

Vienna, such as H.R. Giger. The open, screaming mouth immediately recalls Edvard Munch, the Norwegian expressionist painter whose painting *The Scream* is world famous.

- **Apinan Poshyananda**

Apinan himself is an artist, as well as an art historian and educator (Currently he holds the post of Director of the Contemporary Art and Culture Department at the Ministry of Culture). In 1982, he painted *Psychoanalysis* (Fig.45), which, in terms of its eroticism and automatism, seems to evince surrealist themes and techniques.

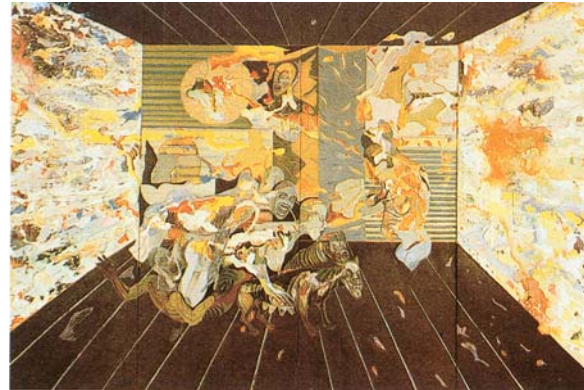


Fig.45

Yet his intentions are somewhat different. His work is a criticism of “free sex,” and he attempts to soften the violence of his painting through the use of intangible forms and the colors of the walls, which serve to draw the viewer’s attention to the objects spread out on the floor.

Apinan admits that he was inspired by several Western painters: “Picasso, Fuseli, Blake, Rubens, Dali, Bellmer, and Kitaj.” Apinan has also explained some of the techniques he employed to produce this work: “First I put several layers of color on the canvas before putting it on the wall. The technique of putting down the layers of color first is partly automatic. But I don’t know if it’s the same method that the surrealists used, and it doesn’t really matter to me if it is or it isn’t. Most things are a product of the times, because automatic painting was widely practiced by American and European painters after the Second World War.”

In our opinion, Apinan may have been inspired not only by Picasso and other abstract expressionist painters like Arshile Gorky, but also by certain works by Francis Bacon, such as *Two Figures* (1953).

In an interview on April 27, 1993, the artist stated: “Psychoanalysis has a certain surreal quality; in other words, there’s something surrealist about it, but that doesn’t mean that the way I produced this painting conformed to the surrealist code...It’s as if this painting is in a box of the imagination: a symbol of the artist’s oppression in a society full of competition. It’s Thai society in the year 1982. It isn’t French society of the 1920s.”

2.3 Artists who produced works with religious themes and/or inspired by traditional Thai art

- **Pichai Nirand**

Among Thai contemporary artists, Pichai is one of the first to integrate historical Buddhism into a modern pictorial form. Some of his paintings evidence a certain surrealist influence – *The End* (1960)(Fig.46) and *Chivataman* (1970)(Fig.47), for example. *The End* is a Buddhist contemplation of death, and the



Fig.46

veiled faces were probably inspired by Magritte's *Heart of the Matter* (1928).

Chivataman is a drawing that looks like a stained-glass window. It is an arrangement of multi-colored panes, each containing the image of an object or scene relating to birth (a baby's head, a uterus, sperm, a breast, etc.). But in the central pane is a face (that of the artist) rapt in meditation. From this it becomes clear that the panes are intended as a meditation on the agonies of birth described in the ancient literary epic *The Three Realms*. The painter has told us that the painting grew out of his interpretation of the teachings of the Buddha.



Fig.47

In addition to his personal feelings and experiences, Pichai may have found inspiration in certain surrealist works. The semi-abstract style of the drawing in *Chivataman* recalls the automatism used by Masson in *Pythia* (1943) or *Gradya* (1939). Pichai's outlook, however, especially with regard to religion, is very different from that of the Western surrealists.

- **Kowit Anekkachai (Khemanantha)**

The picture *Rock with the Face of Dhamma* (1980) (Fig.48) uses the technique of Chinese calligraphy on silk paper to portray a man (the artist as monk) seated on rocks resembling four human faces seen from different angles. The eyes of the most visible face are turned toward the heavens. Part of the hair, or a hole in the rocks, resembles female genitals. Below this are curves or arches like rushing water. The picture as a

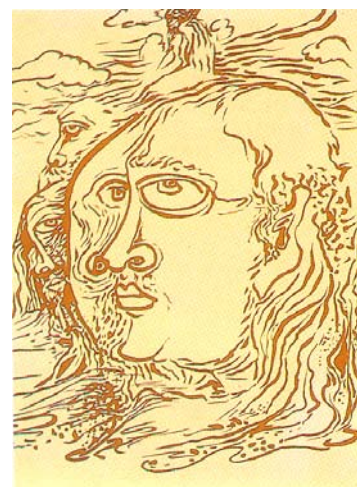


Fig.48

whole can be seen as a monk reflecting on the different aspects of himself and his previous incarnation, especially his past life of sensual pleasure.

Kowit's approach to drawing is influenced by automatic writing, and his use of collage to assemble the various parts of the face recalls Picasso's technique in such works as *Woman in Tears* (1937), which affords a view of the face from the front and in profile at the same time. This double image is also reminiscent of Dali's *Portrait of Frau Styler-Tas*, and the automatic quality of the drawing also brings to mind Masson's *Automatic Drawing* (1924).

In his article "The Way of Buddhist Iconography," the painter explains that the drawing comes from the world of dreams and the self, and makes no reference to external objects. Admittedly, there are similarities between the automatism of surrealism and certain Zen concepts, but the differences are much greater. Khemanantha seems to have hit upon this particular technique more as a result of his study of the teachings of Wei Lang than of his knowledge of surrealism.

- **Worarit Rithakani**

The Tree of Life (1982)(Fig.49) shows a *bo* (pipal) tree and a tiered umbrella in the shape of an island or a mountain. Within the tree is a luminous gem, a symbol of *nirvana* or the teachings of the Buddha. At bottom left are the assembled figures of a man (the artist), a woman and a bird, all moving in the direction of the gem. Human beings, regardless of their sex, will find the key to a peaceful life in the Buddhist precepts.

The association of the two human figures with the bird may recall two of Chagall's works – *Tribute to Apollinaire* (1911-2) and *The Flute Player* (1954).

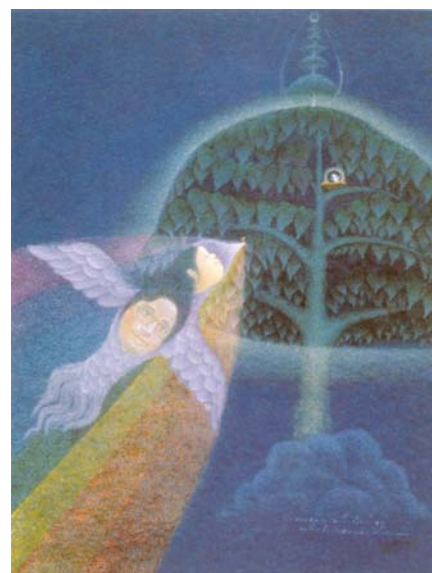


Fig.49

It is clear that Worarit has succeeded in integrating in own paintings both Chagall's fondness for floating or flying objects – representatives of an imaginary world – as expressions of his religious beliefs, and certain traditional Thai elements. But there is an important difference between the half-bird, half-human figure in Worarit's work and that in Chagall's *The Flute Player*. The figure in the Thai artist's work appears more real than the fanciful figure of the Western painter.

In fact, these half-bird, half-human, or half-human, half-animal creatures have been a feature of Thai painting since ancient times. Images of *kinaree* or *kinorn* – half-human, half-bird creatures – and other mythic animals are often found in mural paintings and on Thai scripture cabinets. However, unlike traditional Thai painting, the human faces in Worarit's work are more realistic.

- **Panya Vijinthanasarn**

Most of Panya's paintings are temperas, produced between 1979 and 1981. We have chosen to examine two series of paintings: *Crisis of the World Today 1* and 2, and *Symbol of the World 1* and 2, as well as the individual works, *Different Paths* and *The Struggle*.

In *Crisis of the World Today 1* (1979)(Fig.50), the principal figures are imaginary and legendary animals found in traditional Thai painting. A large *naga* – a mythological serpent – a swan and a griffin do battle in an empty, infinite space. At the



Fig.50

top of this space is the mouth of a *naga* trying to swallow a Buddha statue. On the horizon is an ancient structure with an open door, shaped like a mouth with large canine teeth. The imaginary creatures in the painting may be symbols of human passion or desire and the conflicts between human beings in this world. But one of the animals appears to rise above the fray, ascending into the spiritual realm symbolized by the Buddha image at the top of the canvas. The ruined building in the background, like a mouth frozen open, represents organized religion, a center of faith in the past but which time and human greed have now destroyed. Truth, symbolized by the faint light of fireflies, has been virtually swallowed up by the darkness of earthly desires.

In *Crisis of the World Today 2* (1979)(Fig.51) various animal and human figures are shown riding in a golden chariot behind which are the tail and hind quarters of an animal. The chariot is pulled by an imaginary animal (griffin+swan+*naga*) and moving in the direction of a strange creature with great open jaws and enormous canine teeth. Another group of imaginary animals, bundled together in a knot, can be seen above the open mouth. In the lower left corner of the mouth is another smaller mouth, also open. Opposite, the painting seems to open onto another dimension where a group of imaginary animals advances along another road.



Fig.51

In the distance on the right are a desert and the head of an animal with menacing horns. Its mouth is wide open, and in front of the door, which resembles a tongue, is a chain. Behind this head a large canine tooth surges up out of the ground, its curved tip in the form of a swan pierced with holes. The dominant color in the painting is dark blue, giving the picture a barren, desert-like atmosphere. In the corner of the mouth, the bodies of animals and a chariot are bathed in a golden light. There is also a mix of red and green. The figures and themes are derived from traditional Thai painting, but the painter has put them to a distinctly modern use, as the title clearly denotes. He is sketching the lines and painting the colors of the fantasies haunting the world today.

The work, a skillful blending of traditional and modern styles, offers a biting critique of the modern world in crisis.

Symbol of the World 1 (1980) (Fig.52), like the earlier works, portrays imaginary figures, but here the mouth or entrance and stone-like objects or objects resembling knots of animals with canine teeth or the claws of a great beast swirl in a confusing mass in infinite space. The figures at the center of the canvas represent the world, all alone in the midst of a barren, unstable universe. What distinguishes this painting from other works by Panya is the monochromatic palette in shades of purple.



Fig.52

In *Symbol of the World 2* (1980) (Fig.53), the foreground is filled with the organs of animals both real and imaginary, like the head of a bird and a three-headed *naga*, all connected in a circle. In the center an abyss of jet black is surrounded by a mix of purple and gray. At the top of the picture is a wooden door against a red background. The door is sculpted, and on the closed panel is the design of the guardian spirit, and through the open panel it is possible to see a spectrum of various colors, ranging from yellow and green to black at the center. On both sides of the door there are shutters, and to the left and right of these there are square and rectangular-shaped passageways. Inside, there are mouths, canine teeth, and knots of imaginary beasts. They burst out of the frames as they battle endlessly. The dominant colors are bright green and dark yellow. In its entirety, the fresco is a moving depiction of the sufferings of the world, but the painter does suggest that sublimation is possible through the teachings of the Buddha.



Fig.53

In *Different Paths* (1980) (Fig.54), the frame is triangular and the background red. It recalls traditional Thai painting (See Appendix 2) and works by Thawan Datchani, such as *The Sun* and *Cosmology* (See below). The painting depicts two superimposed passageways. Inside them, the color scheme seems to add yet another dimension, whereas the surrounding background is only two-dimensional.



Fig.54