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NUIT / ALONE WITH NIGHT:  
A GIGER EXHIBITION  
IN NANTES***

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# ***H.R.GIGER. SEUL AVEC LA NUIT / ALONE WITH NIGHT: A GIGER EXHIBITION IN NANTES***

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During the summer of 2017 I curated a major retrospective to honor the work of Swiss artist H.R. Giger, which that took place at le lieu unique in Nantes (France). The exhibition was titled *H.R. Giger Seul avec la Nuit (H.R. Giger Alone with Night)*, presented June 16th - August 27th,



and has been the main retrospective since the artist's passing 4 years ago, in fact the biggest exhibition in 30 years of his work. A large range of artworks were on display, including original paintings, sculptures, drawings, furniture, photographs, audiovisual material and a model of the Giger Bar in Gruyères (Switzerland) adding up to more than 100 works. Private collectors in Switzerland and Germany were involved in this project but the collaboration of the H.R. Giger Museum in Gruyères and by Carmen Giger (the artist's widow) was decisive.

Hansruedi Giger (Chur, 1940- Zurich, 2014) engaged in an intense career, starting in the 1960s, producing unique, wide-ranging, graphic and pictorial work, the expression of a personal universo, which established him 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.



The multifaceted Swiss artist, draftsman, sculptor, and above all painter, as he himself liked to point out, was an artist who has his own unique biomechanical style: a term that he has coined, himself. 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.

Biomechanics is one of Giger's 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 environment.



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.

The figure of Giger is associated immediately with his most famous creation, the monster of the title, in the film *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), about which so much has been written since it was first screened. Film critics point out that Giger's 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, an icon in modern fantastic cinema as well as in popular culture.

But Giger never imagined that his creation would achieve such fame and even outshine the rest of his work. He was devoured by his own creature, which escaped him and became the



origin of one of the most reliable and lucrative film sagas of recent history, from whom Hollywood obtained a major benefit, creating a blockbuster movie franchise, including the latest production, *Alien: Covenant* (Ridley Scott, 2017) and countless merchandising products.

The title of the exhibition, *H.R. Giger Seul avec la Nuit*, referred to a poem of Charles Baudelaire, "Les ténèbres" (1837) that appears in his most famous work, *Les Fleurs du mal*. The main objective of the exhibition in Nantes was to bring Giger's work to the great public in an attractive way. That is why the concept of the exhibition focused on the number 5, not only because it was Giger's favourite, although he was born on February 5, but also because of the the magic and symbolic dimension that's represented by the figure 5 for the artist. This is why the design of the exhibition space was based on a pentagon (pentagram), a geometric structure that symbolizes the microcosm and harmony, because it is the abstract expression of the Golden Number. It therefore has the appropriate qualities to represent order and beauty, with an important projection on science, art, music and mysticism.



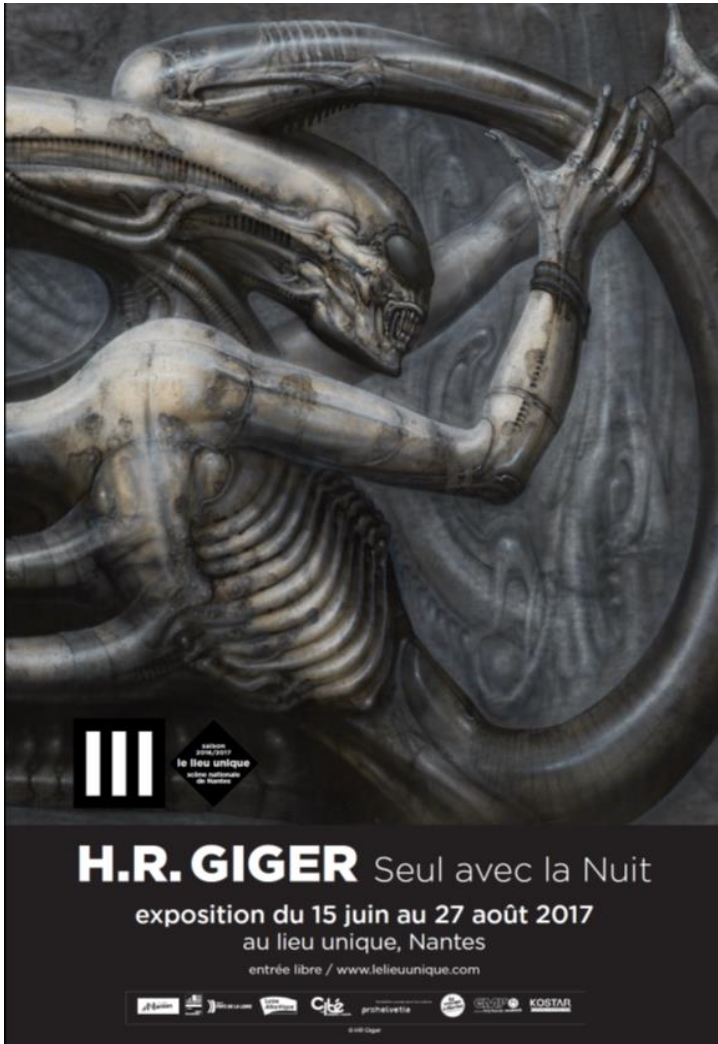
Matthias Belz

Following this idea the exhibition was divided into five large blocks according to the five walls that form the pentagon. The exterior dealt with Giger's stylistic evolution in 5 domains coinciding with his chronology. The interior exposed the 5 main thematic areas of his production. Inside the pentagon a 5-pointed star was traced, which has many connotations, as the icon of the revolution, representation of the 5 elements, sometimes reversed, as emblem of the demon.

The viewer was able to visit the exhibition by following different routes. One of them allowed to look externally at the aesthetic and creative evolution of Giger, thanks to the various artistic techniques used by the artist: First works: ink drawings, illustrations for underground magazines, sculptures and some of the images that were used in his first posters, Giger's first means of artistic

diffusion; The *Passagen* series: oil paintings, a product of nightmares of claustrophobia, metaphors of the trauma of birth and the mechano-erotic routine of garbage trucks; The discovery of the airbrush: the beginning of the use of the airbrush, which will become his most remarkable artistic label. Spontaneous drawings, improvisations, automatic writing and reflections on the architecture of the human body and the technological world; Stylistic consolidation: Giger achieved airbrush technical excellence in the mid-1970s, exploring the esoteric and magical themes and using literary sources such as H.P. Lovecraft and Aleister Crowley. Towards the end of the decade, his friendship with Salvador Dali will allow him to come into contact with the film *World*; Last works and projects: During the 1980s, Giger used stencils for airbrush painting and worked continuously for film projects, many of which did not bear fruit. At the end of the 1990s, he created his museum in Gruyères. The design of a futuristic bar inaugurated in 2003 is its culmination.

Once inside the pentagon, the visitor was able to discover the inter-artistic nature of Giger's work: Film design: Giger is known worldwide for his work in *Alien*. His film designs were featured, as well as other collaborations with Hollywood productions; World of Music: Giger has inspired musicians of various styles such as rock, pop, punk or heavy metal, and has produced album covers for groups like Debbie Harry, Dead Kennedys, Emerson, Lake and Palmer or Magma; Landscape: from his youth the environment and the urban environment were a source of concern for the artist. He did pessimistic work on pollution, disease or overpopulation; Body:



the anatomical elements and their fusion with the machines are developed by Giger through his biomechanical style, synthesizing the biological and technological world, organic and inorganic; Architecture: his training as an industrial designer and interior designer played an important role in his career, as can be seen in these city paintings and his futuristic designs, imprinted with a dark tone.

Le lieu unique is the national center for contemporary arts and music venues in Nantes that has become an utopian living space where conviviality meets the most contemporary forms of creativity, a space of artistic exploration, of cultural effervescence that mixes genres, cultures and people. Le LU, as it is known in Nantes and France, is internationally recognized for its spirit of curios-

ity in the different domains of art: visual art, theatre, dance, circus, music, but also literature, philosophy, architecture, and the culinary arts. 90.000 people visited *H.R. Giger Seul avec la Nuit*, becoming one of the most important events of the summer in France, with a great impact on French Media, such as Le Monde, Liberation, L'Obs, Ouest-France, Paris Match and France Culture, which dedicated a wide coverage.

Giger's art awakes a huge fascination in various cultural fields and is a major inspiring influence upon young and emergent contemporary artists. Giger's renown is likely to grow as

the years progress, as his influence is flourishing, especially in alternative culture. The fantasy genre, horror films and the conjuring of monsters were profoundly changed by the thunderous eruption of *Alien* on the scene, establishing the dark and gloomy aesthetics of modern audiovisual culture; the world of video games, fashion, design, music from pop to heavy metal, illustration, comics and art in general, constantly nourished by the universe of Giger.

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<http://gigerworkcatalog.com/photos/nantes/index.html>