

Our Biomechanoid Father

Remembering H.R. Giger

Written by Gabrielle Faust for Gothic Beauty Magazine ©2014

“Everyone dreams, but few people trust themselves to present their dreams for they are inhibited from making public their perverse thoughts.”
– *H.R. Giger, “H.R. Giger’s Necronomicon” (1976)*

Born out of fear for a nuclear world, overpopulation, and the systematic destruction of nature, and bred between the sheets of his own nightmares and eroticism, H.R. Giger delivered into the world what has been called the most influential surrealistic creations of both the 20th and 21st centuries. Few artists have possessed the profound depth of insight into the human psyche or been so brave to thwart conventional “moral police” with images that, at first glance, seem to be the product of occult depravity, but in truth possess a sublime beauty that can only be achieved by staring deep into the heart of one’s own darkness. To understand ourselves as a species as we move further from nature into the world of machines, we need only to immerse ourselves within the works of Giger, the Father of the Biomechanoid.

In his 1976 self-documentary *H.R. Giger’s Necronomicon* Giger states, “You get talent when you discover the ground of your pain. There is hope and a kind of beauty in there somewhere, if you look for it.” This courageous introspective search for one’s pain, and thus one’s talent, has inspired millions around the world for over half a century, revolutionizing every aspect of cultural history from fine art and architecture, to pop culture and cinema. From the first appearance of his “Atomkinder” (“Atomic Children”) ink drawings in 1964 to his final set and creature designs for the film *Prometheus*, Giger left his distinct and unforgettable fingerprint forever ingrained in the psyches of modern humanity.

Hansruedi Giger was born on February 5, 1940 in Chur, the beautiful capital city of Graubünden in Switzerland. The child of Melly Giger-Meier and pharmacist Hans Richard Giger, H.R. Giger was a shy child and his mother’s favorite. Encouraged from an early age by his mother to explore art through the clay and paints she purchased for him as early as the age of five, but discouraged by his father who thought the life of a professional artist to be a “breadless profession”, Giger was not the academic superstar his father had envisioned. He was instead a creative and inventive child of limitless imagination.

Influenced early on by his fascination with the human skull received by his father as a promotional item from a pharmaceutical firm, he soon began to form his own strange dark fantasy world of Ghost Trains in the back courtyard of their home in the Storchengasse of Chur. A child with a deep fascination with collecting weapons from the age of ten, he dreamed of becoming an architect of castles and fortresses when he grew up, learning the basics of weapon repair and soldering from the local “Gölischmid”, the goldsmith thought by neighbors to be crazy. Though his father and society may have desired a different path for Giger he was never dissuaded and struggled to navigate the university systems of Switzerland. Through the

encouragement of friends and colleagues he discovered his calling in the fine arts and after a challenge made by his older sister and father to prove their opinions wrong about artists, he set out to do just that.

From 1959 to 1962, during his time at the Swiss military college where he was trained as a mortar gunner, Giger apprenticed with the Chur architect Venatius Maisen and developer Hans Setter. Upon the completion of his apprenticeship Giger entered the School of Applied Arts in Zurich where he focused initially on Interior and Industrial Design. As Giger began to dedicate himself fully to his artistic pursuits he found himself profoundly inspired by the surrealist artists of the time such as Dalí, Oelze, Schröder-Sonnenstern, and Bellmer. However, it was the 1964 publication of his “Atomkinder” (Atomic Children) ink illustration in the Chur canton school paper that truly marked the beginnings of his distinct stylistic approach, which he would later term “Biomechanoid”.

Throughout the sixties, many of his early drawings, created through the use of ink brushed onto Transcop paper using a toothbrush and wire sieve, were derived from months of analyzing his own dreams and nightmares according to the theories of Sigmund Freud. It was also during this time that his revolutionary paintings “Birth Machine”, “Under the Earth”, and “Astro-Eunuchs”, as well as the sculptures “Beggar”, “Suitcase Baby”, and “Life-Support” were born. In 1969 Giger’s work reached an international audience when H.H. Kunz, his friend, collector, and co-owner of Switzerland’s first poster publishing company, reproduced several of his pieces as posters for mass distribution.

The next decade was as equally traumatic as it was prolific for Giger. During this time the artist was inspired to create “H.R. Giger’s Necronomicon” and “wet-cell” paintings, as well as a series of four collaborative works entitled “Tagtraum” (Daydream) with Claude Sandoz and Walter Wegmüller. After the untimely suicide of his great love Li Tober in 1975, Giger struggled with his sorrow, channeling his pain and loss into his paintings and sculptures. Through his contact that same year with the American painter Bob Venosa, he found himself commissioned to work on the film *Dune* and, guided by a script penned by Moebius, Giger set about designing the world of The Harkonnen.

The seventies served as a defining era for Giger’s imprint on the world of modern science-fiction cinema. Upon viewing one of the first copies of “Necronomicon” director Ridley Scott and 20th Century Fox studios enlisted Giger to create the creature that has terrified the world as no other has for over thirty years. The feature film “Alien” catapulted Giger into creative genius stardom and in 1980 he was awarded the Oscar for Best Achievement in Visual Effects for his groundbreaking contribution to Hollywood.

Having officially become the creature creator to which all other designers aspired, Giger returned home after a series of trips to New York City, which inspired his extraordinary architectural studies entitled “N.Y. City”. Utilizing these paintings as a template, Cornelius de Fries and Giger began the development of their furniture collection including the iconic chair utilized by The Harkonnen in *Dune*. From the “Victory” paintings and “Totems”, mechanical rods capped each with a screaming head, to his work on the films *The Tourist*, *Poltergeist II*, *Alien 3*, and *Species*,

Giger continued to saturate every aspect of modern culture with his dark dreams for the next twenty years.

From books and graphic novels such as “Biomechanics”, “Necronomicon 1 & 2”, “Giger’s Alien”, “Mystery of San Gottardo”, “H.R. Giger’s Retrospective 1964-84”, “H.R. Giger Under Your Skin”, and “H.R. Giger’s Arh+”, as well as “The Baphomet Tarot”, to work on mechanized sculptures such as the Zodiac Fountain, Giger was tireless in the focused implementation of his visions. While multiple international exhibits of his creations continued to seduce awestruck audiences, work on what would become the Giger Bar in Chur, as well as the Giger Museum in Gruyere, commenced under the artist’s keen supervision in 1992. Through the following creation of the mic stand for the band Korn, to the Ibanez Guitar’s Signature Series and McFarlane toys, the world expressed its cravings for the twisted beauty in Giger’s nightmarish depictions of his greatest fears and haunting interpretations of reality. What had begun as a young man’s desire to change his father’s perspective had become a multi-platform industry unto itself and a vast treasury of dark surrealist art.

By the conclusion of his legacy on May 12, 2014, H.R. Giger had irrefutably altered the human culture in both our fantasies and our physical realities. Indeed, what many artists and designers strive to achieve in a lifetime Giger was able to realize year after year, with each new undertaking more spectacular than its predecessor. To gaze upon a painting or sculpture by the Father of Biomecanoid is to stare into a mirror within which the societal diplomacies that often blind us have been stripped away and our desires run rampant with our demons. Through a morbid, often decadent decay, amidst landscapes consumed by an organic technology, the shy artist who often found art shows depressing and publicity awkward was able to command a metaphysical force acutely attuned to the vibration of humanity itself. Today, the artist’s personal collection housed within the H.R. Giger museum continues to be carefully preserved for future generations to experience and be forever changed by. H.R. Giger was laid to rest on May 30, 2014 in the Fraumünster reformed church in Zurich surrounded by the honor and adoration of friends, family, and fans.

H.R. Giger, we can never truly express our gratitude for showing us your hope, your beauty, and your pain, and for guiding us to the discovery of aspects of ourselves we might never have seen. Your world within worlds transformed us, showing us that truly anything is possible, and for this we thank you.