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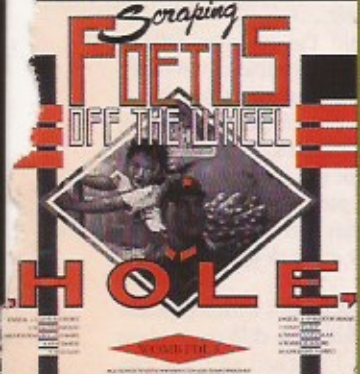
The Foetus Interview by The Pizz



Let's be brief.

If we were to start from scratch here and fill in all you know nuthin' punks out there about *who* Jim Thirlwell, a.k.a. Foetus, a.k.a. Clint Ruin, is, we'd fill up too much space with endless discography and re-hashed drivel.

Let's just clue y'all in with the shortest possible *TV Guide*® synopsis. All your bitchin' industrial CDs, your new Nine-Inch Nails, Ministry, Cop-Shoot-Cop, et cetera— it's all borrowed from this Foetus guy. That's just a quick sample. Speaking of samples, this mix-master-maniac was making orchestral soundtracks outta samples years before the *Batman*® soundtrack came along and stole all the riffs out of it hook, line and sinker. (See "The Overture of Pigdom Come" off 1980's *Nail*.) Lounge muzak, à la Les Baxter, Martin Denny, Esquivel, et al, will be an upcoming trend as all the post-teen wastrels out there discover drinking in bars instead of cars, wake up one day in a cheap red leatherette booth and realize "Hey, this is a way of life!" Well, have a listen to 1991's *Steroid Maximus*— you'll recognize it by the cool Tiki-Tribal Pizz-Art. Perhaps *Wiseblood* (with Roli Mosimann) is more your speed (my hand's in here too, but I won't divulge) or maybe sink as low as *Garage Monsters* (yet one more collaboration with yours truly). Being big time cartoon-heads, this is the closest thing we could get to doing our own cartoons, these blitzkrieg soundtracks from hell, nightmare jungle stomps. A hallucinatory Tex Avery/Warner Brothers/Raymond Scott vibe lurks therein, along with Mad Magazine, Mad Max— and MAXIMUMIZATION, as opposed to *minimalization*, that wimpy, snobby blank hang-over which characterized so much of the Eighties.



See? All this type just for an overview. Go to your favorite hip music retailer and do the rest yourself. Jim Thirlwell has just been signed to Sony. After six years, six months and six days of creative Hades, he's just finished his latest magnum opus *Gash*, to be book-ended by the EPs *Null* and *Void*. He'll be comin' to your town soon enough, with all the accompanying fanfare and hoo-haa outta all sorts of media orifices. But our angle is art. So, what makes this time bomb tick?

The Pizz: OK, the obligatory portrait-of-the-artist-as-a-young-man query... I understand you taught art classes in Australia as a lad.

Foetus: I graduated high school real young, like 16. I skipped a few grades here and there. I hated it and just wanted out. I ran away on "vacation." It was a big liberation. I had left at the top of my class, won the lit prize for English, but I just took off. I had no friends, was a real loner. Everyone else in my class was 18, I didn't relate. Well, after my "vacation" I called my mom and asked her what should I do. She told me about these art classes at Melbourne State College. I thought that sounded like something I could get into and told her to enroll me. So I go there for orientation week and discover I'm enrolled in an arts and crafts teaching course, which I didn't even know about till I'm stuck in a room with a bunch of kindergartners, trying to show them how to throw pots on a potters wheel, ceramic kid-art shit, and it's always degenerating into these brats throwing clay at each other. I had to develop this crowd-control tactic....

Like something out of your show....

Ha! What I'd do is find the weakest kid in the group, like that wimpy kid on the Simpsons, and tell him, "You're staying after school to clean this up!" It turned into a philosophy. I mean, I was some 16 year old punk rock kid with green hair trapped in a classroom full of raging 5 year olds. I had no intention of teaching the buggers.

I detect the nurturing element wasn't part of the set-up....

It got worse... better... take your pick. I was sent to an inner-city all-girls school. Now, I'm 17 years old, they're 15 and 16....

Uh-oh! I see a flood of teen hormones led astray!

I have purple hair by this time, dressed totally wacked out, 3 neckties, baby heads on my lapel, and it's almost like these chicks had a contest to see who could get to me. They're shooting me beavers from the front row... just panties... so just to keep from getting arrested I'd have to pick on the fattest, ugliest girl there just to diffuse the situation.

Any after school "special curriculum," teach?

Well, there was this beautiful blonde in the front row, one of the panty flashers, that I still remember. We had this field trip to an art museum, and I remember following her down the sidewalk watching her ass....

What a great job!

It was tough. I was just trying to absorb techniques and exploit the school system of its available facilities: painting, drawing, screen-printing, et cetera. I got pretty good, then I dropped out after two years to pursue my own shit. I was pretty much self-taught... I absorbed a lot.

Monkey see, monkey do?

Monkey read, monkey fuck up, monkey try again....

All those Foetus sleeves, the Exit Magazine covers, have that same stark and limited colors.

At first it was just black, white and red. Then I added yellow. I've finally broke the mold....

That green crust in your ear? I've been meaning to tell you...

No! I've now added blue to the Foetal palette. But I did do other shit at one time, cubist stuff, realistic self-portraits, still lifes... you know, the fruit-in-the-bowl-with-drapery-shit....

Let's get back to your "Foetus" sleeves. Was it all influenced by this school jazz?

Oh no, that goes back way, way before, when I was like 14. Chinese propaganda stuff, early Russian revolutionary graphics, the WWII Nazi stuff....

I see a similarity of layering, collaging of context and form, with your music.

The music doesn't reflect the package.

Or vice versa. I'm just saying the techniques, the aesthetics are similar. An applied discipline. I had no idea of the whys and wherefores, I just kinda made it up as I went along. What I do now doesn't really come from art school— more like through it.

Tell us about "THE BOX."

Aha! *The Foetus Of Excellence*, which entered the record charts in England at #16— with no record. Just a t-shirt. I had done these 4 records, the album *Hole*. The first was *Calamity Crush* and *E.A.T.* (Foetus-Art-Terrorism), then *Finely Honed Machine*, then *Wash and Slog*. So anyway, part of the record deal was this box to put all these records in, but we couldn't just sell an empty box, so to defray the costs of about 2 pounds (that'd be approximately \$3.50) we threw in a t-shirt. We figured the exact break even point, which was 836 copies, so this box with just a t-shirt made the independent album charts....

Do you lament the loss of the 12-inch format?

Well, it's not really lost, and I like all formats for different reasons....

I'm not talking about digital versus analog here. Just the fact record cover artwork was such a cool medium, nice and big, with gatefolds and shit. CDs are fucking tiny.

I want everything I do to come out on vinyl, also. Now, when we did the *Garage Monsters* 10-inch... I don't think it should come out on CD. Do you?

Well, if I got paid for it, I'd say sure! But otherwise, naw. But didn't you mention your next release Gash is gonna be available on 8-track? Or were you yankin' my chain?

Oh yeah. Theoretically, if I can pull it off, I will. It's gonna involve some research.

Maybe they still use 'em in fuckin' Turkistan or someplace.

I wanna get something out in every format before I croak. I see each release as a living diary.

Or a dying liver....

Gimme a break! I'm not just talking about my life here, but the concept of art as a collectible commodity. Like instead of doing a one-shot, like you do your paintings, but a consumer-friendly-priced item that people can obtain. I think of each release as a piece of art reproduced in multiples, that everybody can own, not to be elitist. The "original" is not the point, with all the crappy/scrappy paste-ups, et cetera. The final product is the collectible "original." Anybody can get one, provided they move fast.

What's it like working with video? Do you get a bunch of other people in on the project, or...?

The last video package, *In Excelsis Corruptus Deluxe*— which is *Male!* live— I kinda cobbled together myself from all these different videos at different venues people had given to me. I patched all these bits and pieces and synched all the vocals and really had to learn the video editing shit myself, fast, to get it put together. A crash course....

I like the way you'll be in 4 or 5 different outfits each song.

Or Norman's hair will go from totally long to cut off! I think it came out great for the money spent on it. It's a bit of turd-polishing, but I'm proud of it.

I understand you took over the Jumbotron in Times Square for your latest....

A definite first. Fucking all Times Square lit up with my art. We did have to take the nipples out, though....

With that tantalizing bit of insider info, we'll wrap this up. Watch out— he's coming to your town! 🍌

