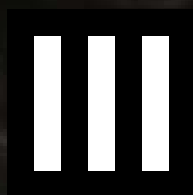




HR Giger, Necronom IV, 1976 ©HR Giger Museum



saïson  
2016/2017  
**le lieu unique**  
scène nationale  
de Nantes



# **H.R. GIGER** Alone with Night

exhibition from June 16<sup>th</sup> to August 27<sup>th</sup> 2017  
at le lieu unique, Nantes

free admission / [www.lielieuunique.com](http://www.lielieuunique.com)

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## H.R. Giger, a captivating imaginery

Few contemporary artists awaken as much fascination as H.R. Giger, a mythical name in the world of graphic and film design. This multifaceted Swiss artist (Chur, 1940- Zurich, 2014) engaged an intense career since the 1960s producing unique, wide-ranging, graphic and pictorial work, which is the expression of a personal universe in which he has become established as the designer of impossible forms and fantasy worlds. Giger's universe is located on the dark side, in caverns and among the shadows, in places where mysterious mechanisms lurk and abominable monsters lie in wait. But more than anything Giger is a plastic artist, a draftsman, a sculptor, and above all a painter, as he himself liked to acknowledge; an artist who has his own unique style: biomechanical, as he himself has coined it; this style combines shapes of natural origin (biological) with those of artificial origin (technological) with great skill. This symbiosis is handled at an iconographic level by combining the organic with the inorganic, anatomies and organs with industrial objects, and flesh with metal. But in this case it is ailing, rotting flesh with rusty, filthy metal. It is not a pleasant combination, on the contrary, it is complicated and uncomfortable and gives rise to anxiety and unease. This is one of the great contributions to modern art, a concept that has been explored and developed to create unmistakable aesthetics and which he uses to deal with the problems surrounding the human being in the contemporary era, the technological era in particular, in which man finds himself enslaved by the machines that are invading his surroundings.

The figure of Giger is associated immediately with his most famous creation, the monster that has the main role in the film *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), about which so much has been written since it was first screened. Specialised critics point out that his work in *Alien* changed the look of science fiction. He created a new concept of space terror, and therefore the fear of the unknown by emphasizing the image of a being of mythological dimensions, which subsequently turned into the most famous modern monster of science fiction. But Giger never imagined that his monster could be so successful and that it should be capable even of outshining the rest of his work. He found himself "devoured" by his own creature, which surpassed him and started one of the most productive film sagas in recent history.

His contribution to contemporary art and culture notwithstanding, institutional consideration has so far been scant, particularly in Switzerland. His career has been peppered with controversy, between acceptance and rejection. The world of art has not been able to assimilate his provocative, rebellious imaginery, which breaks taboos and conveys many of the traumatic experiences the human being has been going through in recent years. His art constitutes a response to its surroundings, a set of experiences and reflections, a particular Zeitgeist of the turn of the millennium expressed by means of thematic discourses and visionary images. So it comes as no surprise that in the body, the anatomy as well as the subconscious, Eros and Thanatos become the focus of Giger's concerns when facing an era of uncontrollable changes, in which the artist records the turmoils of the world like a seismograph and displays them in public. Consequently, through "biomechanics" Giger has developed an enthralling imaginery plagued with cyborgs, monsters, demons and satanic goddesses, fetishes and gothic landscapes, which coexist in a disturbing world.

*Carlos Arenas, curator*

## «*I don't know anybody else who has so accurately portrayed the soul of modern man*»

Oliver Stone

Several years ago, I had the privilege and pleasure of spending time with Oliver Stone, the visionary genius whose films portray the dark side of modern humanity, with extraordinary artistic power. At one point, we talked about Ridley Scott's *Alien*, and the discussion focused on H. R. Giger, whose creature and set designs were the key element in the film's success. In the 1979 Academy Awards ceremony, held at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles in April 1980, Giger's work on *Alien* earned him an Oscar for Best Visual Effects.

I have known Giger's body of work since the publication of his *Necronomicon*, and have always had deep admiration for him, not only as an artistic genius, but also as a visionary with an uncanny ability to depict the deep dark recesses of the human psyche, which have been revealed by modern studies on consciousness since then. I shared my impressions with Oliver Stone, who turned out to be a great admirer of Giger's, and found his opinion of him – his place in the art world and of popular culture – to be very original and interesting. “I don't know anybody else,” he said, “who has so accurately portrayed the soul of modern man. A few decades from now, when we talk about the twentieth century, we'll be thinking of Giger.”

Although Oliver Stone's statement momentarily surprised me by its extreme nature, I immediately realized that it reflected a profound truth. Since then, I have often recalled this conversation when confronted with the various disturbing aspects of the West's industrial civilization, and the alarming developments in the countries influenced by it. No other artist has captured the ills plaguing modern society with such power: unbridled technology taking over human life, the suicidal destruction of the planet's ecosystem, violence reaching apocalyptic proportions, sexual abuse, the madness of living that drives people to an overconsumption of sedatives and drugs, along with people's alienation from their own bodies, from others, and from nature.

Giger's art has often been called “biomechanoid” and Giger himself called one of his books *Biomechanics*. It would be difficult to find a word that better describes the *Zeitgeist* of the twentieth century, characterized by its staggering technological progress that enslaved modern humanity in a fratricidal symbiosis with the world of machines. Throughout the twentieth century, modern technological inventions became extensions and replacements of our muscles, our nervous system, our brain, our eyes and ears, and even our reproductive organs, to such an extent that the boundaries between the biological and the mechanical have all but disappeared. The archetypal stories of Faust, the sorcerer's apprentice, the Golem, and Frankenstein have become the primary stories of our times. In its effort to gain knowledge about the world of matter and to control it, materialistic science has created a monster threatening the very survival of life on our planet. Humans have changed roles: they have gone from demigods to victims.

Stanislav Grof

Extract of his book *H.R. GIGER and the Zeitgeist of the Twentieth Century*  
(Ed. Nachtschatten Verlag, 2014)

## ***“We had quite a few adventures together”***

**Bijan Aalam**

My name is Bijan Aalam. Hansruedi and I became long-time friends after meeting in 1969.

We quickly grew very close and spent many evenings together. I would watch him paint, and we would talk, exchanging impressions on all sorts of subjects. We had great times together in Zurich while I was working with my grandparents. At one point, I decided I'd had enough of this life and of my work. Since I had studied in Paris and started collecting art there, I had the sudden urge to open a gallery in the city and introduce people to fantasy art, exhibiting artists like Ernst Fuchs - many, many of whose etchings I had collected while still a student.

Giger was the first person I spoke to about my idea of opening a gallery in Paris. I asked him if he would work with me and offer support by lending me his works and helping me out. He immediately said yes. He was the first pillar of this project. I moved to Paris and immediately began exhibiting several of Giger's works. I had already helped Giger exhibit one of his paintings in another gallery before I opened mine... This took place at Jean-Claude Cobert's gallery. But his first proper exhibition was at my gallery in 1975.

Back then, it was hard to make the Parisian public understand the importance, beauty, and significance of Giger's work. But I was very active. And thanks to publications at the time, like *Necronomicon* and all his biomechanical creatures, his reputation started to spread. The prices were very, very low, of course; he was totally unknown and more or less rejected by the official art scene. It was a real struggle. But, quickly, more and more people were curious about his work (...).

We had quite a few adventures together, both in Paris and on our many trips. For instance, we went to America twice. The first time was for an exhibition at the Bronx Art Museum in New York, where a friend of mine was curator. The exhibition was called Images of Horror and Fantasy, and my friend included works by Giger and Sibylle Ruppert, an artistic cousin of his. Giger's contribution to this exhibition was to be his famous triptych, exploring his favourite questions: where do we come from, who are we, and where are we going? It featured babies, penises, vaginas, and a skull stuck in a machine.

We had our share of problems. At the time, we lived like bohemians. We didn't have much and always had to fly charter from London. This time round, Giger first had to come meet us in Paris. The three of us then went to London by train with Sibylle, then travelled again to the airport. It was an odyssey, carrying rolled-up paintings under our arms. All except for Giger's triptych, which was being shipped by boat.

(...) The day of the exhibition was fast-approaching, but the paintings were stuck somewhere. Customs had opened the parcels, saw the penises, and had them declared "obscenities." So, we had to go to the cargo area of the airport with a certificate from the Bronx Art Museum and explain to them.

We were finally able to get the paintings to the museum the day before the opening. It was a real hassle, but Giger was very calm and said, "it's going to be alright, it's going to be alright". If the paintings had been confiscated, the whole thing would've been a very unpleasant experience. But everything went well, and a book was also published. The exhibition was the greatest success the Bronx Art Museum had ever had.

Bijan Aalam, friend and first gallerist of H.R Giger

## The most important retrospective since artist's passing

This exhibition is the first since the death of H.R. Giger in 2014. It shows a large range of artworks : paintings, sculptures, drawings...more than 100 original works.

His work has been established as one of the most fascinating of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and a major inspiring influence upon a lot of contemporary artists. H.R. Giger has also fed cinema, fashion, literature, graphic design or music.

Most private collectors in Switzerland and Germany are involved in this project to offer to the visitors the discovery of Giger's universe.

The help of Giger's Museum in Gruyères (Switzerland) and Carmen Giger (the artist's widow) has been decisive.

### Main steps of the legend he built

**First works** : ink drawings, illustrations for underground magazines...

**First *Passagen*** : oil paintings created from claustrophobic nightmares or birth trauma, which are the major topics of his work.

**Airbush** : tool which became his specificity, exploring an esoteric and magic world

**Sculptures and furniture**: three dimensional works in relation with his drawings and paintings

**Last works** : from the 80's to 2000's, Giger uses stencils to paint and works on films' projects. In the late 90's, The H.R Giger Museum opens in Gruyères (Switzerland) and in the same town in 2003, a futuristic bar gives the public the opportunity to discover his biomechanic world.

### Between disciplines

**Cinema** : his work for *Alien* by Ridley Scot (1979) or his collaboration with Roger Donaldson for *Species* (1995) have made him famous worldwide.

**Music** : H.R Giger has inspired lots of musicians and has produced album covers for groups like Debbie Harry, Dead Kennedys, Emerson, Lake and Palmer or Magma...

**Environment / urban development** : since he was young, Giger has been concerned by the urban environment and has revealed a pessimistic view about pollution, diseases and over-population in his art.

**Body / Biomechanic** : Giger synthesizes biology and technology, depicts anatomical elements and their fusion with machines. Populated by phantasmagoric creatures, his imaginary is on the edge of two worlds.

**Architecture** : His training as an industrial and interior designer has played an important role in his career, as we can see in his paintings of cities and his futuristic conceptions.

## Artist's biography

**1940** Born on February 5th in Chur (Switzerland).

**1959-1962** In Chur, undergoes a period of practical training with architect, Venantius Maissen, and builder, Hans Stetter. Attends military school in Winterthur.

**1962-1965** Studies at School of Applied Arts in Zurich, in Department of Interior and Industrial Design.

**1964** Settles in Zurich. Produces first ink drawings, which go on to form Atomkinder series ("Atomic children") and creates first polyester pieces consisting of several masks and a table.

**1965** Publishes drawings in underground magazines *Clou*, *Agitation* and *Hotcha*. Publishes some works in the folder *Ein Fressen für den Psychiater* ("A feast for the psychiatrist"). End of term work consists of designing the underpass of a train station.

**1966** Works at Andreas Christen's studio designing furniture. Meets actress Li Tobler and falls in love. Puts on first solo show at Beno Gallery in Zurich.

**1967** Draws large-format works, like *Gebärmaschine* ("Birth machine") – an emblematic piece from this period.

**1968** Gallery owner Bruno Bischoffberger buys a series of ink drawings and oil paintings from him and advises him to number and photograph his work. Giger takes part in collective exhibition, *Hommage à Che* at the Jörg Stummer Gallery in Zurich. Designs characters for the sci-fi film *Swissmade 2069*.

**1969** H.H. Kunz prints first posters of his works, which are soon distributed all over the world.

**1970** The Bischoffger Gallery exhibits *Passagen (Passages)*.

**1971** First catalogue with his work entitled *ARh+* is published. Fredi Murer films documentary *Passagen* about his pictorial world. It wins first prize in its category at Mannheim Film Festival.

**1972** Begins working with an airbrush.

**1973** Is commissioned to design the cover for the album, *Brain salad Surgery*, by British rock band, Emerson, Lake and Palmer.

**1974** Bündner Kunstmuseum in Chur displays the collective work, *Tagtraum (Daydream)* made alongside artists Claude Sandoz and Walter Wegmüller.

**1975** Concludes series of paintings *Passagentempel (Passage temple)* commissioned by the Sydow-Zirkwitz Gallery in Frankfurt am Main. Li Tobler passes away.

**1976** Visits Salvador Dalí in Cadaqués and becomes part of the film project, *Dune*, directed by Alejandro Jodorowsky, which ultimately fails to get funding. Exhibits at Bijan Aalam Gallery in Paris.

**1977** Commissioned to produce designs for the preproduction of the film, *Alien*. Book, H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon* is published in various languages. Takes part in the group show, *Images of Horror and Fantasy* at Bronx Museum in New York.

**1979** *Alien* premieres. Marries Mia Bonzanigo.

**1980** Wins an Oscar for work on *Alien*.

**1981** As a result of travels around the USA, and produces *New York City* series. Is commissioned to design cover of new Blondie album entitled, *KooKoo*, and direct two music videos. Along with Cornelius de Fries, designs and builds Harkonnen chair for new film adaptation of *Dune*.

**1982** Creates designs for film, *The Tourist*, which is never made. Separates from Mia.

**1985** Commissioned to create various horror scenes for film, *Poltergeist II*. Book, H.R. Giger's *Necronomicon II*, is published.

**1987** Exhibits for the first time in Japan at the Seibu Museum Art Gallery in Tokyo. His books are published in Japanese. Designs first Giger Bar, which is built the following year in Tokyo.

**1990** Takes part in designs for *Alien III*. Exhibition, *Alien dans ses meubles* is held at Gruyères Castle. Begins working with Leslie Barany who eventually becomes his agent.

**1992** First Giger Bar is opened in Switzerland, in hometown of Chur.

**1994** Begins working on film, *Species*. Designs "beautiful alien" named Sil.

**1996** Solo show at the Palazzo Bagatti in Milan entitled *H.R.Giger- Visioni di Fine Millennio*.

**1998** H.R. Giger museum is partially opened in Saint Germain castle in Gruyères. The book, *The Mystery of San Gottardo* is published. It is somewhere between a comic book and an illustrated novel.

**2003** H.R. Giger Museum Bar opened at Gruyères Museum.

**2004** Finishes large-format 3D sculptures for the *Passagen* series. Major retrospective is held at the La Halle Saint Pierre museum in Paris. Awarded the "Médaille de la Ville" at Paris City Hall.

**2006** Marries Carmen Scheifele. Exhibits works at Kunsthaus in Vienna.

**2007** First important retrospective at a Swiss museum with an exhibition entitled *HR Giger, Das Schaffen vor Alien, 1961-1976* at the Bündner Kunstmuseum in Chur. The Universitat Politècnica in Valencia hosts first exhibition by H.R. Giger in Spain.

**2008** Together with Horst Janssen & Guido Sieber, Giger takes part in the exhibition, *Abgrunde*, at Spandau Citadel in Berlin.

**2009** German Film Institute and German Film Museum in Frankfurt-am-Main organise an exhibition focusing on Giger's film designs. The Kubo-Kutxa Exhibition Centre at the Kursaal in San Sebastián (Spain) hosts one of the most important retrospectives of artist's work.

**2014** Hans Ruedi Giger passes away on Monday 12 May, at age 74. He is buried at the cemetery in Gruyères, within sight of his museum.

**2015** *Dark Star: H.R. Giger's World*, a documentary film by Belinda Sallin, is released.

**2016** Exhibition at the Fabrik der Künste, Hamburg.

**2017** Le lieu unique (Nantes) presents first major retrospective after artist's passing.

### **Carlos Arenas, curator of the exhibition**

Carlos Arenas (1971) lives and works in Valencia (Spain) as an independent art curator, writer and lecturer. Since 2009, Carlos Arenas has taught Film History and Art History at the University of Valencia. He has a Ph.D. in Art History on H.R. Giger and is responsible for several exhibitions centred around film, fantasy art, and contemporary Spanish art. The exhibition at le lieu unique is the fourth show he has curated on Giger. His writings include texts on cinema, iconography, animation and design.

### **Exhibition catalogue**

The exhibition, the first large-scale retrospective since H.R. Giger's passing, is the perfect occasion for printing a 148 pages catalogue composed of photos, testimonies, stories and texts about the Swiss artist. It will be available at le lieu unique's ticket office (20€).



## Available visuals



**H.R. GIGER**  
*Alien Monster - Necronom IV* (1976)  
Acrylique sur papier et bois  
© Museum HR Giger



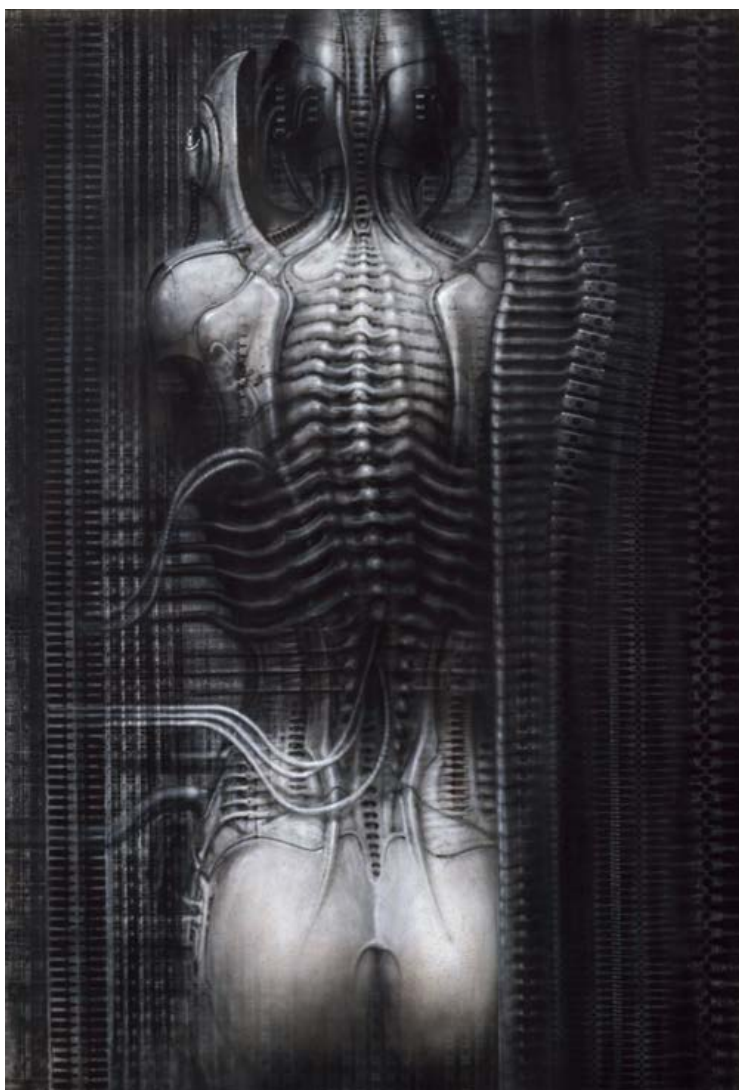
**H.R. GIGER**  
*Birthmachine baby* (1998)  
Bronze  
© Matthias Belz / Museum HR Giger



Available visuals



**H.R. GIGER**  
*Necronom (Alien III) (2005)*  
Polyester et metal  
© Matthias Belz / Museum HR Giger



**H.R. GIGER**  
*New York City, Torso (1980)*  
Acrylique et encre sur papier  
Courtesy R. Huber

## Practical information

### III

#### OPENING HOURS

The inauguration will be on June 15<sup>th</sup> at 6.30pm

**From 16 to 30 June** : 7 days a week from 2pm to 7pm

**From July 1<sup>st</sup> to August 27<sup>th</sup>** : 7 days a week from 10am to 7pm

Free admission

### III

#### ADDRESS

le lieu unique

Quai Ferdinand-Favre, Nantes

t. +33 (0)2 40 12 14 34

### III

#### TOURS OF THE EXHIBITION

##### > Flash tours

Short presentations (about 20 min')

on Saturdays and Sundays, until July 2<sup>nd</sup> at 2pm and 3pm

##### > Tour interpreted in french sign language

on Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> June at 3.30pm

### III

#### WARNING

Some of the works presented may offend the sensibilities of the youngest. Adults are invited to come and check the feasibility of a visit for their children and teenagers. These will not be allowed to enter unaccompanied in the exhibition.

#### PLEASE NOTE

For safety reasons, strollers are not accepted in the exhibition.

### III

#### PRESS CONTACT

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