

Transcription of
Alternative Tentacles Batcast No. 111:
H.R. Giger Tribute
by Jello Biafra - 5/13/2014

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The reason for the emergency podcast, trying to put it up before getting too many interview requests with all the same questions, though Rolling Stone and LA Times have already found me apparently. I'm grateful they would even consider wanting my input on Hans Ruedi Giger.

Many people know him mainly for the monster and the sets of Alien, but of course his work is much wider. He was mainly a painter and sculptor. In my opinion, the best one I had seen when I was exposed to his work, since Hieronymus Bosch. John Greenway, my old friend I grew up with, who wrote the original lyrics to "California Uber Alles", and whom my parents kept trying to get me NOT to hang out with him anymore even in grade school, blaming him for getting me into trouble all the time. Even though it takes two to tango and cause trouble and I had a nose for it anyway. We bonded so well, and sure enough it happened one last time when John and I were living together in San Francisco and he opens up a magazine and shows me this artist, H.R. Giger. I looked at it and was absolutely floored. Best stuff I had seen since Bosch. I got to a piece called, "Landscape #XX" in roman numerals. Where are we going? Most people mislabel it "Penis Landscape", and now you know which one I'm talking about. The one that wound up getting used for Dead Kennedys "Frankenchrist" album as an insert poster.

The reason I wanted to use it at all was the impact it had when it first hit me. My favorite kind of art is that which stimulates the brain, and that goes for visual art, journalism, music, film, you name it! It just got my brain spinning! Full of energy and full of ideas! It occurred to me, "Hey wait a minute, we are in the middle of recording the "Frankenchrist" album, and this picture is like Reagan America on parade! That's what the album is about too! I haven't finished writing the lyrics, but if I tweak a word here and there in all these different songs, it would be a concept album!"

I'm not sure I would have even flashed on that if I hadn't seen the Giger painting! So I thought, naturally this should be the front cover! Not everyone agreed with that. Ruth Schwartz at

Mordam, our distributor at the time, said, "Well, you realize no store will stock this if that is the front cover." So then we looked at having the super dark shrink wrap that Roxy Music used in "Country Life" and Pink Floyd used on "Wish You Were Here" I think? The blue shrink wrap proved to be prohibitively expensive. Then after initially saying the idea was ok, the other members of Dead Kennedys then freaked out about the picture. After we had secured the rights and everything! So a big quarrel ensued and we finally agreed to put it on the inside, which took care of the stores, as an insert poster, instead of the concept of having it as a wrap around gate-fold cover with "Frankenchrist" in candy cane lettering and nothing else on the front. Then you would open it up and on the inside would be the infamous Shriner picture and nothing else. No explanation whatsoever. That's what I wanted. Didn't work out that time.

Of course we know the rest. There was a sticker saying that there was an insert by H.R. Giger that "some may find shocking or offensive. Life can sometimes be that way!" This was right when Tipper Gore and her religious-right zealot friends like Susan Baker, James Baker's wife who was on the board of directors of Focus on the Family. They also had backdoor connections with Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, all of them! They launched their carefully planned attack on music. They need a pigeon. They needed someone they could actually charge with a crime. Little did I guess that it would wind up being me. The prosecutor, Michael Guarino, has even admitted that I was chosen as a "cost effective way of sending a message." In other words, they wouldn't have to pay the money to fight lawyers for Prince, Ozzy Osborne, or Judas Priest or some of the other high profile targets. They didn't play the race card and go after hip hop until a little bit later. So "Frankenchrist" ended up becoming the first album in American history, prosecuted ... well, me and one other defendant were the first people prosecuted over an album in American history. I think it was three years before 2 Live Crew. The excuse was the Giger poster, but it was clear they were after me, Dead Kennedys, and my and the band's whole legacy. Ultimately of course, the jury deadlocked 7-5 in favor of acquittal, and when a jury in a criminal case deadlocks it means a mistrial. The prosecutor immediately filed for a new trial, and the judge denied it on the grounds that there had been enough playing with the law for one case. Distribution of harmful matter had only recently come on the books and had never before used in court and may never be used again.

Of course, no, I didn't go to jail, I didn't get fined, and I didn't get convicted, but in the marketplace it meant that Dead Kennedys and Alternative Tentacles were kicked out of a lot chain stores because the McCarthy-style chill factor that they wanted, actually happened! It also meant that the silver lining, the few that were in there, was getting to meet and hang out with Frank Zappa. My spoken word shows being pole-vaulted from coffee house readings of alleged poetry to talking at universities about censorship, and I never looked back. The other one was getting to know Hans Ruedi Giger! His agent, who had been very helpful during the legal situation, knew enough not to fly Giger in from Switzerland as his own expert witness. When the cops were raiding my house, they were trying to Giger's address off of me. I said, "No, he's in Switzerland!" I thought I was about to get my jaw broken because it was the LAPD. Thankfully they didn't go that far.

Anyways, I had some great adventures. I met Giger three times. The first time they were kind enough to fly me out when he had an opening in New York City. It just happened to be during the CMJ Convention for music and a new Carcass album with Giger's art on the cover had just come out. So there were all kinds of tie-ins, except for in the mind of this really uptight, miserable owner of the gallery. Giger discovered to his horror, that "Landscape #XX" and a few other sexually explicit (depending on how you look at them) paintings of his, were all in a separate room where the owner could lock the door if so-called "important people" were in the room. Giger practically pulled his art, and cancelled the exhibit he was so upset. This went on all day, finally Giger got to the point where he pulled out one of the metal masks that he made. One of his sculptures, it's in one of the books, and put it on. He hid behind the door of the gallery as "important people" showed up. It was a double opening, R. Crumb was in the adjacent room, so people could go back and forth. So Giger would go, "RAAWR!" and stuff, trying to save his mood and everything. More disagreements went on and stuff, but then who should then walk into the Giger room in full costume, but Gwar! The owner of the gallery was so freaked out he fled his own opening and went home. Suddenly Giger was in a buoyant mood! I mean, he knew who Gwar was. He had experienced them before. He was so happy to see them. From that moment onward a great time was had by all. I mean, the owner was trying to charge people \$20 just to get in the elevator to go up to the gallery, when he realized all the Carcass fans were coming to see Giger's work instead of "important people" and all! That was a lot of fun.

Later, when I did a spoken word show in Zurich, his sort of adopted nephew and my good friend to this day, Boris Bueller, took me over to Giger's house. That was interesting right from approaching the house from the block, because I knew immediately which one it was. It was part of like a big block building that was divided into a duplex. There were two or three stories per side, it was pretty roomy. One side, immaculate lawn, everything perfect ... and then right down the middle, weeds that had grown into tree trunks and everything else, and you could get to the front door and that was Giger. Inside? Black walls, and some paintings we all know well just leaned up against each other in a corner. A really famous Joe Coleman original hanging above his stove complete with bubbling food grease that he had gotten on it. A little train he had built that went in and out of his house, through the back into a tunnel he had made, which of course was a thinly disguised vagina. It was raining, it was kinda cold, and there was some 3D versions of Giger's infamous decaying looking babies on the outside of the cave, and mushrooms were growing on them which just enhanced the whole image, we all agreed. There was a mock up in the back of this beautiful, but very Giger-ish, fountain that he was hoping to talk the city of Zurich into building, and all the sculptures would move with the water. It was amazing. The Giger museum, which was over in the French speaking part of Switzerland in Gruyères was still, well I guess the museum had just opened and the Giger bar was across the cobblestone way, was still in the works. Thus Giger's house just reeked of chemicals as he was making the molds to ... well the thing you would make the mold around in order to make the metal dinosaur bones that crisscross the ceiling of the Giger bar, and he was going to put some of those chairs he's known for, the metal chairs? It was really great to be able to sit in one of those and stuff, they are not the most comfortable things in the world, but they are some pretty amazing chairs let's face it!

Come to think of it, it was right after September 11, 2001 had happened. I was on tour right after that. I remember Les calling from New York just distraught over what had happened and everything.

It was agreed that since Giger wanted to check up on the progress anyway, we'd all get in the van and go the two hours or whatever it was, to Gruyères and check out the museum. So what a treat it was to check it out with him, and I realized in a discussion in the van on the way that he hadn't really hadn't been filled in all that much on the "Frankenchrist" legal case, the trial, what had happened and so I filled him in at length on that!

Gruyères itself is a preserved mid-evil town for tourists. The cheese even comes from the valley down below! The town was absolutely up in arms that one of the two castles in the area, the smaller one ... of course Giger had to have a castle for his work, he wouldn't settle for anything less. No building in Zurich would do! The town wasn't very happy that it was a German speaker, not a French speaker who got the castle, let alone THIS German speaker with THAT art. There had been battles up and down over the sculptures he wanted to put in front of the museum and a smaller one wound up being it. You would go under this archway of Giger's castle on both sides of a cobblestone way that's a little bit uphill from the rest of the town, and then you would reach the big castle that was further up the hill, so ALL the tourists would have to pass the Giger museum. Of course what you do with most castle walls that were built in those days is that you would have a portcullis that goes down to keep out the invading Huns or whatever. Giger of course, had designed his own. You can imagine what THAT looked like and of course the town said NO.

Then into the museum and words can not describe what those paintings look like when you are right there with them. It's one thing to see them in a book but when they are floor to ceiling tall, and you can see all the other little faces that are almost subliminal in them- the depth- and I don't know if the faces were still supposed to be there or whether he had painted over them or had not painted over them all the way? I have no idea. He was getting a bit impatient because of course he had seen these paintings many times. There were rooms I could spend entire days in, in that museum! So needless to say, if you are anywhere near Gruyères, and you are if you are Geneva, let alone Lausanne, or Lucerene or whatever, you have to go the Giger Museum! Even if you have to hitchhike to get there or whatever! It fabulous!

Finally, I was lost in it all. There was another room devoted to Alien, including all the stuff that didn't get used, and another room devoted to some of the other projects that he started with and then he would be fired from set design and then they would use some of his ideas ANYWAY, which was a sore subject with him. DUNE, being a major example. I mean, think when they let Jodorowsky go ... just imagine what a great movie that would have been if he'd been allowed to finish his version before DeLaurentis saw the rushes and practically lost his mind! Something about the pope being horse whipped, which had nothing to do with Dune, which is what I heard from Greenway at the time. Anyway, so there is some of the Dune stuff, some other movies, some smaller models of trains he wanted to

build. He approached this Swiss town about a Giger based theme park that never actually happened. I think one of the great regrets of Giger's life was that the Swiss art world never gave him his due and whatnot. He was still trying for that.

So as I went through these rooms, there was this morbid, almost Schoenberg-ish piano music going on. I thought, "Wow, that's a great thing to be playing in the museum! This is kind of helping!" Then I get to the top floor, and there is Giger himself at the piano. All alone, just enjoying playing himself some music. The minute he saw me watching him and listening, he stopped and that was the end of that.

I saw him one more time, when Guantanamo School of Medicine toured Europe, I think it was '09 or 2010? Me and John Weiss who is an accomplished painter, muralist, and I think sculptor himself, went to see Giger with Boris and clearly his health had declined a bit, but we were still having a lot of fun and everything.