



In 2001 HR Giger talked about his deck of Tarot cards with J. Karlin. Together they determined that Tarot had actually inspired Giger much more than perhaps even Giger had previously realized, but that while Giger's mask of personality definitely covered the image of his Baphomet, what shines through in the renamed deck isn't some hidden devotion to an occultist dogma, but rather the aesthetic talents of HR Giger. The latter serves to vitalize a deck of Tarot cards whose images had never been created to serve that specific purpose. Still, Giger's Tarotic sensibility is so strongly apparent that the deck succeeds better than

the vast majority of efforts by people actually trying to make a Tarot. Oddly, that even applies to Giger's official interpreter, and partner in the creation of the deck, Akron.

On January 30-31, 2001, I interviewed [H. R. Giger](#), the Swiss artist who has made an indelible mark on popular and fine-art cultures in the past thirty years, producing such seminal works as *Necronomicon*, and of course the creature and the look for Ridley Scott's *Alien*. Giger has said he paints what frightens him and his work has often had the effect of frightening viewers, sometimes unduly. The humor in his work is often missed by people who are frantically searching for demonic substrates or motives in his cheerfully disturbing images. About ten years ago Giger was approached by Akron, the Swiss musician and *magician*, and writer of several popular Tarot books, to produce a new Tarot deck. Initially Akron wished to have Giger produce new images for this deck, but ultimately Giger felt that the work required to do justice to the effort was too much, and they instead chose to select the 22 Major Arcana from Giger's existing works. This became the *Baphomet Tarot*, and has mainly been of *cult* interest to fans of Giger and of Tarot for a number of years, but has only recently been re-issued by Taschen as the *H. R. Giger Tarot*, and will now receive a much wider distribution. One of the questions I wanted to investigate with Giger was just how much he actually knew (or cared) about Tarot. As we began the interview Giger assured me that, on the surface, his knowledge of Tarot might not even warrant the few minutes he would spend confirming his lack of depth on the subject. I consequently expected we might have a short visit, perhaps ten or fifteen minutes at most. However, we spoke about Tarot, and his work, and his work AS Tarot, for two hours over two nights:

G: You will see right away I don't have much to say about the Tarot.

jk: I was told you might have a concern that I would ask you too many questions about Tarot, but I am more interested in discussing your images.

G: OK.

jk: I am interested in exactly how this deck came to be. From what I've read it appears that this initially was Akron's idea? Is that right?

G: Yes.

jk: Can you tell me a little bit about how you met Akron and how this Tarot project came to be?

G: Yes, I was invited to a party and there were some very nice people there, and the hosts wanted to get in contact with me and Sergius Golowin, the writer, and

The Giger Interview by J. Karlin

there was also among this small group of people, "artists" if you like—Akron—a very enigmatic figure. And he was so unusual you know, and very intense and talkative. He was a member of Amon Düül, the rock group, and I knew that he had written some books about psychology. And he knows a lot about Tarot and about many subjects. I wasn't very familiar with Tarot, I had done just a couple of "cards", ***The Magus (Work #276, 1975)***, and that was of a good friend of mine who died in 1972, Friederich Kuhn, an artist, and I liked him very much and I presented him as *The Magus*. A year after he died I used a photo I took about 1/2 a year before he died and I changed it to *The Magus*. And then there was another painting—***The Devil (Work #272, Baphomet, 1975)***, Akron used that, yes that's the only one [of the paintings in the Giger Tarot] that is a Tarot card. Fifteen—the head of the Baphomet and the lady who is in the pentacle—up it's the lady and down it's the Baphomet, the horns and the ears and the beard and then if you put these two, one over the other, you get the [double] pentacle and that's the balance between the two forces.

jk: So this painting of Baphomet was intended to be a Tarot image? Before Akron?

G: Yes, I had these two "cards" if you like, and then Akron didn't like *The Magus* because of the color of the card, which I understand very well because all the others have the same color and it wouldn't be good to use the painting with Kuhn as *The Magus*.

jk: Now that you have mentioned it, the color on most of these cards—

G: They are all the same color because when I painted with the airbrush I used ink and white color, and I sprayed one over the other and it became bluish, the white over the black, and when I used black ink with a little water it got brown—so *grisaille* [gray monotone, from warm to cold]. So, all or most of my paintings have been with the airbrush in these colors. And so the green *Magus* [i.e., the Kuhn *Magus*] would not fit in, so Akron used the *Mirror Image* painting for this card—

jk: *Spieglebild*.

G: Yes, ***Spieglebild (Work# 344, 1977)***, and I think the way he used it was very good. I mean, he just took those images that he thought would work well for the cards.

jk: When he came to you and said he wanted to use your images, why did you decide to do it?

G: You know I was curious—I was interested in all kinds of mystery or deeper meanings in the paintings because I myself have not analyzed why they have turned out like this or like that. It's sometimes quite strange for me to see my own paintings. It comes as a surprise to me sometimes. As it is for someone else, the finished painting is a kind of mystery. This is because most of my paintings are done in the way of the surrealist painters, intuitively, and so I was very happy to find somebody who wanted to give them a meaning. Akron decided when he chose an image that we should talk about each card, and then we had a telephone call for each one, we talked for about an hour or so for each specific image and I told him what I knew about it, what had influenced me or what I had felt or what could be a kind of psychogram in the image or whatever. And that was what I liked very much in the book, the analysis of the images.

jk: Now are you talking about the Taschen version and its descriptions?

G: Yes.

jk: The new book then?

G: Both. They contain the same cards. In the old one—the English text is shorter. Have you read the German one, the *Baphomet Tarot*?

jk: I haven't.

G: Well that was a thick book, about 500 pages. And it's much more worked out than the translations in the small booklet the other company [the publisher before

Taschen—A. G. Müller] produced for the English-speaking market. So for Taschen he produced something from this other, older, book, more like the German version.

jk: Have you seen Taschen's English version?

G: No. I mean I have seen it but I haven't read it. I think it's probably the same as the German one, no?

jk: One thing is that Akron talks about how Taschen decided to focus on your artwork more than on his text.

G: So, Taschen chose it because of my images and not because of his text, is that what you think?

jk: Akron thinks that.

G: That is probably true because all the books Taschen has published have been more or less paintings or images, not much text.

jk: That is their main interest.

G: Yes.

jk: So, to summarize, you met Akron at a party or gathering and at that time he seemed to you to be very talkative and unusual?

G: Yes, now he's a little less garrulous but in earlier times he was very animated, but he is a very intelligent guy, very knowledgeable, he is fantastic. You don't know him?

jk: I know of his books on Tarot. I haven't talked to him yet. He has a website on the internet so I'm thinking of sending him an e-mail, and just ask him a few questions as well.

G: Yeah, I think that's much better, because he can give you a much better explanation for these things than me. I just did these images, not especially for the Tarot.

jk: But I think that looking at these images, even apart from what he may have thought about them, that there are many impressions that come off these paintings that remind me of Tarot. I wanted to ask you have you studied Tarot at all?

G: No.

jk: Now you had an interest at some point in Aleister Crowley's work, or at least in his Tarot, is that right?

G: Yeah, I only know his Tarot cards that he made with Frieda [Harris] and I like them very much, but I never studied them. And I do not like it if somebody wants to do the Tarot for me, you know? I'm very superstitious and I hate that.

jk: So no one has ever done a card reading for you?

G: No.

jk: No one has told your fortune?

G: No.

jk: That you know about.

G: Yeah.

jk: Do you think Akron has ever read your cards and not told you about it?

G: (laughing) I don't know, if somebody doesn't tell me how would I know?

jk: That's a funny thing because in Tarot people sometimes talk about whether it's ethical to read and not tell someone about it. Of course that assumes you believe there is anything to it or not.

G: I know that if somebody tells you things like—a prediction—I react in a way I wouldn't act without knowing about that and that makes me—that makes me afraid.

jk: So you don't want to know what's coming?

G: Yeah, it's not because I'm afraid it's coming. It's because I'm afraid about my reaction. Because I myself have no control.

jk: I see. So Akron came to you after your meeting and suggested that this would be a good idea and the reason why you wanted to do it was because he was going

to give meanings to what he saw in these cards.

G: You know, it was just another presentation of my work, and a funny one, because the cards are quite different from the normal Tarot deck, no?

jk: That's something I wanted to talk about. Here's how I've looked at your deck. I had not seen these cards before, the images that were selected for them by Akron, and I had not seen what he had said about them, so what I did was to open the box and I looked at a card and I wrote down what I thought about it—

G: Did you like it?

jk: I think that these are great, I like them very much, and I think the choices that were made were mostly correct. When I went back to read what it is in the book, what Taschen has allowed Akron to say, then it seemed there was not much there, not as much as I would have liked to have seen, about your images. What they've done in the English book is they've emphasized fortune-telling. They've emphasized reading cards, telling fortunes.

G: I don't understand you.

jk: I'm sorry, in other words, about 2/3 of the text of the book is about how to interpret the cards in telling fortunes. Only about a page and a half or so on each painting, on each card, actually talks about the image. So it isn't very much.

G: Yeah, that's true. I have to control how—I have a problem in reading the text of Akron sometimes because it is a lot of fantasy. And I don't—it's sometimes a little too much.

jk: I agree. I think you're right, but I want to be fair to him as well, and I think a lot of his ideas about how these work as Tarot cards are probably correct. But I think there's a tendency in the text, at least that's in this book, for him to say things that aren't very clear.

G: He uses fantasy sometimes and it's a little too much.

jk: For example, on the **Magician (Work# 344, Spiegelbild, 1977)** painting, where you have the guillotine blade and the reflected image, when I looked at that image, again before I had read Akron's text, this was really clear to me why it would be chosen for this card, because part of the idea of the Magician or the Magus card in Tarot is of a person who is able to use his mind to conceptualize (or conjure), to reach out and use an idea as a tool, made out of virtually anything you could imagine or you could dream about. And this card seems to be about a person, or an entity, whose mind is bursting with these kinds of images, with these kinds of dreams, and that is reflected in this blade, and one of the things about the Magician card is that the Magician usually has tools that are laid out on a table and these tools are manifestations of his own desire—that is he wants to be able to do something in the world and these are ways in which he can do it, and so to me when I look at this blade that is the Magician's tool. It's a funny thing because it's a tool that's directed at yourself, you cut off your head when you start thinking this way.

G: That is correct, I didn't reflect about that but you're right. The blade, and the round thing—they are the coins or whatever, they are all there. That's true, they are all there, I didn't realize that.

jk: But the thing is Akron says nothing about this. And you're saying you hadn't thought about this either.

G: Yeah. Just now I saw it because you talked about the four tools.

jk: But see this is the interesting thing about the way Tarot can work with an artist, and even though you didn't intend for that image to be matched with that card it still works. I'm sure Akron realized that as well, but again part of what happened when Taschen edited his text down was that he wasn't able to say everything that he might have wanted.

G: That was not edited.

jk: You don't think the text was edited?

G: No, Akron did that, there was no editing. You know, he did the whole book in a very short time and he did everything, he did the pages [layouts], the editing or whatever he did himself. I think Taschen never read it at all.

jk: I've heard this also, that Taschen didn't pay much attention to what Akron was writing.

G: Yeah, I think not, and Taschen probably decided to let Akron do what he wanted to do because they wanted to have my paintings.

jk: Now did you approach Taschen about this project or did they come to you to initiate this new edition?

G: I have to think how that worked. I think Akron went to Taschen, because he knew about my *HR Giger ARh+* and he knew that had worked well and he was looking for a publisher, and he said we should ask Taschen because the *Baphomet Tarot* didn't work at all because the early publisher was uncomfortable with our Tarot.

jk: Why?

G: I think because of the sexuality in it. The unusual images. These people didn't want to release the deck, they didn't like this Tarot at all, and I think they wanted us out.

jk: So they were uncomfortable with the whole thing.

G: Yeah, Akron told me that, and they sold about—I mean they did a German, a French, and an English edition—they sold each year about 2-300 decks and no more. They didn't give it normal Tarot-card distribution.

jk: Are you talking about A. G. Müller, or some other publisher?

G: Müller, yeah. And Akron had problems with these people. You know in the beginning we had this friend, he was the director of the Müller Tarot cards, and then they fired him, and after that we realized that the new director disliked our Tarot.

jk: Well, why do you think that Taschen was receptive then?

G: Taschen saw the erotic aspects of some of my work as an advantage, not a problem. They also changed the title from *Baphomet* to *Giger Tarot*.

jk: Why was the title changed?

G: Because Taschen thought he could sell more if the title was *Giger*.

jk: Let me read to you what Akron writes in the English preface to the new book. He talks about the change of the name of the deck. He says "Although we lost the Baphometric philosophical superstructure, this meant that we gained a compact book of Tarot interpretations that was easier to understand. We have therefore called it simply, but appropriately, The H. R. Giger Tarot." There are some comments he makes in this preface where he talks about how Taschen wanted to eliminate the discussion about Baphomet.

G: Maybe that was Taschen's editor that wished to do this.

jk: It seems as though Akron is saying that since most of what he had contributed has been taken out, it should now be called *H. R. Giger Tarot*. So you agree with that.

G: Yes—sorry, could you repeat it please.

jk: That sentence in English suggests that since the book is now reduced, and that the publisher doesn't want to talk about Baphomet and instead is going to talk about your images and also how you can use those images to tell fortunes that NOW the deck should be called *H. R. Giger*. You know, it's sort of amusing. He wanted the deck to be called something else when it was mostly about his text, but now he wants it to be called yours.

G: There is also another reason, because Akron wanted to keep the rights for the *Baphomet Tarot* and he wanted to have it still on the market, and he likes his

500-page book and everything that he is saying about the Tarot is there. And he thinks the smaller Taschen book doesn't contain all of what he has said about the Tarot. And so he has told me that he would like to have that and that he has found another publisher for the *Baphomet Tarot*. He changed the text for Taschen quite a bit, but he can't change it too much because the images are the same, just the interpretation is a little different.

jk: They list about six translators who worked on it.

G: Who? You are talking about the translators of the English version by Taschen?

jk: Yes. It says "translated by..."

G: Oh, I didn't realize that.

jk: Akron didn't translate this. And there was an editor too.

G: Yeah, I have to read this again. You know it came out and I didn't have the English version right away. So now I have it but I didn't realize.

jk: So maybe they did edit something in the English version.

G: Yeah. But not in the German. Though it would be difficult for me to find out, but maybe they edited it in English. We don't know English good enough, Akron and I, to find out what happened.

jk: Well, you know in the tradition of Tarot, and you mentioned Crowley and Frieda Harris, but there is this tradition in the last 100 years where a designer will work with an artist and that artist basically becomes an illustrator of the designer's ideas.

G: You mean Frieda Harris?

jk: Harris was certainly that, she was an artist but she was illustrating...

G: ...Crowley's ideas.

jk: And they had this long correspondence between each other to accomplish this, but in your case you had already completed these images and so Akron really wasn't working with you in that way.

G: No, he didn't influence my images.

jk: But the way he presented it in his books apparently was that he used your images as if they were illustrations to his ideas.

G: That's new—yes, but how could he do that, since the images are old, like twenty-five years old, so how could Akron, who is even younger than me, how could he get this idea?

jk: I don't think that it really is that way, but this is the way that Tarot books are usually written, the text of the book comments about the images, the images illustrate the ideas of the book. My understanding is that Akron used your images to talk about his ideas. But in this new book, in the Taschen book, it's not like that, there he is mostly focused it seems on your images.

G: That's the difference between the *Baphomet Tarot* and the Taschen [i.e., *Giger*] Tarot.

jk: Yes.

G: I have to find out if that is also the case in German, I didn't realize. I must say I didn't read it carefully enough.

jk: In the Taschen book he talks about how he found you and realized your artwork would illustrate his ideas. He says he was happy to find you because you were the right artist.

G: Even the ink drawings—you know this is first time they have been shown, in the small [Taschen] book—and I did that just after we worked together, and there I had taken some things I had done before and changed a few of them, and again he made selections from these. So, again, these are not his ideas and were done entirely without his input or initial awareness.

jk: What about Baphomet? That was obviously an image you liked, but why did you use it, was it because it was an image you liked, or because it represented some belief?

G: I liked it as an image.

jk: But Akron has turned it into a religion.

G: You know, I did that back when I was doing my *Spell* paintings, 1973-'76 and I was fascinated by this Baphomet image, and so this was long before I met Akron, who I've known for about twelve years or so. Maybe '88 or so. I mean, it has absolutely nothing to do with his ideas.

jk: You hadn't thought about this before? You didn't realize that...

G: No. I didn't realize that. And you know it's not as important as for you probably.

jk: Well, I don't mean to cause trouble.

G: (laughs) Yeah. You know, I said I have this problem that I need to more carefully read Akron's text because it's too much, too much fantasy, and so I am busy with other stuff—it's funny, it's nice to hear that someone is studying that carefully and now I know a little bit more about that.

jk: The thing is I liked your paintings as Tarot images. And I saw why those choices might have been made, and I was interested to write about that myself, about how that would work. But in reading his website, and his introduction to the book, his main motivation was to talk about his religious ideas. And I don't think he was trying to do something bad or rude to you, but I think this was something Taschen realized—which is that this work is YOUR work—and that's what is interesting to people and maybe not so much Akron's ideas about Baphomet.

G: True. Taschen would never normally publish a Tarot book, he was just interested in my paintings, and not in Akron's writing, but I think it's like this—I don't want to make Akron unimportant, or whatever, because he did the Crowley book, the thing he did with that other guy [Hajo Banzhaf], and Akron does really know a lot of things.

jk: So, back to these Baphomet images, did you know that they originated with an occultist named Eliphas Lévi?

G: Sure. I read the whole book [*Transcendental Magic*] at the time.

jk: You did read that?

G: It was much earlier.

jk: What influence do you think those occultist writings had on you?

G: I don't know. I can't tell you. I was fascinated, like everybody, about these magicians, and I was fascinated by Crowley's drawings and paintings—I got a catalog of an exhibition of his drawings and paintings in London. I was always very interested in his paintings, because I understood that better than his text. His text is very difficult, and it was not translated much at the time.

jk: It's difficult in English also.

G: Yes, I think so. It's really hard.

jk: So, you saw these images—

G: I got the catalog from a friend of mine. I didn't see the show.

jk: So these images of Frieda Harris in the Thoth deck were interesting to you, but the text Crowley wrote didn't influence you?

G: No.

[end of first interview—we agreed to talk again the next day]

Second Interview: Jan 31, 2001

jk: We talked about a lot of things yesterday, but one of the things I wanted to ask you tonight concerns a kind of *trick* that seems to be working in some of the cards, or maybe in your paintings, and that is that a number of the images, the cards, seem as if they were designed to turn upside-down, to obtain a second or reversed

view. Do you understand?

G: No, not really. Only maybe in the *Magus* painting, the *Spieglebild*.

jk: I was looking at the High Priestess.

G: That's a *Spell* painting. With the babies.

jk: If you turn that upside down it's actually quite interesting, because it looks like a reversed crucifixion, the feet become hands, there's a light which is now at the top, and the head becomes the head on the cross. And so I was wondering if that sort of thing, that result, was intentional. I take it that you're saying it wasn't.

G: No, I didn't work it out upside down, I never turned it around.

jk: Akron talks about turning over a couple of cards, and viewing them that way. Of course, in reading Tarot cards you often turn them upside down, and they have meanings upside down.

G: Yes—I remember that when I was in Dali's home—I had some prints of my work for the *Necronomicon* with me, for the book in '75, and I showed him these and there was the *Li* painting, and he also looked at that upside-down. He turned it around and he had seen some face or some elephant or whatever—I remember that.

jk: A lot of your images are symmetrical—

G: Yes.

jk: So it is probably easy to turn them around and see things.

G: That's true.

jk: But the creation of a reversed image is not a conscious intent on your part?

G: No, I just did them like that, I didn't turn them around. It's also not so easy, you know in the beginning I worked on these paintings just on a roll of paper which I fixed with two nails on the wall and I spread out just the top so I could work on it. I had to sit to work with the airbrush so I set my elbows on my knees, so they wouldn't move. So then I sprayed with the airbrush at about 70 centimeters high, on the upper part of the painting, and when I finished that part I would roll that up some more and fix the nails higher to move the painting up to work on the next part. So finally I was through with the painting from top to bottom. And so I had never really had an overview of the whole painting till the end when the paper was rolled out completely. Then I finally saw what it looked like. I couldn't see the rest of the painting when I worked on the upper part—it was not stretched out—the surface was not rolled out so I had only the surface I was working on in my view. Maybe that has something to do with it—it makes the whole thing have less fixed perspective. Otherwise, if you work on the whole image on a piece of wood and it's upright and you have to stand on a chair to work on a large painting, then you work more underneath it, and you work the figures while standing up or being under the image and so you have more perspective working underneath the whole thing. But the way I worked—that didn't happen. So the paintings I have like that, with a perspective, have been changed after I finished the whole thing. I made a kind of lift for the paintings in my home, so I could move them up and down in a slit I cut in the floor. I could work on it them even sitting, fixing my elbows on my knees, and working on a part even when the whole work was already done, even with the under part already done, so I could overwork them.

jk: So are you saying that the way you work may contribute to a person seeing a reversed image?

G: I did it so I could eliminate some mistakes—for instance, I made a human figure and that figure was done in the first way I told you, from top to bottom. And then later on, as I saw the whole thing, as I raised it, I might change the perspective, as if seen from underneath. On some paintings I thought I had to change that to a more correct perspective. But on others I have left it so that from every point of view they appear correct.

jk: Many of your images elicit a strong emotional response from the viewer. Is that something you want, or do you think of that? Do you understand?

G: No.

jk: Many of your images cause strong emotions in people.

G: Yes, because they are—Jung talked about it—archetypes.

jk: Do your images come from dreams?

G: Not mainly, no. In a normal dream it doesn't appear like that.

jk: Some people's dreams are like that.

G: (laughing) Yeah, but not mine, I don't see them like that.

jk: Do you think about these images as being awake dreams?

G: I don't know where this kind of world—I don't know—it could come from mushrooms, psychedelic images.

jk: You know, that reminds me, I'm very fascinated with the Fool image, the fellow with the shotgun. Now I found a reference to an earlier draft of this same image—did you do an earlier version of this?

G: Of the Fool, *Pump Excursion*—yeah I did four versions of it, and they were some of the latest things I did. After that I stopped painting—or nearly stopped—I had to finish some things but not much. I think the last painting I did was the work on *Species*.

jk: So the thing is when I looked at this, and I was reminded of this when you mentioned mushrooms, but the date I had on this was wrong—it's 1988 right?

G: *Pump Excursion* is about '87.

jk: The way he holds the shotgun, is that—

G: It's to blow away his head.

jk: But is the attitude of his hands significant, he holds the weapon in a very delicate and particular way.

G: Yeah, yeah—I mean the gun is not built to hold it like that.

jk: When I first looked at this I thought it looked like a bong.

G: A what?

jk: Do you know what a bong is?

G: No.

jk: A water pipe.

G: Ah!!

jk: For smoking marijuana.

G: Yeah, it was like a flute, like an instrument to play.

jk: His cheeks are puffed out.

G: Yeah, to make music. I wanted people to think at first that it is an Indian who plays an instrument.

jk: Do you mean from India—or an American Indian?

G: American Indian.

jk: So this pyramid in the back is Mayan or Aztec or something?

G: Yes.

jk: OK, good. And you may recall our discussion yesterday about the guillotine blade and how that seemed to be the Magician's tool but this is not mentioned. And in the Taschen text, in the English version, they don't even mention this image in the background. Akron talks about steps, but not about the pyramid. So you intended this figure to look Mayan?

G: Yes.

jk: What's interesting, and I don't know if you're aware of this or thought about this in the context of the choice of this image for this card, but the steps leading up the pyramid reminds us of the blood sacrifice, the removal of the heart, and there is the solar aspect of this, the worship and feeding of the Sun. This is also a part of the occult tradition we find in the discussions of the Fool card. Did you know this when

Akron chose this image for this card?

G: No.

jk: Again, I don't know if perhaps he mentioned this in the longer text and it just didn't make it to the English version, do you?

G: No, I don't know.

jk: There's again a symmetry in this Fool image, a cross at the bottom, a St. Andrew's cross, several crossing elements.

G: Crosses in this painting? I don't remember.

jk: Well, the arm and her leg form an "x" at the bottom, and the shotgun and his hand form an upward cross—which matches the pyramid rising up as well.

G: Yes.

jk: So that was not intentional?

G: No.

jk: You do a lot of interesting things accidentally.

G: Yeah, it looks like it. Well, what I wanted to do with that painting was show that in the end he would be looking at the last thing he saw when he was born—where he was coming from was his last view.

jk: Are those headphones on his head?

G: What they are—it's a kind of joke, they are ear protectors—so he doesn't hurt his ears when he shoots.

jk: Right. That's a little subtle. I thought you had him listening to music.

G: Right, that could also be the case. So he wants to avoid damaging his ears.

jk: I think this is a very compelling image, do you—I haven't read a lot of reviews of your work—do women find this offensive?

G: Excuse me!

jk: Do women find this kind of image offensive? I think a lot of your images incorporate women in ways that some women might find offensive.

G: What does this mean—"offensive"?

jk: Oh—

G: They dislike it?

jk: It would make them angry.

G: That could happen.

jk: Why did you stop painting?

G: Because I was tired of working with the airbrush, it is a lot of work. You know if I have some idea, I just use the ink or pencil or ballpoint, and what I'm doing now is to turn my two-dimensional things into three-dimensional objects. Anyway, my paintings should turn into sculptures.

jk: They look like sculptures anyway.

G: Yeah, that's true.

jk: So that was what you always wanted to do.

G: Yes, in a way, yeah. I always liked architecture.

jk: So you could make a three-dimensional Tarot card.

G: A three-dimensional Tarot card?

jk: Sure, a Tarot sculpture. See, this is the problem with Tarot, it is trapped in two dimensions. This is actually a problem in some of the images Akron chose for your Tarot, not that there is a problem IN the image, but that the image had to be cut in order to fit the card.

G: Yeah, because some of the cards have been taken from larger pieces.

jk: But there is this problem anyway in Tarot, because the viewing area is so small—you do lose details of the symbols. So in my view the images need to be liberated from this and that's what 21st-century Tarot will be about, getting the symbolism off these pieces of cardboard into different environments, so you could do a sculpture if you wanted.

G: Yeah—some objects are of course existing, like the gun, I have a pump shotgun like the one in *Pump Excursion*.

jk: Do you like guns?

G: Yeah, sure.

jk: Do you like the mechanical aspect?

G: Yes, I don't shoot them. When I was young, a young boy, I already had guns, my father gave me—what was it—a Mauser, a pistol.

jk: How young were you?

G: I was about eight. And my father was in the military, and was an instructor, and I was fascinated about weapons—you know I shot around when I was younger, with friends, we experimented in different ways with weapons—and then when my military service came when I was about 20 I completely lost the interest in it. And then I had this strange dream, when I was about 40, or maybe a little older, and through this dream I went to an instructor of weapons and began again to buy weapons and to shoot but for just a short time and then I gave it up. Strange, no?

jk: What do guns mean to you?

G: Like the airbrush. It's a kind of magic instrument, you can make something happen at a distance—and you don't touch the image. It's like it's done through someone else's hands. The airbrush is the same thing, the painting starts to exist without touching the canvas surface and that's the difference between the brush and the airbrush.

jk: That distance—what does it mean?

G: You won't see it—how it happens, it just happens.

jk: So in this image of the Fool the shotgun is a flute, so it becomes a musical instrument.

G: I used to play a certain wild saxophone.

jk: Like jazz?

G: Yes.

jk: What kind do you like?

G: In earlier days I liked Dixie-Land and then I stayed with John Coltrane.

jk: Did you like Charlie Parker?

G: Yes.

jk: I wanted to ask just one other thing I think. In all these cards that are in this deck, which one still has the most personal relevance to you—which one are you most connected to?

G: I don't know—I mean, the *Li* paintings are very personal—you know she committed suicide one year later. And that was in '75, and I did the painting in '74. Two *Li* paintings. One is in the Tarot—that was the one that Dali turned around and looked at.

jk: Everyone wants to turn them around.

G: It was a method he had of looking at his own images—to see them in another way. Dali liked to have a painting with seven different views or meanings. He called it his "paranoid method", or something like that, to find some new figures or images.

jk: From talking to you it seems that you want and need people to find something in these images.

G: Oh no, no. I did not ask Dali to find something new in the paintings. I just showed him the paintings because I wanted to have him write a Foreword to my book—and because of him I could later on work on a film [Dali had shown a catalogue of Giger's paintings to Alejandro Jodorowsky, which led to Giger's first film assignment, *Dune*].

jk: I didn't mean just Dali, I meant in general, most people. It sounds like what you are saying is that the artist is hoping that people will find a part of themselves, their

own view, somewhere in that image. Is that right?

G: I don't know. I mean if somebody likes a painting it is because he sees something personal in it, something he relates to. There are different reasons for it. There could be archetypes of what he likes in it, or some hidden feeling, or something that frightens him.

jk: Do you not like to tell people what your paintings mean?

G: I don't know what they mean. To me it is sometimes like when I've finished them they were done by someone else. And some things in it I can say at that time I was doing the painting I was fascinated about that or just during the work on the painting somebody came with something and I just incorporated that into the painting, like a box or a key or whatever.

jk: So in Tarot you told me that one of the things you wanted Akron to do was to provide meanings to your images. Do you remember that?

G: He had my paintings in books to look over, and he could choose from these, 600 or 700 or so, but he could choose from a lot of images to find the right ones for the Tarot.

jk: But you said yesterday that the reason you wanted to do this was because he was going to give your paintings meanings.

G: I liked the things he was doing in Tarot. I didn't care about Tarot, so through that I became more interested in it. I was fascinated by the way Akron chose the paintings—sometimes I didn't understand why he made the choices—and he always gave good explanations. It was funny—I'm not such a—maybe the paintings look like I'm a—I'm not such a serious or tragic person. I like fun. And often people don't see the joke.

jk: I thought they were funny, and I don't know if Akron brings this out.

G: I liked the text, the things he saw in the paintings, but then he went and made these fantastic comments, I disliked his fantasies a bit.

jk: You know I don't think he thought they were fantasies.

G: His explanations sometimes were quite crazy. You know what he interpreted sometimes—it could be the contrary as well. I don't know the meaning in English but it is that sometimes if he would like to see something then he will see it in the painting. If he wants to have this meaning in it, then he will see it.

jk: So we might say he reads meaning into a thing instead of reading the meaning.

G: Yes.

jk: He projects the meaning.

G: Sometimes. His explanations of the cards are sometimes crazy, but funny—but not probably very serious.

At this point we completed the interview.

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