

H.R. Giger's Baphomet

BY CHRISTINE EHREN

"Baphomet. The Goat of Mendes. A controversial figure in both practical knowledge and Satanic thought."

A powerful symbol since its purported debut seven centuries ago, Baphomet has attracted artists from Eliphas Levi to H.R. Giger. Gracing this issue's cover is Giger's version of Baphomet as a sterling silver pendant, adapted from his famous 1976 "Spell III" painting and sculpted for the artist by Paul Komoda. The image, fitting snugly in the hand, is a palm-sized representation of good and evil, light and dark, and the male and female sexual energies of the original Giger work.

The first Baphomet emerged from the legends concerning the ancient Crusader order, the Knights Templar. When the members of the Knights Templar were tortured and burned at the stake, under Pope Clement V and Philip IV of France for the alleged financial benefit of the Catholic Church and France, some confessed to the worship of an idol called Baphomet.

The word was not a common demon's name and its etymology remains unclear. Perhaps Baphomet was a bastardization of the name of Mohammed, Islam's holy prophet, or a Sufi Muslim associated word, Abufihamat, meaning "father of knowledge." It might also have been a combination of the Greek words "baphe" and "metis," meaning baptism of wisdom.

Whatever meaning Baphomet had for the Templars has disappeared through history, lost along with the Templars' legendary treasures. But, the Knights' link with Baphomet continued into the 19th Century when Alphonse Louis Constant, better known as Eliphas Levi, purportedly used a gargoyle from the Templar

Commandry at Saint Bris le Vineux to base his famous, and infamous, drawing of Baphomet.

Levi's creation was allegorical, depicting the duality of all living things. The figure's body is both male and female with obvious breasts and a caduceus, the ancient doctor's symbol of snakes entwined around a rod, in the lap of Baphomet. Like many common demons, the creature has cloven hoofs and a goat's head. These items



BAPHOMET PENDANT © 2004 HR GIGER
BY HR GIGER & PAUL KOMODA—PHOTO © 2004 MARC VILLAS

had deeper meaning for Levi, however, who thought of them as representing the horror of the sinner. Such wicked elements were counterbalanced by the flame of knowledge mounted atop Baphomet's head and the arms, one pointing upwards, the other downwards, inscribed with "Solve" (dissolve) and "Coagula" (congeal).

The words and even the positioning of the arms had Hermetic and, therefore, alchemic implications. Alchemy was one of Levi's many magical interests, along with Kabbalah, animal magnetism and astral light. In 1854, Baphomet made its appearance in Levi's most famous text, *Dogma and Ritual of High Magic or Transcendental Magic*.

Directly following the publishing of *Dogma and Ritual...*, an anti-Catholic, anti-Freemason and occasional pornographer named Leo Taxil took Levi's Baphomet and incorporated it into at least two anti-Freemason tracts, which cemented the public's belief that this secret society associated with the Devil. One tract showed the Freemasons worshipping a Baphomet while a woman in the forefront cavorts with a severed head. In another, Baphomet, as a Freemason, attempts to seduce a pure woman of France.

The strongest association between Levi's Baphomet and the Devil may have come from the Waite-Smith Tarot deck, published by Rider in 1909. A traditional-style Tarot card, Levi's Baphomet stands in for the Devil, shown as a seated creature with a human torso, wings and a goat head with a pentagram set between its horns. The arms are positioned identically to Levi's Baphomet, but there are two major differences—the feet are clawed, not cloven, and the crossed legs are covered in fur, not draped in material.

Controversial modern day magician Aleister Crowley greatly admired both the Tarot and Levi, believing himself to be the direct reincarnation of the writer-magician who died the day Crowley was born. Baphomet was the first name he took as he joined up with the German sexual magic practitioners, Ordo Templi Orientalis, around 1896.

When the Church of Satan was founded in 1966 in San Francisco, High Priest Anton LaVey adapted Baphomet for the Church's own symbology, endorsing the use of a goat's head in the midst of an inverted pentacle, surrounded at the points by Hebrew letters spelling out "Levianthan," the name of the biblical sea serpent associated with Satan.

ELIPHAS LEVI DRAWING OF BAPHOMET
FROM TRANSCENDENTAL MAGIC, II, RITUAL



THE SABBAIC GOAT

Today, it isn't unusual for a Baphomet-like goat-headed pentagram to be hung over the altar in a Satanic church. True worshippers may also wear a Baphomet sigil as a pendant, belt buckle or tattoo and hard-core death and black metal bands have adopted Baphomet for their own artistic uses.

The complicated, multi-layered meanings of Baphomet evolved long before Giger first painted his own interpretations of it in "Baphomet" (work no. 272), 1974, and, a little later, incorporated the image into "Spell III", 1976. Both paintings first appeared in the artist's first book, *Giger's Necronomicon*, published in 1977. (NOTE: The numbers on the four "Spell" series paintings in the book are mismatched with the images, according to the artist.) But Giger, abandoning this century's Satanic implications of the image, returned to Levi's original design to create his own unique version.

Giger's Baphomet in "Spell III" is a treatise on light and dark. Baphomet itself is rendered mostly in blacks and grays, colors the artist refers to as grisaille in warm to cool tones. The round heads of two babies cradling hand grenades replace the breasts of Levi's drawing and the caduceus forms the phallus in its lap. The head of Baphomet is also mechanized with its empty robotic eyes, metal plates forming its snout and tubing, its eye sockets. In contrast and in congress with the flame of knowledge is

SPELL III © 1977 HR GIGER, 240 X 140CM, ACRYLIC ON PAPER ON WOOD



the shining female figure, the representation of good. She lies on a double pentagram covered in intricate designs and carries a blade, pointing outwards, in each of her hands. To the left and right of Baphomet and the pure female are sister figures of good and evil, each woman curled up fetally below the dark (the right) or light (the left) pentagrams, which are repeated in the center of the image.

Utilizing the double pentagram was a major impetus for Giger in creating a Baphomet. At the time, he was fascinated with magic and the pentagram figured heavily into the artwork that accompanied the texts he read. He'd seen pentagrams drawn like Leonardo's "The Study of Man", but Giger wanted to do something more freeing and put one pentagram over the other.

"The idea for the Baphomet came from the guts. I did it quickly without thinking," Giger said

His burgeoning knowledge of Levi fed into his Baphomet interest, influencing the design of the piece. Giger learned of Levi and Crowley

from the 1960's Sphinx editions on magic. "At that time, there was no Internet, so it was necessary to research the most important magicians and concentrate on them," Giger said.

Like Levi, Giger didn't focus on the dark implications of Baphomet. As an artist, he created an image that could be—and has been—viewed as representative of evil, but

Giger insists that he is not a tragic or twisted person, but a jokester—even if his audience isn't always in on the joke.

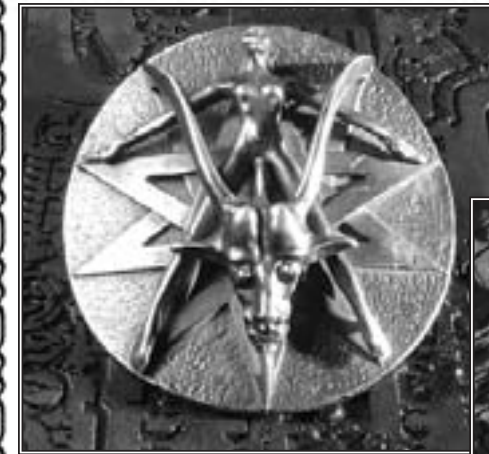
Especially in working with Akron on a Tarot deck that utilized Baphomet as the Devil card, the image of the goat head, girl and pentagrams became reassociated with Satan. Giger found Akron's explanations to be sometimes "crazy, but funny."

"If he [Akron] would like to see something [in a painting], then he would see it. If he wants to have a certain meaning in [a painting], then he would see it," Giger said.

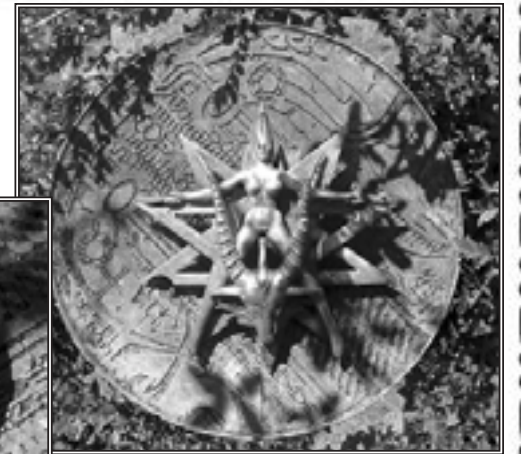
But Akron's meanings—among others—were not his. "If somebody likes a painting, it is because he



BAPHOMET (AFTER ELIPHAS LEVI) © 1975 HR GIGER, 200 X 140CM, ACRYLIC ON PAPER ON WOOD



LEFT & BELOW:
BAPHOMET © 1977 HR GIGER
BY HR GIGER & ROBERT CHRISTOPHE
RIGHT:
BAPHOMET © 1994 HR GIGER
BY HR GIGER & GARY VANN AUSDALE
PHOTOS © 2003 LESLIE BARANY



sees something personal in it, something he relates to. I don't know what they mean. To me, when I've finished them, sometimes it's like they were done by somebody else," he said.

"Spell III" is still the best known of Giger's creations that exhibit his Baphomet and the artist has often returned to this iconic balance between good and evil. Variations of the theme exist as 3D pieces, including a 1977 belt buckle and a tabletop sculpture. Baphomets were used as the cover of the Giger-Akron *Tarot of the Underworld* and also as a hologram on a bound edition of the book, *Giger's Necronomicon I and II*. (Giger chose the title *Necronomicon* thanks to the suggestion of his friend, author Sergius Golowin, but since then, he's become an admirer of H.P. Lovecraft's work. Someday, he says, he would love

to design a movie based on "At the Mountains of Madness".)

The latest in the Giger Baphomet series, the Komoda sculpted silver pendant, again isolates the most important aspects of Giger's work: the goat head, the double pentagram and the naked, spread-eagled female figure. The dark pentagram is solid and dull, while the light pentagram is delicately carved and polished, as are the hairs of the goat's beard, the ridges of his horns and aspects of the female's headdress and body.

Komoda's attraction to Baphomet and his desire to render Giger's work as a pendant was simple. "When it comes down to it, it's a wonderful horned monster. My main interest has always been in creepy esoteric things. This is figurative and it's also one of the first images I'd seen from Giger besides the *Alien* production work



PAUL KOMODA PRESENTING POLISHED PROTOTYPE OF BAPHOMET PENDANT—PHOTO © 2004 LESLIE BARANY

he'd done. It made perfect sense. If I hadn't met Giger and been hired to do it, I would have probably done it one day, anyway."

Komoda's work had already caught the eye of Les Barany, Giger's agent, however, and their collaboration was set in motion.

"I became aware of Paul's work many years ago when he was already doing some amazing work as an unbilled assistant to a New York City jeweler," Barany explained. "This was before he gained well-deserved recognition under his own name. I was sure if Paul and Giger could meet, it would lead to Paul being asked to work on some projects that would require his unique sculpting skills. The opportunity to introduce them came about in 1998 during one of Giger's visits to New York. As I expected, Giger was very impressed by Paul's talent as an artist and sculptor, as well as his quiet temperament and professional demeanor. A few years later when Giger designed The Lovers pendant for his girlfriend Carmen, Paul Komoda was the first name that came to mind. It took many months to translate Giger's deceptively simple sketch to a 3 dimensional piece. The project served as a test run for working together with Paul over a great distance, using faxes, photos and prototypes mailed back and forth. When the piece was successfully completed, Carmen, now the director of the Giger Museum, had the idea to continue with Paul and create a whole Giger jewelry line."

To work on the Baphomet pendant, Komoda was invited to Switzerland in November 2003 to work for a month at Giger's home directly under his supervision. Activities included visits to the Giger Museum in Gruyères and lots of work in an atmosphere Komoda describes as a "Resident Evil-style domicile. One side of



H. R. GIGER & PAUL KOMODA IN GRUYERES, SWITZERLAND
PHOTO © 2003 CARMEN SHEIFELE



ABOVE & LEFT:
THREE WORKING SKETCHES FOR THE
BAPHOMET PENDANT BY H. R. GIGER © 2003
BELOW:
SKETCH OF BAPHOMET © 1975 H.R. GIGER

the house is Giger-land, black on black, darkly lit, with displays of fabulous wall-size artworks, furniture and sculptures. Absolutely phenomenal. The other side of the house is relatively normal. That's where the workshop is and that's where life goes on."

Even in such a stimulating environment, the process from Giger painting into silver jewelry wasn't easy. The first "draft" of the female figure met an unlikely end, thanks to Giger's cat, Muggi. Komoda had crafted a small draft of the female Baphomet figure out of Castilene, a green hybrid of wax and clay, and Giger approved it. Paul went to bed in his loft, leaving the girl out for the night.

"It was about noon and I heard this chewing sound. I thought no, no, it couldn't be what I think it is. That's too nightmarish," he said.

H. R. GIGER IN THE HR GIGER MUSEUM—PHOTO © 2003 LOUIS STALDER



But when he looked for his miniature woman to show it to Ronald Brandt, a fellow sculptor who works with Giger on many of his major sculptures, she was gone—or mostly gone.

"I found the chewed head of the sculpture. Yes, it had been devoured by Muggi. So I started the whole thing over and from then on, the Castilene I was using was referred to by Giger as 'Muggi food'," Komoda said.

Aside from the minor setback, Komoda found the work experience with Giger satisfying and exciting. "He's just riffing, just spewing forth ideas all day on paper. When we were working on the pendant, he'd be right there with a handful of sketches indicating certain things that he felt proportionally or compositionally should be changed, design elements to work into it.

"It was really inspiring to see that level of enthusiasm. He's excruciatingly exact, which is good, especially if you have a defined, strong vision as he does. But he's willing to be there for you and help you along for the formation—the gestation—of a piece of sculpture," Komoda said.

The Giger-Komoda Baphomet pendant is available for \$400 plus shipping and handling, through the official Giger website, www.hrgiger.com. Those who would seek out Giger's original Baphomet art, the "Spell III" painting is one panel of the Spell Temple, a room comprised of four wall-sized paintings at the HR Giger Museum, located in the 400-year-old Chateau St. Germain in Gruyères, Switzerland. For more information about the museum and Giger's new architectural wonder, the HR Giger Museum Bar, visit www.hrgigermuseum.com.



LEFT:
OUTSIDE OF THE HR GIGER
MUSEUM (LEFT IN PICTURE) &
THE HR GIGER MUSEUM BAR
(RIGHT IN PICTURE)
PHOTO © 2003 LOUIS STALDER



ABOVE & BELOW:
THE HR GIGER MUSEUM BAR
PHOTOS © 2003 WOLFGANG HOLZ



Christine Ebren is an arts journalist who lives and works in New York City. Her satiric horror novella, "The Girl in B33," a sequel to her novel-in-progress, Coney Island Complex, was recently published in the Amityville House of Pancakes anthology. Visit her on the web at www.jdwelles.com.

