

A Daring Architectural Work by the Swiss Artist H.R. Giger

In the Belly of the Beast

Javier de Pisón

Photo: © 2003 Marc Adrian Villas / HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.



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 creature. But the “Harkonnen” chairs, with their spinal cord backs topped by pelvis bones, and the 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

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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.

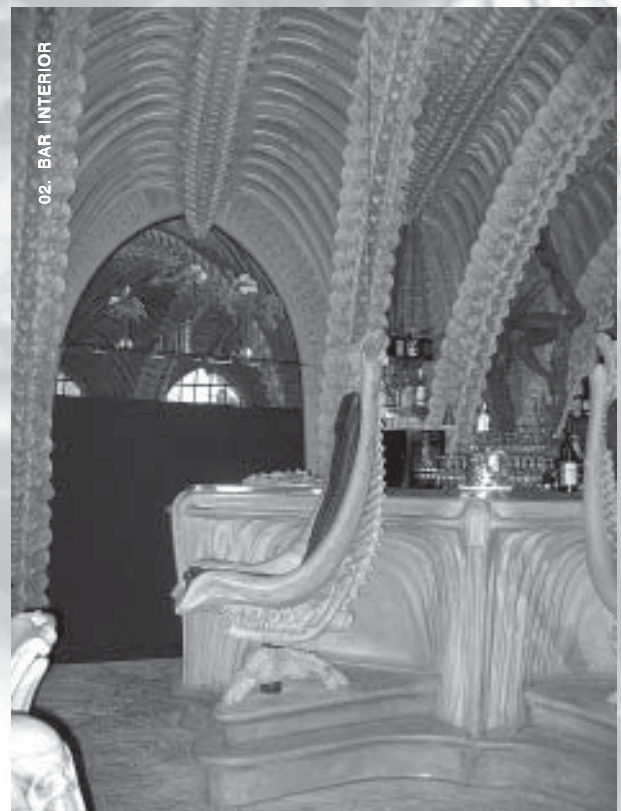


Photo: © 2003 Wolfgang Holz / HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com

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.

With its bone-colored furniture and awe inspiring interior design, the wing of the castle that houses the Museum Bar has a truly organic feel. The cast concrete surfaces of the bar furnishings have been polished to the point that they are skin soft to the touch, enhancing 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 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

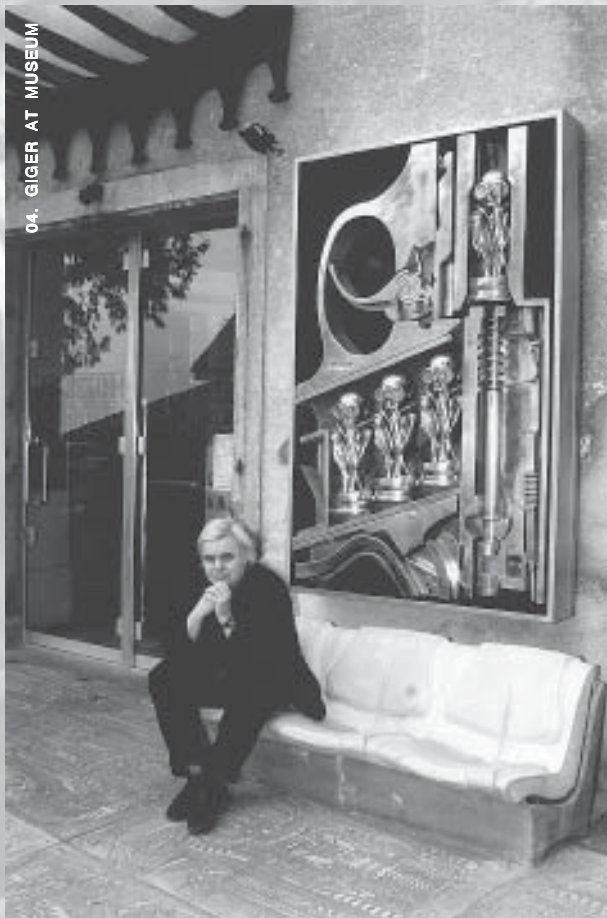


Photo: © 2002 Louis Stalder / HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

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

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 before hand and to avail themselves to the rare privilege of sharing a private moment with the usually reclusive artist, who was still making last minute adjustments to the lighting of the new bar.



Photo: © HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

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, 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

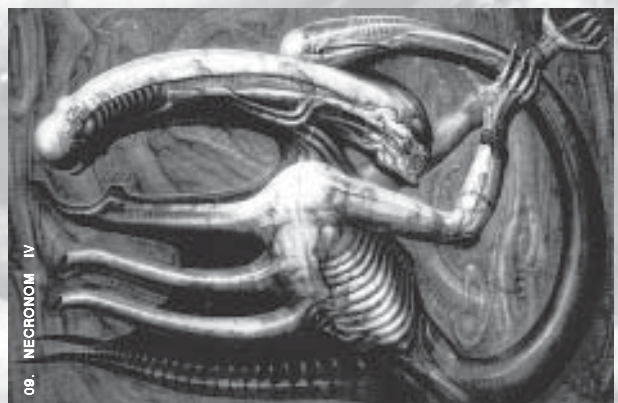


Photo: © HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

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 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 their 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.



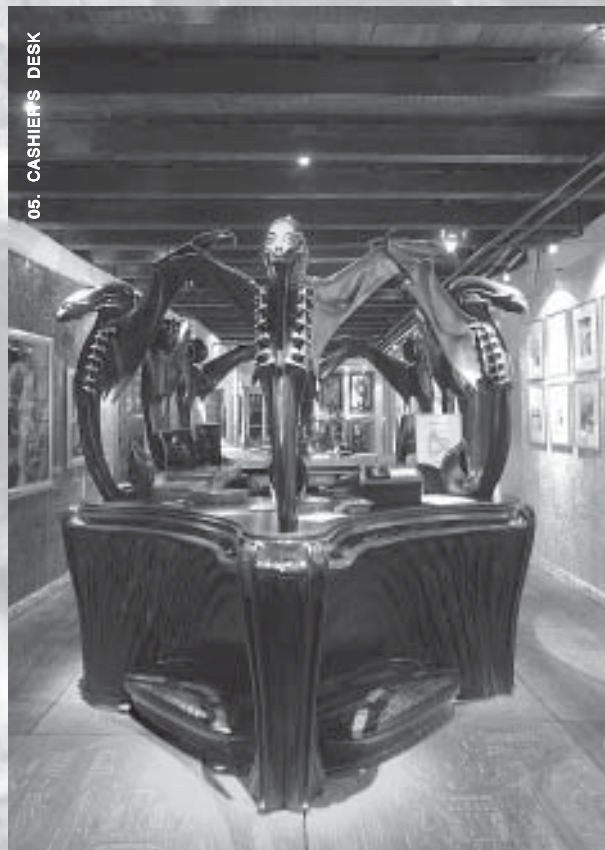
Photo: © HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

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



05. CASHIER'S DESK

Photo: © 2002 Louis Stalder / HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

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.

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 new 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



06. ALIEN ROOM

Photo: © 2002 Louis Stalder / HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

“Biomechanoid” beings in his classic, translucent airbrush works originated in the late 1960’s. But in his latest sculptures and installations these new beings, which according to Giger represent our future, have acquired a new, 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 insure 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-meter 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.

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. 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. Through his artwork, he



07. MUSEUM PROJECTION

Photo: © 2003 Marc Adrian Villas / HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

has dared us to meditate upon the next steps in 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. Few as him have dared to explore the depths of their utmost hidden fears. As he once summed it up, **“I only paint what frightens me.”**

EDITOR’S NOTE: For more information about the art of H.R. Giger, visit www.HRGigerMuseum.com. Direct all inquiries regarding purchases, commissions, and licensing to Les Barany at www.hrgigeragent.com.

* Javier de Pisón, a writer and journalist, also runs Wild Seduction Gallery in Miami (wildseduction.com).

01. BAR CEILING

The interior of the H.R. Giger Museum Bar, with its skeleton-shaped, vaulted ceilings. Photo: © 2003 Marc Adrian Villas / HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

02. BAR INTERIOR

The H.R. Giger Museum Bar counter and other interior furnishings are cast in a compound of concrete and fiberglass, polished until it’s so soft to the touch that feels like skin. Photo: © 2003 Wolfgang Holz / HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com

03. HARKONNEN BOOTHS

One of the several newly designed “Harkonnen Booths” and a plexi-glass top side table in the H.R. Giger Museum Bar, Gruyeres, Switzerland. Photo: © 2003 Javier Mz. de Pison / HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

04. GIGER AT MUSEUM

H.R. Giger sitting near the entrance of his museum in Gruyeres, Switzerland, under the sculpture “Birth Machine,” 1999. Edition of five, in aluminum, 200 x 140 x 25 cm. Photo: © 2002 Louis Stalder / HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

05. CASHIER’S DESK

The artist-designed cashier’s desk in the foyer of the H.R. Giger Museum, topped by a configuration of eight of his “Guardian Angels,” 1997. Photo: © 2002 Louis Stalder / HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

06. ALIEN ROOM

“The Alien Room” of the H.R. Giger Museum. On permanent exhibit are nearly all of the artist’s original paintings for director Ridley Scott’s movie, “Alien,” including one of the three full size shooting models of cinema’s most infamous sci-fi creature. Photo: © 2002 Louis Stalder / HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

07. MUSEUM PROJECTION

The night of the opening, a light show of projected Giger paintings on the facade of the H.R. Giger Museum was organized by David Jahn, from Prague.

Most Giger fans will easily recognize the striking image of “Landscape XIX,” 1973. Photo: © 2003 Marc Adrian Villas / HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

08. ALIEN MONSTER I

“Alien Monster I” 1979, © H.R. Giger, acrylic on paper on wood; 140 cm x 140 cm., depicts the artist’s famous creature, and was specifically created for the cover of his book, “Giger’s Alien.” Photo: © HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

09. NECRONOM IV

“Necronom IV,” 1976, © H.R. Giger, acrylic on paper on wood, 140 x 140cm. One of the two original paintings which were created independently by the artist several years before Dan O’Bannon wrote the script for the film, “Alien.” Quoting director Ridley Scott, upon his discovery of them in the book, “H.R. Giger’s Necronomicon,” “That’s it, why look further.” Photo: © HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.

10. CHINESE EVOLUTION

“Chinese Evolution,” Work # 562, 1981-84, © HR Giger, acrylic on paper/ wood, 240 x 280 cm. Photo: © HRGigerMuseum.com & BaranyArtists.com.