthy and intelligent. Each day, he hangs upside down with his wife for half an hour, like a bat, in gravity boots.

**SECONDS:** *You know Timothy Leary too, right?*

**GIGER:** Yes, but not too well. When he was in Switzerland, he was looking for a place to hide because they wanted to put him in jail. My father was a pharmacist and knew Leary was in trouble. He was not very excited about Leary being in Switzerland, so I didn't tell him I was trying to get help for him. He wouldn't have been pleased.

**SECONDS:** *It's been rumored that you're not allowed in the States since the incident with the Dead Kennedys poster.*

**GIGER:** Not allowed in the country? No, that's not true, I was never charged or prosecuted. They were looking for the painting in Jello's home, they thought it was a photo or something. We explained that this painting was shown all over the world in galleries, on television, and even at the Bronx Museum without any controversy. The painting is one of a triptych illustrating the circle of life, represented by babies, skulls, and penises.

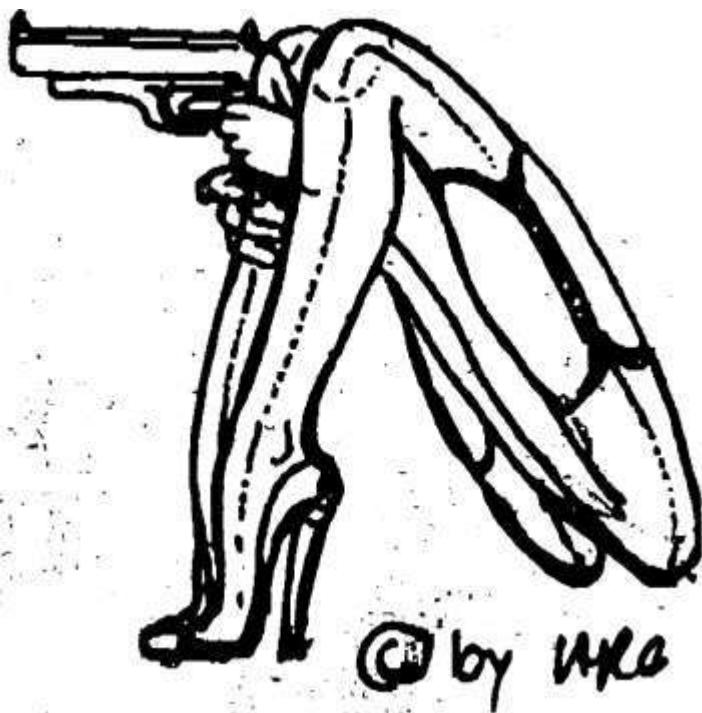
**SECONDS:** *Do you think they approach erotic art differently in the States?*

**GIGER:** Yes, they like erotic art very much, but not officially. They have trouble showing my books in store windows. *Necronomicon* came out fifteen years ago, you would think by now that they'd have



*Watchguardian, Head TV* 1993, cast bronze, 33x20x45cm.

no problem with it. They're seeing sexual penetrations that aren't there. They're looking for them. They wanted me to hide the breasts on the cover by putting type or stars over them.



**SECONDS:** *I've noticed a lot of guns in your work.*

**GIGER:** Yes, before I was able to get a lady, before puberty, I was collecting guns. My father gave me my first gun, an automatic pistol.

**SECONDS:** *Do you still have it?*

**GIGER:** No, because later I was more interested in revolvers; I admired them from cowboy films. I liked them because they could fall in the sand and still shoot.

**SECONDS:** *Do you use them for anything other than a phallic symbol in your work?*

**GIGER:** Any object has sexual symbolism. A long thing is always a penis, a hollow thing is always a vagina. That's all very simple. I don't approve of guns for the killing of humans or animals. I distance myself from their violence. In my work they represent magical action. Working with an airbrush is also a magical action, but it's non-violent.

**SECONDS:** *Are you still painting?*

**GIGER:** No, I stopped painting. I'm working directly with my ideas through my ink drawings. I like having my ideas immediately fixed on paper or in books, even through comics or storyboards. I realized drawings were the quickest way to transmit my ideas to people, something I noticed as I was faxing sketches to them. There was no sense in faxing copies of airbrushed paintings, since they would print in such high contrast.

**SECONDS:** *How are people reacting to your new drawings?*

**GIGER:** They don't enjoy them as much as the airbrushed paintings. I've noticed that artists prefer my drawings. Non-artists fixate on the airbrushed works because they come closer to a reality. To me, the paintings are too finished and too cold. What I do like about using the airbrush is that it's easier to render texture with it. I don't like shiny objects such as new airplanes, but with the airbrush I can

create the passage of time on an object.

**SECONDS:** *What criticism about your work bothers you the most?*

**GIGER:** After *Alien* people only talked about me, but I'd rather have people talk about my work. After the Oscars I became kind of a celebrity. People think they can do with you what they want, they don't feel it's necessary to talk about your work anymore. They just want to make small talk, they don't take you so seriously. After *Alien* the museums stopped buying my pictures. They think that if you do film or architecture, you don't have anything to do with art. I read someone say in a review of my art that you can't make paintings with an airbrush. Stupid guy.

**SECONDS:** *What's the highest compliment you've been paid?*

**GIGER:** The greatest compliment is when people get tattooed with my work, whether it's done well or not. To wear something like that your whole life is the largest compliment someone can pay to you as an artist. I have no tattoos. The only tattoo I'd ever want to get is a cross on my arm to show my doctor where to draw blood from.

**SECONDS:** *How do you feel about your fans?*

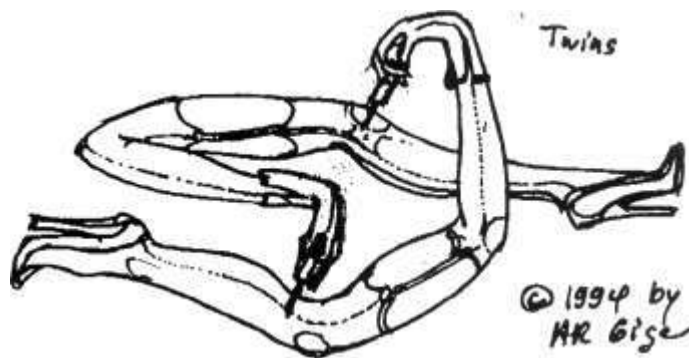
**GIGER:** I like my fans very much. When I see that people enjoy my work, it gives me great happiness and the energy to go on. Everyone needs a little admiration, just like everyone needs a little sex, love, and vitamins from time to time. But some fans are too enthusiastic and disturb me at home. This I don't enjoy, I like peace and quiet when I'm at home.

**SECONDS:** *Have you ever looked to religion for inspiration?*

**GIGER:** No.

**SECONDS:** *Is your use of Satanism purely poetic?*

**GIGER:** My interest came from literature. I was quite interested in mythology and magic and that's why those images appear in my art.



Sketches on this page from *The Mystery Of San Gottardo*

**SECONDS:** *When you paint your nightmares, are you doing it to exorcise them or to celebrate them?*

**GIGER:** If I have a problem in my life, it's that my dreams aren't very good. The stress destroys my dreams. It brings back memories of military service and school. If I have the same disagreeable dream repeatedly, I'll paint it to liberate myself from it.

**SECONDS:** *Who are the beings in your work?*

**GIGER:** They're often people I admire, like beautiful women — my goddesses. I like to create images of faces in ecstasy.

**SECONDS:** *Your work is often described as violent, but I've always sensed a feeling of serenity and contentment.*

**GIGER:** I hate violence, but violence can be played out in sexual play. I have always thought of my paintings in a way, as being beautiful. I don't look at them as ugly, to many people the beauty is hidden. I do have some paintings that I think are ugly, but I had to



Louis Stalder

Lamp 1993, cast aluminum and polyresin, 80x40x20cm.

do them for some strange reason, although I don't know why. I don't enjoy looking at them.

**SECONDS:** *I understand that you have had problems with the producers of Alien 3 over your omission from the credits.*

**GIGER:** That's right...

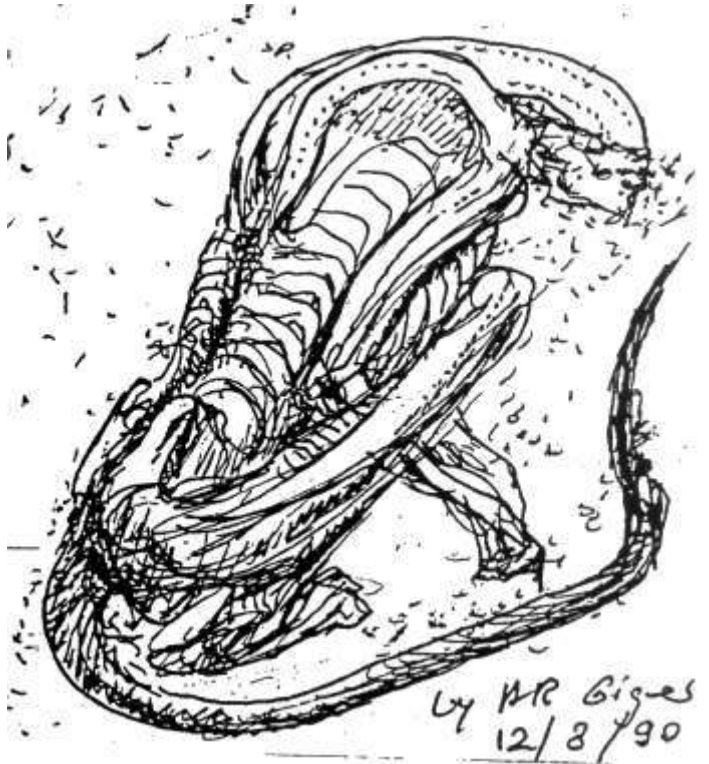
**SECONDS:** *Is that something you can discuss?*

**GIGER:** These are things I don't like to discuss because it's horrible. I've had a lot of bad experiences with people not being honest.

**SECONDS:** *So will you shy away from film work?*

**GIGER:** I no longer have any illusions about Hollywood and the movie-making process. I worked hard on *Alien 3* improving the creature from the first movie. They tried to hide the fact that I was the designer. When it was shown in the theatres, nobody knew that

I worked on it. My credit, as promised in the contract, was not there. Shit, after a long argument between lawyers, it was finally fixed for video, but it was too late for me. I hope it's better next time.



The design of Giger's creature for *Alien 3*

**SECONDS:** *What about the screenplay that you're working on?*

**GIGER:** It's called *The Mystery Of San Gottardo*. It concerns a race of creatures, my Biomechanoids—part organic, part machine. The concept of these reduced human beings is that they are a new life form. They consist of only an arm and a leg. It's the further developing of a recurring image in my work from over the last thirty years. My earliest sketch was called *The Beggar*, in 1963. The film will be about a man and his unique love for a freak of nature, Armbeinda, who is really sentient being combining an arm and a leg. This is where I'm focusing my attention at the moment.

**"Everything has its good and evil."**

**SECONDS:** *Are you also having some problems with Danzig?*

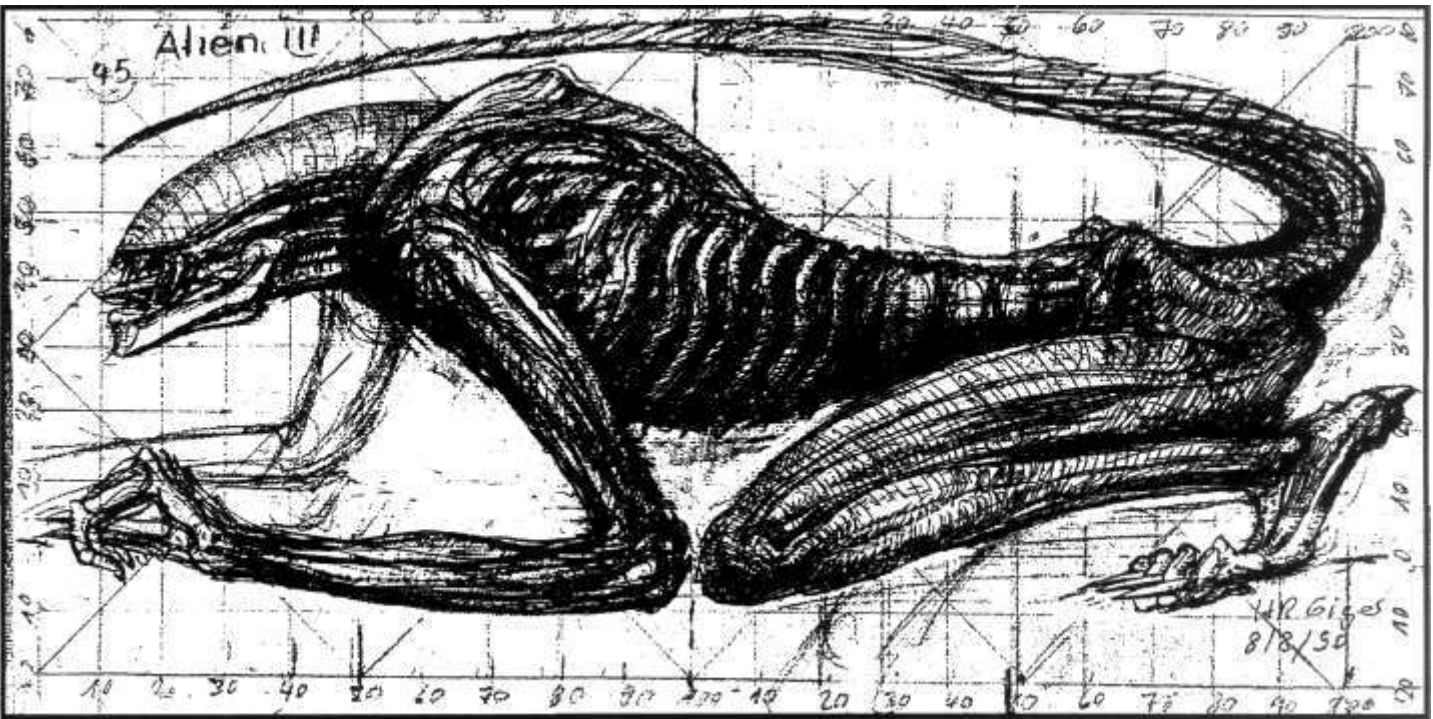
**GIGER:** I like to trust people. If you can't trust people, existence is difficult because you're always worried about being taken advantage of. Without friends and confidence and love, life has no value.

**SECONDS:** *Do you listen to much music?*

**GIGER:** Nothing has come out that's really good or special. I was into Miles Davis, Eric Dolphy, and John Coltrane.

**SECONDS:** *You played piano on Deborah Harry's Debravation but you weren't credited you for it, correct?*

**GIGER:** Warner Brothers forgot. I think I played too badly, I don't know. Chris Stein recorded it during the time I was making the molds for Debbie's mask for the cover of *Koo Koo*.



An improved, more feline Alien 3 by the father of the franchise.

**SECONDS:** *In her video, was that you behind the mask?*

**GIGER:** Yes. I do have several masks. When I was in New York I used that one. It was made for Debbie's face, on her skull. This mask is made from stencils for electronics. It's melted copper and burned out with acid. It has very fine lines and is very delicate. The *Koo Koo* mask has changed a lot — getting me into the mask changed it a lot. I wore it to the opening of my show in New York at the Alexander Gallery. It was the night before Halloween, and everyone had to come in black tie or in a mask. I wore a mask and a vest made from my four-banded crosswatches.

**SECONDS:** *I read somewhere that you like to wear masks to your shows because of your shyness.*

**GIGER:** Yes, it's best because you don't have to smile and you don't hear small talk. You're a little hidden and that's not bad sometimes if you don't know or recognize the people.

**SECONDS:** *Is technology the master or the servant in your work?*

**GIGER:** I've always shown machines as servants of human beings.

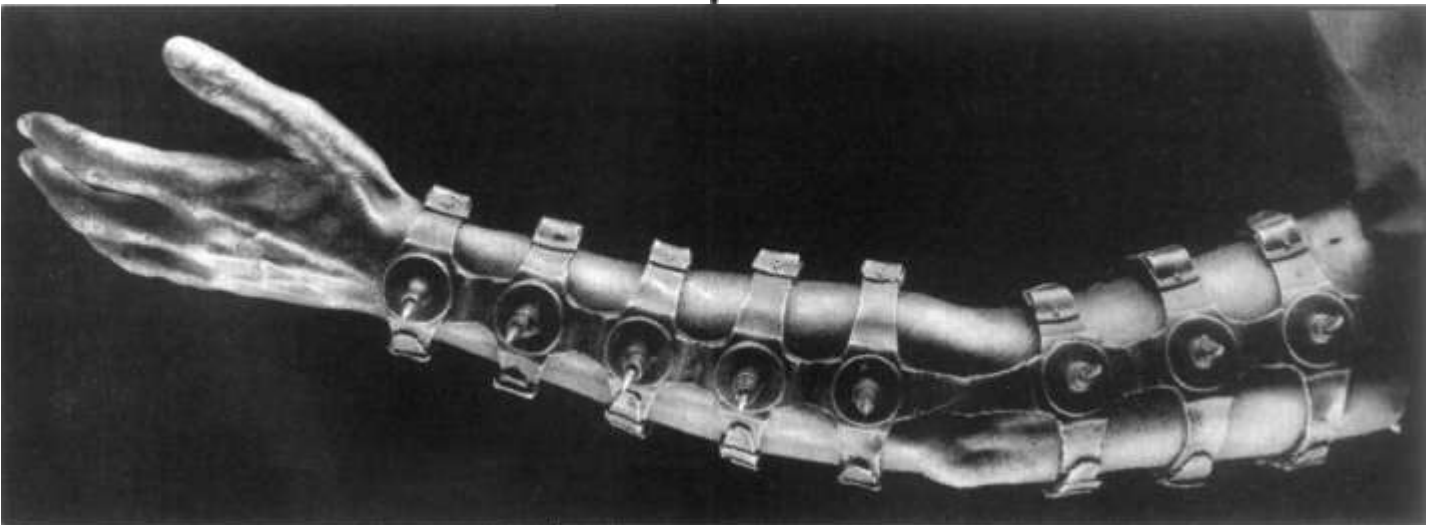
**SECONDS:** *I always thought you were saying that the mechanical was taking control of the biological.*

**GIGER:** No, things such as bicycles, watches, artificial hearts and prosthetics are helping man, but machines can be used to destroy. It depends on how they're used, everything has its good and evil.

**SECONDS:** *Is man good or evil?*

**GIGER:** Man is both. Without evil, there's no good. If there were only good people, the world would be shit. \*

To be included in the upcoming book of Giger tattoos, *H.R. Giger Under Your Skin*, send high-quality transparencies of your personal markings to: Leslie Barany Communications, H.R. Giger ARH+ Publications, 121 West 27th St., Suite 202, New York, NY 10001. Phone 212-627-8488



Louis Stalder