



The gallery



HR Giger

HR Giger的異度空間

in the belly of the beast

The womb-like interior of the otherworldly environment that is the H.R. Giger Museum Bar is a cavernous, skeletal structure covered by double arches of vertebrae that crisscross the vaulted ceiling of an ancient castle. The acute perceptual sensation of being in this extraordinary setting recalls the Biblical tale of Jonah and the whale, lending the feel of being in the belly of a fossilized, prehistoric beast. But the "Harkonnen" chairs, with their spinal cord backs topped by pelvis bones, and the stone floor plates engraved with strange hieroglyphs, all suggest that somehow you have been transported into the remains of a mutated future civilization.

The bar, as well as the museum which houses this unique architectural installation, is the unmistakable work the Swiss Surrealist H.R. Giger. Known for his Oscar-winning designs for Ridley Scott's classic "Alien" film (1980), Giger has left behind his airbrush paintings of the 70's and 80's to create a series of three-dimensional spaces in which his aesthetic views, literally, come to life. If in his paintings he has vividly illustrated the genesis of what he sees as the next steps in the evolution of mankind — the symbiosis of man and machine into new forms of beings — in his new sculptural and architectural works he makes you part of them.

The artist renovated a 400 year old, four-story medieval chateau high atop a hill in the picturesque Swiss town of Gruyères to build his museum, a labyrinthine structure with two meter-thick walls that is now home to the most comprehensive permanent display of Giger's artwork, spanning his 40 year career.

There is a truly organic feel in the wing of the castle that houses the Museum Bar, with its bone-coloured furniture and awe inspiring interior design. Giger used a rock-like synthetic material to cast all the bar elements in order to preserve the atmosphere of this ancient chateau, which is a landmark historic monument.

"At the beginning of the project," explains Giger in his private apartment at the museum, "I was fascinated with concrete, because I felt that an antique building such as this needed stone, aged stone, so I used a mixture of cement and fiberglass to achieve a rock gray color for most of the

Javier Mz. de Pisón attends the opening of the H.R. Giger Bar in Switzerland and speaks to H. R. Giger about his work, museum and gallery.

interior elements. But it didn't work when we tried to use it for the ceiling because the cast arches weighed too much."

The cast concrete surfaces of the Museum Bar furnishings have been polished to the point that they are skin soft to the touch. This enhances the impression of being inside a once living creature, of sitting on something, perhaps less than alive, but very warm and enveloping just the same.

Giger's art consistently provokes a strange perturbing feeling because he continuously touches on profound issues that resonate in all of us and, in many instances, seems to anticipate our future, not only as individuals but also as a species. His intellectual concerns are matched only by the impact of his highly original works, his constant experimentation with different media, and an ever more polished execution.

From the start of his artistic career, Giger has confronted the traditional ambivalence of man towards the scientific advances that can alter the nature of the human body. This issue has now acquired a real urgency and prompted moral and philosophical debates by recent experiments in genetic engineering, such as the possibility of cloning human beings. The detailed depiction of his "Biomechanoid" beings in his classic, translucent airbrush works originated in the late 60's, but in his latest sculptures and installations they have acquired a new and eerie physical form.

Etienne Chatton, founder of the International Center of Fantastic Art, considers Giger the most important artist alive today for his premonitory works. "He is the only artist who has seen the dangerous allure of genetically modified beings, and has linked it to our underlying fears", says

Chatton. "Giger's Biomechanoids were conceived well before today's scientific advances."

Another recurring theme in Giger's oeuvre is his concern with overpopulation, a threat to overcome in order to ensure the survival of mankind. His now classic painting "Birth Machine" (1967) depicts the cutaway of a pistol in which the bullets are crouching mechanical-looking babies. Giger has recently recreated "Birth Machine" as a two-metre metal sculpture that greets visitors at the entrance of the Giger Museum. Another "Birth Machine Baby," a "detail" from the larger sculpture, stands guard several feet away, and much like the royal guards in front of Buckingham Palace, poses with visitors all day.

The Museum Bar, which took four years to complete, opened its doors with a ribbon cutting ceremony on April 12th, 2003, to a select group of invited friends, artists, collectors, coworkers, and members of the media. Guests began arriving to the long anticipated event the day before, taking the opportunity to tour the museum beforehand and to avail themselves to the rare privilege of sharing a private moment with the usually reticent artist, who was still making last minute adjustments to the careful lighting of the new bar.

The next morning, the population of the small village of 300 inhabitants, literally doubled in a matter of hours, with the arrival of devotees from countries near and far, from Austria, Germany, Italy, France, Spain, Czechoslovakia, Chile, Israel, and the United States. The schedule of events for the day included another opening in the H.R. Giger Museum Gallery for the Swiss artist Martin Schwarz, the on-site printing of two limited edition prints to commemorate the day, speeches and dedications, the day ending with a special dinner, followed by nighttime projections of Giger's artwork on the façade of the museum.

Surrounded by intimates, the artist stated proudly, "I built much more of this bar with my own hands than any of the other ones I had designed previously," referring to the now closed Giger Bar in Tokyo, and the very much open one in the city of his birth, Chur, Switzerland.

"This time it is exactly as Giger had envisioned it,"

adds Leslie Barany, Giger's close friend and agent, "This third Giger Bar is the prototype. Its modular design lends itself best to being recreated in suitable spaces in other cities and, hopefully, other countries. All the molds are being preserved so the next time Giger can concentrate on designing whatever new additions may be required, or inspired, by a new space. Once we have figured out what this all cost, we will be ready to talk to with whoever may be interested."

"The idea for the museum," explains its director, Carmen Scheifele, "originated with a large exhibition of Giger's work in the upper castle of Gruyères, commemorating his 50th birthday. Giger discovered that this little town received a million visitors a year who come here for the year-around postcard look of the surrounding snow peaked mountains, and the region's green valleys, rivers and lakes."

Following in the tradition of artists such as Salvador Dalí, who created his own museum in Spain, the Giger Museum is a work of art in itself, a large-scale permanent installation of separate environments, an ever evolving project on which the artist has been working for more than ten years.

"I am aware it is unusual for an artist to open his own museum," says Giger. "My reasons for that decision were practical. First of all, there is a continuous demand by collectors and admirers of my art to see the original creations on display. Galleries and museums could only exhibit some of my art for a couple of months a year. Most of the time the majority of my paintings sat in storage all year around. And now that my art is on permanent display, I can control the environment and ensure

that the rooms and surroundings are suitable."

Since it opened in 1998, the H.R. Giger Museum has nearly doubled in size. The top floor now houses the artist's own private art collection, which includes over 600 works by Salvador Dalí, Ernest Fuchs, Dado, Bruno Weber, Günter Brus, Claude Sandoz, Francois Burland, Friedrich Kuhn, Joe Coleman, Sybille Ruppert, André Lassen, and David Hochbaum, among many others.

Four exhibition rooms in the adjoining wing of the building house the Museum Gallery, where on a rotating basis, Giger curates one-man shows for artists in his collection. At the moment, the gallery is exhibiting Martin Schwarz's "Amongst The Living," a series of three-dimensional book objects, montages, and collaborative paintings with Giger, which will be on view till September 2003.

As part of the museum, which now includes the new bar, Scheifele says they will soon open a screening room for films. And Giger's participation, as production designer, in the upcoming Swiss movie "Gloria," to be helmed by the young Swiss director Marco Lutz with an ensemble cast of German, Swiss and Austrian stars, will also bring more attention to the existence of this extraordinary place.

The museum also houses Giger's film design work for "Alien," "Poltergeist 2," "Alien 3" and "Species." "Films fascinate me," Giger once said, "because I believe they have surpassed painting as a way of communication." The mythological proportion and cult following of the "Alien" movies, whose creature is based on his paintings, "Necronom IV" and "Necronom V," both created

two years before Ridley Scott had stumbled upon them, are due in great part to his powerful designs.

"He's been discussing doing some more work in films," says Scheifele, adding that for a long time Giger didn't want to have very much to do with Hollywood, after a series of problems, among them the lack of proper credits in the subsequent "Alien" series.

The years of arduous work involved in renovating Chateau St. Germain, the castle that houses his museum, have not diminished Giger's perseverance, nor his meticulous eye for detail. A good example of this is the intricate bronze banister flanking the stone steps leading up to the entrance of the museum cast in the shape of the "Alien" creature's tail.

As an artist, Giger is responsible for single-handedly creating an astonishing and original new aesthetic universe, one that provokes profound questions regarding the future of mankind. Through his artwork, he has dared us to meditate upon the biological evolution of our species. If Giger's work is disturbing, it's because from his visionary vantage point he forewarns us of the inherent dangers of our own, approaching mutations, which, as he describes them, are not a very pretty sight. As he once summed it up, "I paint what frightens me."

For more information about the art of H.R. Giger, visit www.HRGigerMuseum.com.



The Belly of HR Giger's bar