

# GIGER THE GREAT

## alienest of artists



**I**F POE had been a painter ...  
**I**F DRACULA a sculptor ...  
**I**F FRANKENSTEIN a model-maker ...

And if all 3 of these legendary dwellers in the macabre had pooled their nightmares and made a pilgrimage to Switzerland and offered their dark dreams to a certain distinguished painter & designer there, the result could only have been the incredible, bizarre, twisted, terrifying, fabulous, fascinating images that emerge from the monster mind of H.R. (for Horror Rex) Giger.

Pronounced Geeger with a hard G.

### aliens among us

In CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD

KIND there is that memorable line, "Einstein was probably one of them"—referring to the benevolent beings from beyond the stars.

There is a sci-fi fans' button that reads, **H.G. Wells was a Martian.**

Few would doubt it if it were revealed that. . . H.R. Giger is an Alien.

Who is this Man of Mystery?

This latterday Hieronymus Bosch? (George Pal himself, with a collaborator, has attempted to unravel the mystery of Bosch in a novel soon to be published.)

Who is this pale, saturnine figure who dresses in black and (tho vampire's blood must surely flow thru his veins) dares to appear upon occasion by day?



**GIGER'S GARGANTUAN GROTESQUERIE:** Once Seen, Forever Etched in the Memory.

# NO PLACE LIKE HOME



--Especially if the home is HRGiger's! Giger poses here with one of the posies that adorn his dyingroom wall.

## the wizard of zurich

Giger would have been at home in Rotwang's gothic bungalow in Metropolis. He lives & works in the modern European metropolis of Zurich, Switzerland. His work is an extension of his childhood when, in his youth, "I had many strange dreams—and nightmares," he says. "When I awoke I would paint the things I had seen in my dreams, which made me feel much better and the nightmares would go away.

"Until nexttime ..."

Eleven years ago Giger began to work as a freelance painter, sculptor & designer and his reputation grew by leaps & bounds thruout Europe, culminating in his rocketing, riveting "performance" in ALIEN, where his weird work dominates the screen with sights unseen upon this planet since the Eldritch Age of the Old Ones, of which HPLovecraft has reported in his purported fictional "stories".

Giger has held one-man exhibitions in

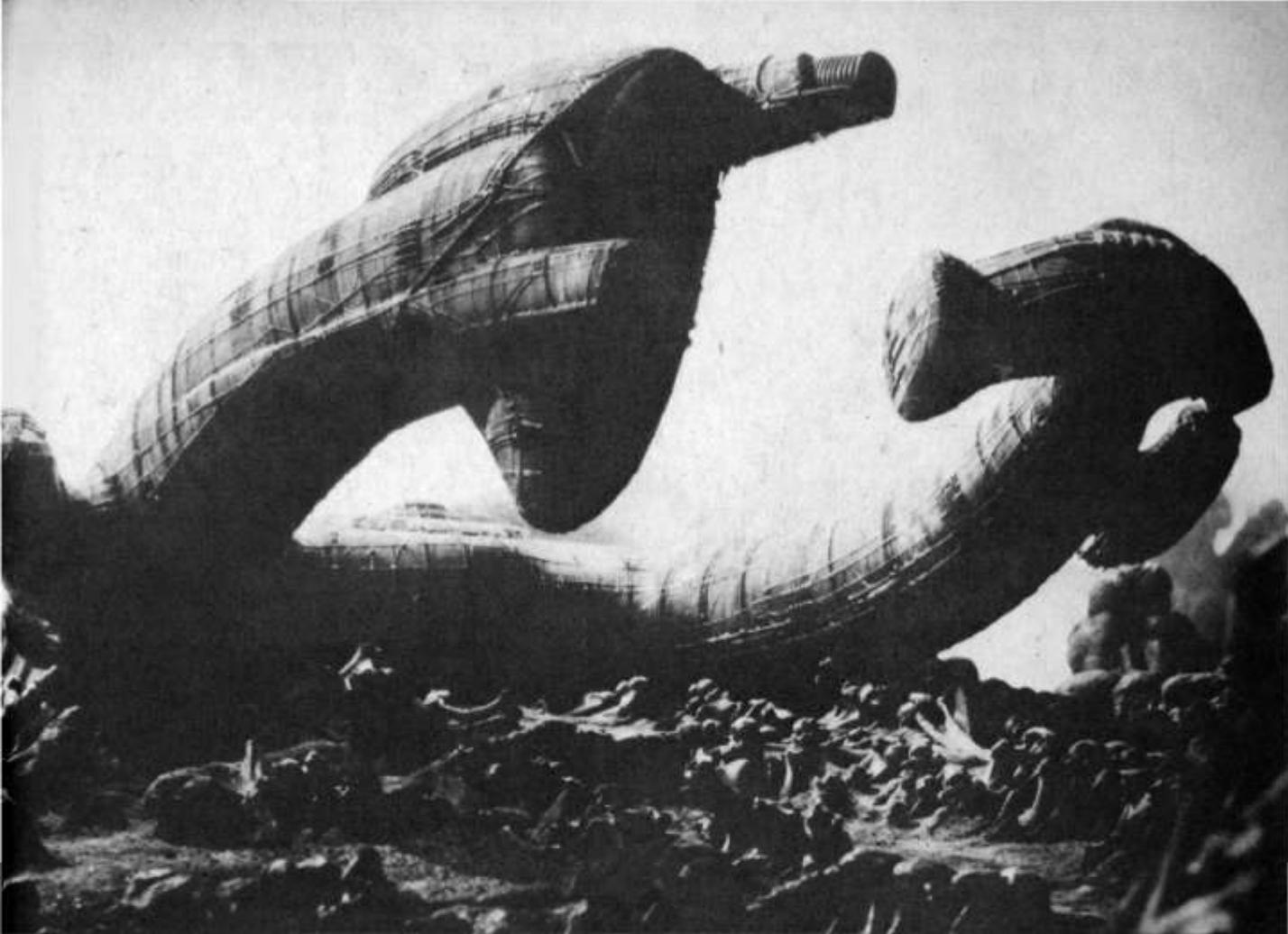
Switzerland, Germany, France & Holland and his work has also been displayed in general exhibitions in those countries as well as Austria, Poland, Israel, England and ... New York! (Lucky filmmonster fans living in the Big Apple may have seen his "captured nightmares" on display in the Bronx Museum.) His posters have sold thruout Europe and his drawings have been featured in magazines in such distant exotic countries as Japan and ... China!

## defying description

Giger's paintings are virtually indescribable.

Perhaps, had Clark Ashton Smith (the man who memorized a thesaurus) lived into the time of Giger, he might have found the words to encapsulate him.

Were Ray Bradbury not so busy writing a celebration in words for the 10th Anniversary of the Lunar Landing and aiding the Disneyland operators to envision a Futureland, he might



**The Derelict Ship on the Uncharted Planetoid, a Mystery of the Void envisioned in the Baroque Brain of HRGiger.**

adequately describe the Gargantuan grotesqueries of Giger.

*Where are you Dali, now that we need you?*

*Where are you Druillet? (Drew-ee-lay.)*

*Where are you Dorian Gray?*

About the best we can convey is that Giger is an ancient alchemist reincarnated, a Merlin of the macabre, an artist alienesque who mixes in his mortar wing of harpy, tongue of gryphon, eye of cyclops, snake-hair of Medusa, hair of werewolf, blood of vampire, and brings the mordant mixture to a boil in a warlock's cauldron suspended over a dragon's breath of flame.

Giger is a Poesque poet, a Merrittesque magus, upon whose pittoresque palette are admixed bones, babies, birds, berries, bristles & thistles; machinery & misery; skeletons & screams; darkling woods & desperate despair.

"His work is a thing of beauty of a terrible but elegant kind, hovering on the edge of a 3-dimensional hell."—Robert Dingilian.

## **from dawn to dune**

*Early Morning.* This was the name of an unusual play produced on the stage in Zurich in 1969 and for which Giger created a remarkable pair of Siamese twins who were important to the plot.

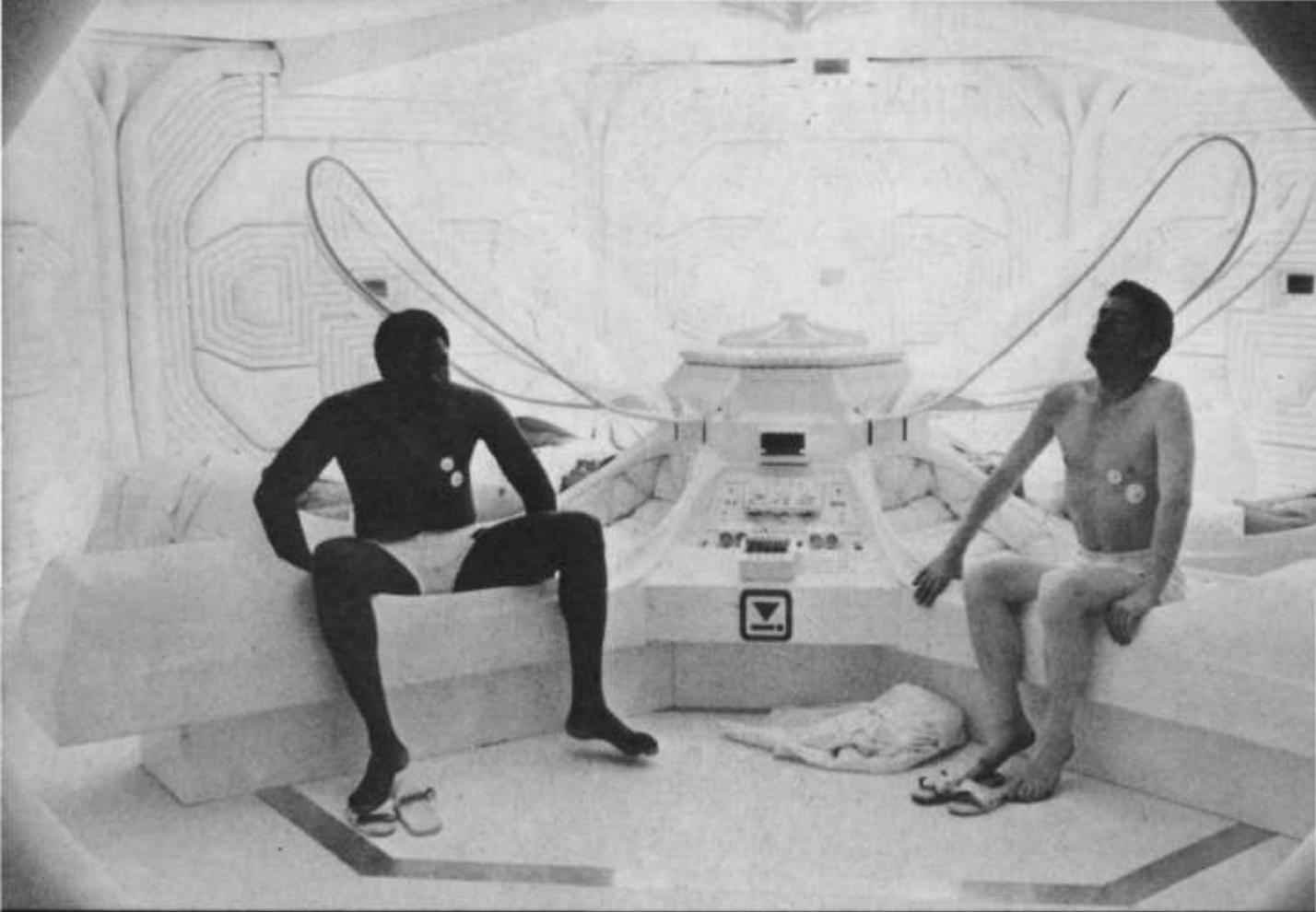
In 1976 he found himself designing sandy sets for the ill-fated start-&-stop on the filming of the classic DUNE, a project which, happily, has been brought back to life. They must be serious about making it—author Frank Herbert has been paid \$1 million for the movie rights!

## **another chaney?**

Like Lon Sr. before him, Giger is reluctant to talk about his work.

The late director Fritz Lang was like that, saying he felt his works (METROPOLIS, MABUSE, SIEGFRIED, FRAU IM MOND, M) spoke for themselves.

But Giger has broken his silence to say, "Some people say my paintings show a future world . . . and maybe they do. But I paint from reality, I put several things & ideas together and perhaps, when I have finished, it could show the future—who knows? If people want to interpret my work as warnings about too much overpopulation, disease & mechanization in the future, then that is up to them! I like to combine human beings, creatures & bio-mechanics. And I love to work with bones—they are elegant & functional and, after all, are part of human beings. I have many bones in my home in Zurich and I study them and use them as models. Skeletons too."



**Parker (Yaphet Kotto) & Kane (John Hurt) will soon wish they'd never waked up from hypersleep when they confront the nightmare Giger has dreamed up for them!**



**Parker, Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) & Ash (Ian Holm) wonder what Giger has cooked up for them next. They hope to come thru with frying colors but . . .**

"Some people say my work is often depressing & pessimistic, with the emphasis on death, blood, overcrowding, strange beings & so on but I don't really think it is. There is hope & a kind of beauty in there somewhere, if you look for it. The creatures I design & paint are very much like their own environment, one comes from the other.

"The colors I use are usually gray, white & brown—these are the colors of my beloved Siamese cat. I use black ink too and like to make use of an airbrush quite a lot. I like white on black also—it gives my work a kind of translucent look and sometimes almost a 3-dimensional appearance. The faces of women in my work are often based on women I have known in my life." The woman in Giger's life at present is beautiful, dark-haired Mia Bonzanigo who works as his devoted assistant.

When "ALIEN" is released in 1979 many people throughout the world will have their first glimpse of H.R. Giger's unique work.

\* \* \*

It is with pride & pleasure that we now present An Exclusive Interview with the Artist of the Hour conducted in the offices of FAMOUS MONSTERS by Ric Meyers. The same Richard S. Meyers who is the author of the *Doomstar* pocketbook space operas from Carlyle paperbacks. The author of *World of Fantasy Films*.



**Dallas (Tom Skerritt) & Lambert (Veronica Cartwright) make their cautious way over Giger's Planetoid of Peril.**

## **giger speaks!**

**FM:** Is this your first trip to the United States?

**GIGER:** *No, this is my second. The first time was just to visit New York. This time it is for the film. I would like to see how the reaction is. I was very surprised about how successful the film is. I was very excited to go to Hollywood for the opening.*

**FM:** On the basis of your paintings alone, one might get the impression that you are a gloomy, pessimistic artist. It's refreshing to find that you totally enjoy the fact that your work & designs were the basis of a straight horror movie.

**GIGER:** *Yes. All the time Dan O'Bannon was working on the story he was thinking that I should do the monster. Finally when he finished the script he called me from LA, all the way to Zurich, and asked me if I would like to work on ALIEN. I asked what the story was about, he told me and then I said yes, I would like to do some designs. I did the first designs about August or September of 1977.*

**FM:** Looking at your paintings,

one gets the impression that an involved story is behind each & every one. You yourself may not create that story but the viewer almost always does.

**GIGER:** *Yes, that seems to be true. I had certain problems, like everybody. When I was depressed it was very good for me to put it down in a painting. Then I felt much better. So I think I'm really quite normal.*

**FM:** There seem to be pieces of your previous work used in the designs for ALIEN.

**GIGER:** *I don't know. I'm not sure. I mean, Dan O'Bannon had my book after he finished the story and just before Ridley Scott got involved in the project. I gave him my first copy. It was a French edition, hand-bound, and it really was the thing that secured my involvement with the project. As soon as Ridley saw it, he said, "That's it! I need this man." So 20th Century-Fox decided to work another way than they usually did. Normally they take an experienced crew from the studio. That's the reason so many films look alike. So many horror films look the same. You know, things like the Hammer films*

*with Christopher Lee. There are some good ones but then they get to be all the same and boring. And harmless. Because they're all done with the same people. But if you have a choice of talent from many places, it may be more difficult to get started but maybe the final product looks different & fresh.*

**FM:** ALIEN certainly is different, probably because they used so many fine artists to design the different aspects of the film.

**GIGER:** *Oh, yes. Ron Cobb, mostly, did the "mothership", the Nostromo, and I was responsible for the other things, like the planet's surface, the derelict & the aliens.*

**FM:** It has been said that your work comes from your own dreams, nightmares & feelings. But how did you work on someone else's ideas?

**GIGER:** *Well, at first it was decided that I would only work on the Alien. Because in the early days of the project Ron Cobb, who also lives in LA and worked with Dan O'Bannon on the aborted DUNE project, did some designs of the planet & the Alien "egg silo" & the derelict & things like*

that. So once I entered the job, I don't remember whether they asked me to do it or not but I painted this derelict ship in the morning and when I showed it to Ridley Scott he said, "Oh, that's it. Well use it. Please now do the entrance and please now do the interior." So I wound up doing more than we had expected.

**FM:** How did you work up or adapt your ideas for ALIEN?

**GIGER:** When Ridley was first at my studio in Zurich with David Giler & Gordon Carroll the producers, they told me a little more about the film's story and then I suggested it might be good to have different people design the different elements so that the Nostromo would have a completely different look than the derelict. I think it turned out much better that way. Ron Cobb's designs for the "mothership" look designed by humans while the derelict looks totally alien. I wanted it to look like something planted, perhaps in the process of maturing—a mixture of organic & mechanical stuff. The center piece of that design was the "space jockey". His existence was dictated by the script. But it allowed me to integrate my biomechanic creatures concept into it.

**FM:** Let's go back a bit. Starting with the genesis of the Alien, did you design the egg?

**GIGER:** Yes, I made the first design and I also modeled it myself. I also did some models of the planet landscape, I built the space jockey & painted it myself and I did a complete model of the mature Alien. Then it was cast by other people. I wound up making it myself, you see, because there was no one else around. All the good people who could do it were involved with other films. Others gave us some bad examples of how it could be built but both Ridley & myself disagreed. When he first came to my home he said, "We have people that can build the Alien precisely from your drawings." I thought that was wonderful but then I found that there was no one around so I had to do it myself. But I enjoyed doing that because it was my creation. If I had to sculpt someone else's work, that would have been a lot harder. If one is responsible for the design it's good to work up to the completed creature.

**FM:** And how much of that completed creature was your original creation and how much of it was

the director's & writer's?

**GIGER:** The first concept was done by Dan O'Bannon. He made some sketches and he also sent me some sketches by Ron Cobb. At that moment Ridley wasn't involved. Later on when Ridley became the director we worked very closely together. He had a very strong idea of how it should look. But whenever I thought he was wrong he was quick to compromise. Consequently the design changed a lot for several reasons. First the story changed constantly. Second Ridley was very experienced in film and I am not. He knows what it would look like on screen. He knows that a lot can be done with smoke & with oil & with slime or with lenses or whatever. He knew that if you moved just little things just a bit, suddenly the screen becomes alive. Very much so. It was a terrific experience working with him.

**FM:** What was your personal initial concept of the Alien?

**GIGER:** When we started, Ridley said, "I haven't seen any good monsters lately in films." I mean, to do a horror or monster movie nowadays we didn't have many good examples. The biggest problem was that there were a lot of bad examples around. To design something effective without film experience was very difficult for me. Then, of course, there was another man involved with the mechanics: Carlo Rambaldi, the maker of KING KONG. He had a lot of experience, but I was responsible for the shape & look of everything. He handled the inside and I handled the outside. And I ... uh ... forgot the question.

**FM** (laughter): How did the Alien progress from initial design to finished monster? It just seems that there's a lot of little Aliens throughout all your work, but the final monster seems completely original.

**GIGER:** Not so much original, really. In my book there are some things that look like the Alien now. And we looked hard at my work to see what we could do realistically. Normally it's boring to feel that you're watching a man in a suit with a mask, so we experimented. We started with a tall man and we fixed 2 children onto each of his sides. So the monster had a lot of arms at first but I always felt that looked more ridiculous than frightening. After that we decided to choose something from my Necronomicon

book. Quite similar in fact. It wound up being similar to a human being only much bigger. Ridley contributed a foto of a Nubian, those black, tall people. He said it might be good to use their physical look covered with sort of "transparent clothes" so you could see the skin. But then we had trouble with transferring that concept into reality. It turned out to be a . . . how you say... a night dream . . . uh, a nightmare. Sometimes I couldn't even sleep because I was afraid I wouldn't be ready with the design by the deadline. I mean, the Alien had to be the star of the film, and if the star is no good the film is lost.

Thankfully Ridley was always behind the camera himself. Even if I thought it didn't look good and wasn't ready for filming, he could film it in a good way.

**FM:** So while you were rushed and it was a terrifically challenging job, were you happy with the final product?

**GIGER:** For the most part. It was good enough for a film but maybe not good enough for a sculpture piece.

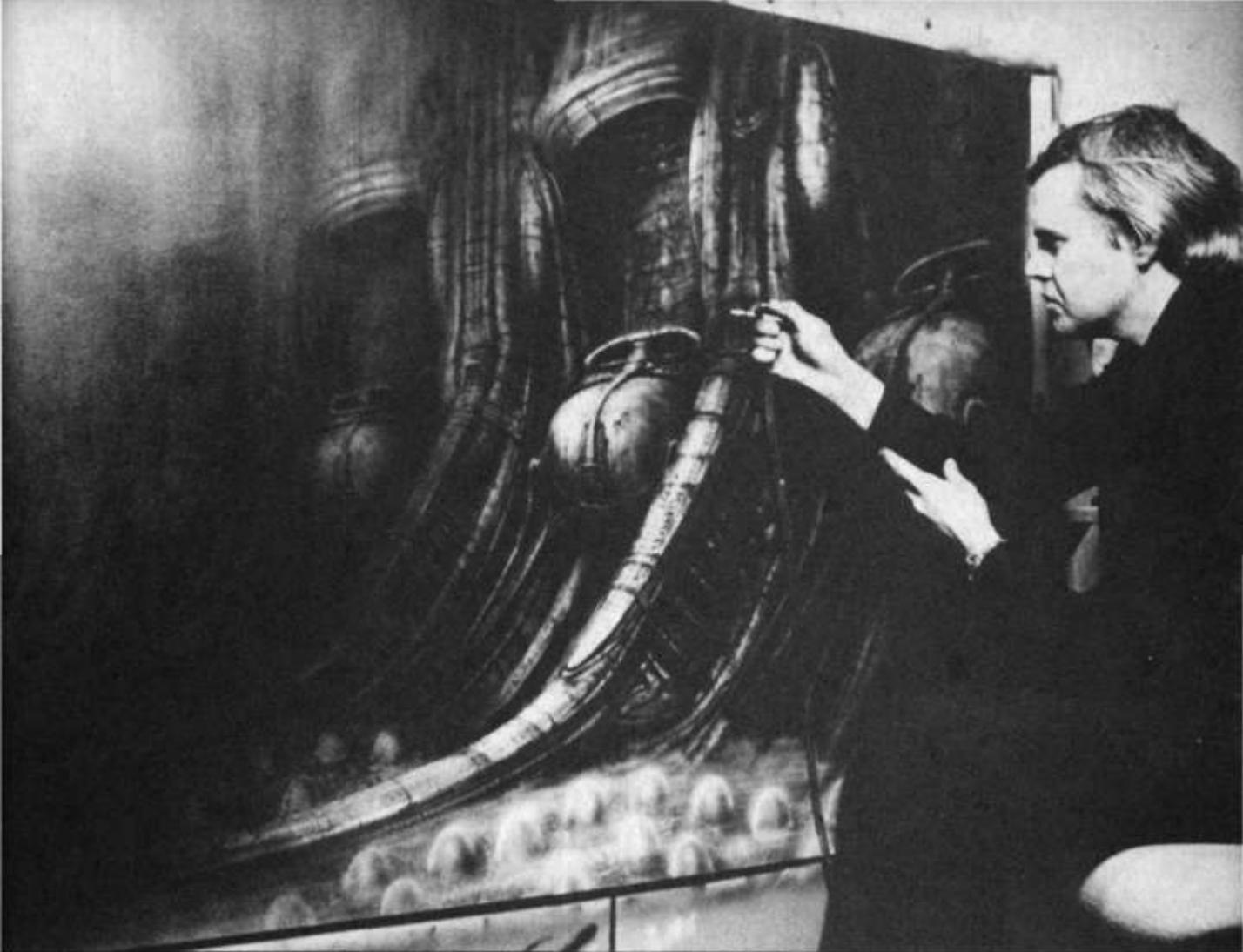
**FM:** What would you have changed if you'd had the time?

**GIGER:** The tall one I wouldn't change a lot. I had these things in my head, I have drawn them before, and then I built it up. One part at a time with adaptations made by other technical people. If there'd been time enough I would have done everything! (laughter) I may have another chance since the reaction has been so good. But the reaction has been so good because it was filmed so well.

**FM:** Do you feel that the final Alien effects the audience on more than one level? Do you think its physical appearance somehow effects the audience psychologically as well as visually?

**GIGER:** Hmmm. During the last shot you can see the Alien's "tongue" slowly coming out. And his teeth came because I prefer always to have these big long heads for the monster, because I worked as an industrial designer. Every object needs to have a function. So if it has a long head there's space for a long "tongue". And I also gave his tongue teeth. I thought it was very good as a filmic device.

**FM:** According to the original script & the various books that have been published there were several things that were changed. Could you comment on the incon-



**Looking a lot in profile like Jon Voight, the Wizard of Zurich airbrushes his painting of the Alien Egg Chamber in the crashlanded starcraft.**

sistencies between the final film & the novelization?

**GIGER:** In the original story the eggs were in a pyramid silo, like an Egyptian one, with hieroglyphics on the walls. I worked up the hieroglyphics which tell the story of the Alien. But it was too close, we found, to our own Egyptian culture and we thought it should be almost completely un-earthly, so we designed another silo. But then the budget wasn't big enough to include this structure so we decided it would be a good idea to have these eggs inside the derelict like termites inside the walls of a house.

**FM:** Still, there seems to be some question between the 2 versions as to how the Alien grew.

**GIGER:** Yes, in the film there are 3 different monsters. There is the first one, which is kind of like a crab sitting in the egg. Dan O'Bannon had an insect-like design for that at first. But I always look for a function. These creatures should be able to jump out. I

used the tail as a spring, a spring would be good. And I liked the crab fingers very much. Kind of a spider with a tail. The second Alien was born thru the crab. It is the baby of the big one. It seems to be a giant head but it develops a tail. At first it had these 2 little arms but they were kind of like freak arms. All these beasts are blind I think it is very frightening to have beasts with no eyes. At first they wanted it to have eyes with lamps behind them. Other people always wanted that but I decided no, no eyes. They said please try it but it didn't work. I think the final version looks quite believable. Did you like it?

**FM:** Very much. I thought Ridley Scott handled it with imagination & flair.

**GIGER:** And he did very strong visuals! I liked, for instance, when the scientist attacked the girl. You could see a little blood running out of her nose at the same time the milk began drool-

ing down his forehead. I thought things like that were great! I thought everything was terrifically realistic. The interior of the Nostromo was so believable. I hate these new-looking spacecraft. You feel like they're just built for the movie you're seeing. They don't look real.

**FM:** One of the big questions concerned the final Alien step. That is, how you got from the mature Alien back to the egg again? Do you know whether that question was answered in the original script?

**GIGER:** Not only is that in the story but it was filmed! I asked for it to be filmed. Originally the movie was 3 hours long and there was much more of the alien landscape & other things. But it was too long & too much. And the "co-oon" scene, Ridley told me, slowed the momentum of the climax. It was much more effective, they thought, to take it out. Maybe if there's an ALIEN II, the final co-oon-to-egg scene will be in. The

black man & Ripley find Dallas & Brett. The one with the Hawaiian shirt is more a cocoon while the Captain is freshly wrapped. They find them in the leg of the Nostromo, near the top.

**FM:** Everyone also thought that another Alien would be on the shuttle or in the cat at the end. Did you consider that option?

**GIGER:** Oh, yes. There was an egg on board. Once we showed a preview audience a final scene where there was a cocoon in a corner of the shuttle. That was very nice but now it is no more. There were a lot of different ideas in the original version that they thought it was best to take out. I don't know whether it was a good idea to take it all out. I just saw some rushes and they looked good. But if Ridley decided to take it out, then it should have been taken out, because I think he is a genius. We always agreed about things so I think if I saw both versions I would like his final version better.

**FM:** A lot of people in the film business seem to think that the world starts & ends with them but you seem very versatile & adaptable.

**GIGER:** Oh, if I have something that I think is right, well, (laugh) then it is right. It's very difficult to change my mind. For instance they often wanted other people to change some of the things I had done in the beginning, like the derelict. But I always said, "I can't do another one." So after all that it came out the way I intended, so (chuckle) I am happy. But some things did change. My first design of the "chest-burster" had more than one mouth. The mouth was the most important thing because it had to eat out of his body. But we made it smaller and Roger Dicken built the small alien.

**FM:** Even after all your work on the final Alien, the audience does not really see it clearly.

**GIGER:** Yes, that's very good. I like that. Otherwise it would get boring. It maintains the mystery. Only at the end can you see his tail & his arms & things.

**FM:** It's obvious that you really like filmmaking.

**GIGER:** Yes, yes, yes. I think it's a combination of all arts together; sound, movement, all the mediums. It's OK to do paintings but in a film you can do more.

**FM:** In some cases artists are controlled by their medium rather than the other way around. This seems especially true of artists

who concentrate on the supernatural or fantastic. Do you feel controlled by the subject matter of your work?

**GIGER:** When I work on a film I must deal with other people. I have to think of it as a team effort so I can't work like I normally do. Normally I work in the manner of a surrealist painter. Without thinking, just going on, finding what is inside your body. So things come out on the canvas and almost magically appear at the time you make the painting. They come into the painting. I like to find what is in my mind.

**FM:** How long have you been a painter?

**GIGER:** I've been working as a



**A Modern Medusa? She's certainly a marrow-freezing sight. A sample of the Outre Art that has made Giger a Big Leaguer.**

freelance painter since 1968. Before I still did paintings but my work as an industrial designer came first because you must have a profession in Switzerland. It's no good to be an "artist." You are shamed if you make a living at it. It's not a job in their eyes. But then if you make money with it, everything is good. And if you get famous ... ? Then it's all "Bravo!" But before, "Poof!" Heh-heh.

**FM:** What do you want to do now?

**GIGER:** I'd like to do my own paintings. I've had ALIEN up to here. For almost 2 years it's been ALIEN, ALIEN, ALIEN. Never stopped. I'm very happy the film

is successful. We worked very hard on the thing and so we are all glad it worked.

**FM:** Do you want to do more films?

**GIGER:** Maybe. Maybe. I'll tell you, it was very hard at times and I was nervous and I couldn't sleep and it cost me a lot of energy. I was happy to work with Ridley Scott; it was really a great thing. I mean, it could've been a lot worse.

**FM:** As you may know, fame is very crazy in America. I mean, SUPERMAN & STAR WARS have made some people ridiculously famous. Are you afraid of what might happen to your art if you were suddenly catapulted into "stardom"?

**GIGER:** You know what I'm afraid of? As an artist, if you do too much work for film they say, "Aw, he's a film architect" or something like that. Suddenly they don't take you seriously. If you work for the opera, that's something else. But film, that's always, "eh," you know (makes hand gesture of "comme ci, comme ca")? So I have to be careful, otherwise ... Maybe it's a good thing to work in films but it can turn against you.

**FM:** Do you think that your experience on ALIEN will change your painting style?

**GIGER:** I don't think so. My medium is the airbrush; my colors, they wouldn't change. This has been very good for me because it made me do paintings of things like spaceships, things I hadn't done too much of before. And sometimes it's good to work under pressure. Or to do something you would never do under other circumstances. So maybe you get new, fresh ideas. That's always very good.

**FM:** So your work seems to picture your nightmares & demons. And by painting them, it has been written that you purge yourself. Do you find that sometimes these paintings only serve to give your nightmares a reality? To make them real?

**GIGER:** I must say, about this dream idea that was written about in my book, it occurred a long time ago, when I was about 20 years old. It was early in my career. At the moment, I feel very good. These bad dreams don't occur much anymore. I only have bad dreams when I'm under pressure. Or something. Maybe it's the ALIEN.

**END**