

J Thirlwell, aka Foetus Interuptus, aka Foetus Under Glass, aka Foetus In Your Bed, aka Foetus Art Terrorism, aka The Foetus All-Nude Review, known to his friends as Feet, is his own biggest fan. He's been making records for years now. By himself. For himself. And, he's watched them being unleashed on an unsuspecting public to mixed reaction. They're noisy, they're nasty. They deal with subjects like sex and violence and things that hurt or don't taste very nice. Things that people don't like to talk about, let alone listen to on a record. It's the sort of noise you either love or hate, no in-betweens, no compromise, no sell out. Whether you think of him as an artist in a deep and meaningful search for his inner self or a self-indulgent prat, he's got things to say, the music is always well produced and well packaged and he's not about to go away. "I get branded as a misanthropist, a sexist. I get bomb threats, death threats, letters professing eternal love..." His latest release, a collaboration with Lydia Lunch, who he has lived with for five years, called Stinkfist, has a typically controversial cover, featuring the two of them simulating

and accusations of self-indulgence. Why does he have to do everything himself? Why does it have to be a self-inflicted punishing experience.

"I'M A BIG FAN OF SELF-INDULGENCE"

"I'm a big fan of self-indulgence, but also highly self-critical."

But why inflict yourself on others? What do other people want to learn about you? Surely they should be learning about themselves.

"If other people want it, they can have it. They get something out of what I do, relate it to themselves. Self-indulgence is the other side of the coin to Stock, Aitken And Waterman who try to reflect popular tastes, or create them. Which is it? Can you tell if you're being conned?"

Like you conned people by releasing an empty box to put all their Foetus records in?

"That was a great idea, to release a box by itself instead of a box set. It was also a great art object."

Which is another difference between Foetus and SAW – good old art terrorism.

Is Foetus art?

the crappy sides of a city. I still think New York is great, though, except for the crime. It's gone up by 50–100 per cent in the last year, mainly crimes to get money, like car theft and mugging, because of crack. That stuff wires you to f***ing shit. People just go wild with paranoia and shoot their friends. But the seduction is that ten minutes of euphoria. It's the only escape some people are ever going to have. Ed Koch, the mayor, has admitted that they have lost the war on drugs. You have to be streetwise, but Lydia (Lunch) was mugged recently."

So why the hell do you live there?

"There's so much at your disposal and there's a certain excitement and intensity which can easily turn you into a quivering paranoid neurotic, which is probably why I like it."

MY KIND OF TOWN...ER LONDON IS

London, on the other hand has now got a reputation with New Yorkers for being boring, dark and gray.

"I lived in London for five years so I feel like I've done my time here. It's so oppressive, you get politics shoved in your face, the living situations, the food and the weather are so

FOETUS IS GOD?

"I'm really into hills..."

sex. In today's climate it's probably not the best thing to do if you want to sell a lot of records.

"You see worse shit on Page Three of the *Sun*, every day. I think it's a great cover. That's just the way the session evolved. We ended up digging up loads of dirt and bringing it into the photographer's studio. I think it's more statuesque than pornographic."

Things perceived as being unusual or even disgusting in 'decent' society are, to Jim's mind, quite usual. He doesn't do things to shock, he just does what he wants to do, which mostly happens to be a bit, well, weird.

"The ideas in the songs are just my current obsession. It may be a deep fear, or something from a TV commercial or a wrestling magazine. They come out and I catalogue them."

But most of them seem to be about sex and violence.

"Um... I don't notice that at the time. I just want them to be a pure expression of what I feel."

So when you do a bit of recording, is it an ordeal?

"There is some kind of mental anguish and the schedule gets pretty punishing because I do everything myself. I put a lot of pressure on myself because I want to create something totally great and true."

So why not just get somebody else to do some of the work for you?

"Because then it wouldn't be a Foetus project. Each record is a draining experience and when it is finished I feel satiated and feel the need to work on something else with other people."

Hence his production work and collaborations, like Stinkfist and Wiseblood,

"The way I sit on the subway is art, my entire life is art. Define art!"

Oh no, I ask the questions, you answer them, OK! What about that Mark Kostabi guy, the artist from New York who doesn't paint pictures, he pays other people to do it, then just signs them. And of course as soon as he does they become extremely valuable.

"Warhol was doing that years ago. I can't condemn it, because he's got a racket and he's making a lot of money but he's just a party person."

You mean he's not a serious artist or he's not giving VFM (value for money)?

"VFM makes me sound like Woolworths. I don't release things if I don't think it's perfect. Like the Stinkfist record, I'm proud of everything about that – the label, the layout, the cover. Everything. A ton of ideas have been distilled into it. Two days scouring scrapyards in Los Angeles, three days putting it through fabulous effects and still feeling it needed more. It's insane the amount of work that goes into each of my products, but that's the way it has to be. It's the ultimate value for money."

NEW YORK NEW YORK IT'S A WONDERFUL TOWN

Jim still chooses to live in New York, just two stops away on the subway from Sonic Youth, even though, he admits, it's a dangerous place to be, and getting worse all the time.

"There used to be some mystique about New York, but now people realise it's just another city. People in New York used to have the same feeling about London, you know? If you had an English accent you could get into a club free. From a distance, you don't see all

bad. When you fly in there's a brown cloud hanging over the city."

THERE'S A PLACE FOR US, SOMEWHERE A PLACE FOR US, PEACE AND QUIET AND OPEN AIR

"I like Berlin for a break, but after a while it gets too insular. I like San Francisco because I'm heavily into hills. It's very polluted but there's a good vibe. And I like Scotland, my mum lives there and I go there to chill out. I feel an affinity with the soil there, there's a lot of dead souls in the soil. But mostly I just like passing through."

Being into hills and talking about your mother are not really compatible with being a living-on-the-edge artist, maybe even Jim Foetus is beginning to mellow with age.

"Highly unlikely. There is this fear of encroaching middle age. I'm scared of mellowing out. I don't want to. My main satisfaction is my music and I don't want it to be softened, to make it more commercially palatable. People still say if I used a different name I could be massive, but I won't compromise, I won't change my name, people should come round to my way of thinking. I mean, God, it's the nearly the 1990's and at this point people should be able to handle anything. I won't be put off by the fascistic tie-up of the megalomaniacal pseudo-politicians who run the music business."

"My music is out there and it's the best thing going today."

Jim, number one Foetus fan.

Foetus rap by Chris Mellor

