



## The Talented Mr. Giger

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I was introduced to H.R. Giger by Chris Stein at the opening of the Giger Room at New York's Limelight club. Chris has known him for years, and has one of Giger's skull chairs in his house.

To me Giger seemed very mysterious and fragile and remarkable all at once. I was too awestruck to say anything, so I just shook his hand.

Thinking that this hand had created the *Alien* monster, which I first saw in Japan at a big cinema, wearing my high school uniform. Japan flipped over *Alien*, and there was a special program printed to go with the movie. I've been a fan ever since.

Chris Stein's house is itself a museum of horror and curiosities, with the Giger chair right in the middle of a sort of wonderful chaos. When I called him to talk about Giger, he had just come from the Forbidden Planet, where he bought a bunch of knockoff biomechanoids made in China.

None of those would have ever happened, he says, if not for Giger. Over the years he's always spoken so warmly of the artist, with so much admiration, I hardly knew where to begin with my questions.



The artist in his most native environment, with Debbie Harry.

### Meeting the alien's father

"Debbie [Harry] and I met him right after he won the Academy award for *Alien*," Chris says. "The original prints of the *Alien* artwork were on display around the country, so we went to the gallery in New York and by coincidence he was there and we met him. We brought him over to the house, and we've been friends ever since, pretty much."

As part of that friendship, Giger produced art and directed a video -- he is credited for "concept and design," among other things -- for Debbie Harry's 1978 solo debut album, *Kookoo*.

"The idea to do Debbie's record and the video was kind of mutual," Chris remembers. "It just came up. He actually did paint on her face, I think, but I don't really remember, you'll have to ask her."

### Meet H.R. Giger

Born 5 February 1940, in Chur, Switzerland. Won Academy Award for Best Visual Effects 40 years later for the film *Alien*.

In 1996, conceived of the H.R. Giger Museum in Gruyeres, Switzerland. Situated inside a 400-year-old castle, the museum is still a work in progress, and can be visited only via the special Giger Castle Train.

Currently, the museum is building a bar in keeping with the structure of the old castle, which is mostly stone. The chairs and other furniture are being cast in a mixture of cement and fiberglass, so it will all look like natural outcroppings of the castle. There are no photographs as yet.

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Chris bemoans Giger's lack of recognition in the "serious" art world.

"What happens with guys like Giger and Robert Williams is that once they have an association with Hollywood or with cartoons or any kind of sci-fi fantasy art, they lose a lot of connections with the real art world, which is really pathetic," he says.

"Especially for Giger, because he has been such a major influence on modern style in general, in art and design and style. . . . Giger should be in the [Museum of] Modern [Art]. It's really crazy, and a perfect example of what happens to artists in this society, because the guy should be a multimillionaire billionaire and he isn't."

### **Stylistic plunder and a surprise word from John Hurt**

Chris is convinced that Giger's brand of xenozoology has infected the world, reaching fevered levels.

"I'd like to see someone even vaguely compile how many versions of the Alien are floating around the world in models and stuff," he says. "There must be close to 100,000 -- little toys, things. All the Japanese horror comics just plunder his style."

"Some stuff is a direct rip-off, some of it not so direct, but it's his mentality. It's all stuff that he did first. After the first *Alien* movie came out, the Bally Pinball Company made an *Alien* pinball machine without even asking him. When he tried to make an issue of it, they gave him two pinball machines."

While I'm sitting there plugging in what Chris is saying, Debbie calls. I tell her I'm transcribing Chris talking about Giger and she says she ran into John Hurt the night before at the Oscars.

"You know, he was the one who had the Alien pop out of his chest," she says. "We talked about Giger, and he told me that he had visited Giger's house and seen his garden and the little train, and just how wonderful and macabre it was."



Giger was involved with an abortive [early attempt](#) to film [Frank Herbert's \*Dune\*](#). Harkonnen designs like these are now available.

### **Airbrushed by Giger**

"Did Giger actually paint your face?" I ask, wanting to know about Debbie's experience being a live piece of Giger art. Advertisements bearing that cover image were banned in England.

"Yes," she says. "For some things he painted on photographs, but for the video he used different stencils and an airbrush and he painted my face. I wore a painted body suit. So, yes, I was airbrushed by Giger!"

Nowadays, Giger's artwork is mostly sculpture, with countless other projects in the works.

The artist must work constantly in order to create so much. When I ask Leslie Barany, his agent, whether he ever rests, Barany says "there is very little else in his life" except work.

"Which to some people might sound strange," he continues. "But to him or to me or other knowing artists, it's not strange at all. He has no social life, he hardly ever did. He doesn't leave the house for any real reason that's not work-related. "