knees seem to melt into the oval seat, which is divided into several red squares in which there are skulls, faces, eyes, and emaciated children with bulging eyes. This is a symbol of the starvation, poverty, and suffering of the Thai people at the time. Yet the brilliant rays of light that emanate from the back could symbolize the enlightenment of Buddha after his mortification as well as the *dharma*, a source of comfort to all Buddhists. The artist is showing Thai society the right path to follow at this time of suffering and sorrow.

But a closer look at Pratuang's works shows that despite these surrealist influences, notably the free juxtaposition of images and the automatic brush strokes, the subject matter and messages of the paintings are uniquely his own. The chief difference is that Pratuang's paintings, unlike those of the European surrealists, have no sexual content. In the Ernst painting, for instance, the metal piercing the nut carries the full weight of the Oedipus myth and conceals a powerful sexual element. But in *The Metallic Tree*, Pratuang emphasizes the suffering and pain that destroy life and leave one powerless to fight back.

In *Dharma-Adharma* and *Red Morning Glories and Rotten Rifles*, Pratuang is protesting against the political violence of the time, whereas the works of Masson, Magritte and Dali are meant to express the artists' subconscious urges and appetites.

Pratuang presented his painting *Red Morning Glories and Rotten Rifles* on the eve of the bloody events of October 6, 1976. Could he have had a presentiment of the terrifying violence about to happen? Dali also had a premonition of the horrific violence of the Spanish civil war before the conflict broke out. It is interesting to note that Pratuang was accused of being a Communist because of his use of bright red in his canvas *Red Morning Glories*. After the events of October 6, 1976, Pratuang had to report to the police in order to respond to the accusation that he and the other members of the Dharma Group were leftist sympathizers.

The violence directed against students in 1976 also had a tremendous impact on another artist, Chang Sae Tang. The painting *October 14* (1973)(Fig.37) is a self-portrait but without eyes – perhaps to symbolize his refusal to accept the terrifying events he had witnessed. And as in certain surrealist works by Miró, Magritte, etc., there is also a mixture of writing and images. But it is just as likely that Chang was inspired by paintings illustrating ancient Chinese poetry. The writing is illegible, as Chang wished it to serve merely as a backdrop for his self-portrait.

Fig.37

- **Thammasak Booncherd**

Thammasak was a precursor of the Windmill Group, a collection of artists that will be discussed below. His painting *Thai Peasant* (1979)(Fig.38) depicts the lives of poor peasants exploited by capitalist merchants. In the painting a peasant hangs from a scale for weighing rice, his clothes are in rags, and he is surrounded by parched rice fields under a harsh, cloudless sky. The scene recalls Dali's *Christ of Saint John of the Cross* (1951) and to a lesser extent the same artist's *Sleep*.

Fig.38

- **Paisan Thirapongvisnuporn and Chirasak Pathanapong (Windmill Group)**

The Windmill Group, made up of five young artists who graduated from the School of Fine Arts (*Thai Wijit Silpa*), announced their intention to point out the corruption and moral decay of Thai society. They wanted to motivate others to rise up and deal with these long-standing ills. Two members of the group, Paisan Thirapongvisnuporn and Chirasak Patanapong, produced works with obvious surrealist traits, especially the works they contributed to the Group's second and fourth exhibitions (1980-1982).

Paisan's oil paintings are clearly influenced by surrealist models. Most reflect the particular social problems debated after the events of October 6, 1976. One such problem was local government's mismanagement of water resources and the resulting droughts in the Northeast that forced farmers to abandon their villages and migrate to the cities. Young people especially had to leave their homes and look for work in the capital, where life was difficult. Some became coolies, others prostitutes. They were exploited and deceived by the capitalists. In other paintings Paisan addresses different religious and moral issues.

In an interview on March 30, 1985, Paisan admitted to an interest in surrealist art. "I feel that the surrealist style gives me the most freedom in terms of presentation, form, content, essence, symbolism and the ability to get my messages across. We can express whatever we feel. Frankly speaking, it isn't my intention to be a surrealist; I just borrow their techniques. I don't fully understand their philosophy."

Fig.39

In *Faint Breath of the Old Field* (1981) (Fig.39), the torso of an old man, resembling a fan or a cadaver on a wooden stake, hovers above a cracked and desolate landscape. He represents all the elderly villagers in the Northeast abandoned by their families in a parched, impoverished land. The extended arms and the hands that

point back towards a city in the distance symbolize the hopes of young villagers, unable to work the dry soil of their native villages, of a better life in the big city.

It is clear that in planning and executing this painting, Paisan was inspired by Dali, especially in the depiction of the sky which is larger than the earth, the human figure floating in the middle of the canvas, and the use of the stake, all of which recall *Sleep*.

In *This Street Is Called Patpong* (1982) (Fig.40) (Patpong is the center of the tourist sex trade), the artist shows a street that leads directly to a door located right between a woman's legs. The image suggests that the men who come to this place are interested in only one thing – sex. The naked legs, with occasional rotten splotches, suggest that the sex trade turns women into soiled, degraded, and disfigured victims. On the side of the street, near the woman's right foot is a sign with the street name, and above this is a white cloth tent propped up on posts. Above the front entrance to the tent hangs a pair of breasts, and above the tent are two masks and animal skull, symbols of the wicked, hypocritical capitalists. It is a bold, shocking exposé of a reality that Thai society would prefer not to face so openly.

Fig.40

The use of cloth in the painting recalls Dali's work *William Tell in Old Age* (1931), while the cut in the middle of the body is reminiscent of *The Weaning of Furniture-Nutrition* (1934), likewise by Dali.

In Paisan's last painting, *Lokiya-Lokuttra* (1982)(Fig.41), the artist depicts a V-neck blouse on a hanger. The sleeves metamorphose into the face of the artist on one side and the face of the Buddha on the other. Beneath the faces, the blouse is tied in a knot. What the artist wants us to see here is that the "self" is made up of *lokiya* (worldly pleasures that are the causes of suffering) and *lokuttra* (truth that is above *lokiya* and *dukkha*).

Fig.41

What makes this painting interesting is the surrealist influence that inspired Paisan. For example, the image of the double faces comes from André Masson's drawing *The Portrait of André Breton* (1939), and the hanger is borrowed from Magritte's *Philosophy in the Boudoir*. Yet Paisan's use of these images is in complete opposition to the philosophy of surrealism: the Thai artist sees religion as a cure for society's ills, while the surrealists

were violently opposed to all religions and moral codes.

Although Paisan was inspired by the form and style he saw in surrealist paintings, his work differs from that of the Europeans in terms of its content. His paintings are meant as criticism of current events taken directly from the media. His work does not reflect his unconscious or dream images aroused by his experience of reality. Some of Paisan's works, especially those that deal with prostitution, have a certain boldness, but his sole intention is to criticize, not to arouse sexual desire, as is often the case with the European surrealists. Another difference is that the atmosphere in these paintings tends to be lifelike and realistic, not dreamlike or ambiguous.

Chirasak's work is characterized by subject matter and formats that are very similar to those found in Paisan's work. This is not surprising as the two men are close friends. They studied at the same art college (*Thai Wijit Silpa*). Chirasak actually took part in the demonstrations leading up to the events of October 14, 1973 and October 6, 1976, whereas Paisan followed the developments in the press. Both were important members of the Windmill Group. Like Paisan, Chirasak adopted certain surrealist techniques in order to criticize society. Because of its social relevance, Apinan calls their work "social surrealism" (Apinan 1992:224). In an interview on March 26, 1985, Chirasak spoke of his interest in surrealist models, which "are conducive to expressing feelings, you can distort them any way you like."

Many of the oil paintings Chirasak Pathanapong produced starting in 1979 are the artist's response to the cramped, unsanitary living conditions of peasants in the capital in search of work. He also addresses political and environmental issues, portraying images of garbage pickers, poverty and pollution. Chirasak's favorite symbol of oppression and discontent is a shroud. One of his paintings shows a skeleton, partly concealed by a piece of cloth. The image is meant to suggest the degradation of workers in contemporary society.

Fig.42

The painting *Life of the Working Class* (1981)(Fig.42) is composed primarily of an elephant's head, its skin clinging to the bone, and its body like torn cloth stretched over a worn skeleton. Part of the animal's tail is shaped like a cone spiraling around the pinchers of a crab that rests on the floor. The four legs are not the legs of a normal elephant. Instead, they're grasshoppers' legs so tapered that they could not possibly support the weight above. The elephant, used in Thailand to haul logs from the forest, is a symbol of the exploitation of the country's working class. On the left of the canvas, there are unidentifiable objects that look like a series of screens stretching out of view. Between the screens are piles of covered objects, perhaps dead elephants, symbols of the working class in the big city.

Screams of Time (1982)(Fig.43) is an expression of the pain and oppression that the artist and his friends were made to endure. Time moves on relentlessly. Two human heads scream from inside the face of a clock. Between them are two pathetic human beings, one a woman with no head, the other a man with a head but with a mutilated body. These human forms haunt the artist as he remembers the events of October 14, 1973 and October 6, 1976. The same suffering is expressed in *The Sad Song of War*, another painting from the same year but which we have not included here.

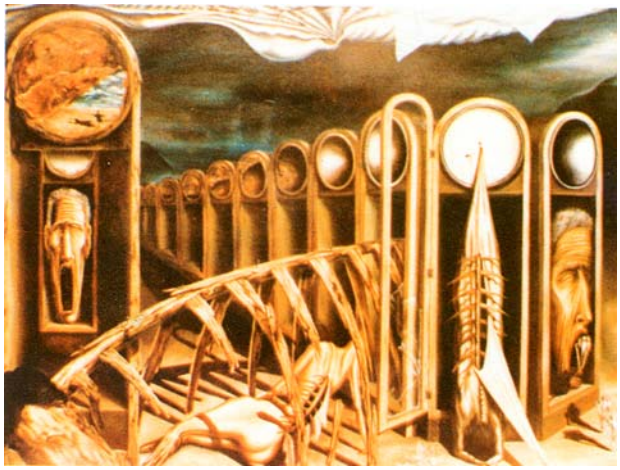

Fig.43

The last painting entitled *Breathing in…Breathing out* (1983)(Fig.44) is a self-portrait surrounded by symbols of oppression, duress, and despondency. These symbols take the form of tubes covering the artist's mouth and nose, and an object wrapped in cloth in a rectangular frame. The metal tubes look like parts of an industrial factory. Perhaps the artist wanted to comment on the pollution in Bangkok, where oxygen is in short supply and it is increasingly difficult to breathe.

Fig.44

An examination of these three paintings shows clearly that Chirasak was inspired by the styles and techniques of surrealist painters, especially Dali, but that he adapted these methods to express his feelings and critique the social conditions around him. In combining the human form with cloth, he is borrowing from an image Dali used in *Daddy Longlegs of the Evening – Hope!* (1940). In *Life of the Working Class* and *Screams of Time*, his depiction of skeletons, elephants, and men with torn cloth instead of skin is striking and original. The elephant with its delicate legs (*Life of the Working Class*) may have been influenced by Dali's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (1946), and the way in which Chirasak wraps objects or men's heads in cloth may have come from Dali's *Specter of Sex Appeal*.

Chirasak may have found inspiration in the works of other surrealist artists as well. For example, the arrangement of figures in *Screams of Time* recalls Chirico's *The Disquieting Muses* (1916).

It is also possible that Chirasak was also inspired by painters from other schools that shared certain common characteristics with surrealism. Covered objects and the use of tubes and cones may have come from the work of Christo or artists from the School of