

Foreword

This book is the result of an earlier translation and extensive revision of a university study which originally appeared in Thai in 1996. Based on research and interviews, the study was an examination of surrealist tendencies in art and literature in Thailand between 1964 and 1984. The current volume contains additional information gathered from subsequent research which has been integrated into the original version.

The book is divided into five chapters. After a brief overview of surrealist influence in various countries of Asia, Chapter 1 deals with the introduction of European surrealism in Thailand prior to 1964. Chapter 2 examines the body of Thai writings on surrealism that may have had some influence on contemporary artists and writers. Chapter 3 analyzes a selection of paintings by Thai artists completed between 1964 and 1984, and compares them with the European models – Dali was of particular influence – that appear to have inspired them. In Chapter 4, we describe the works of literature produced in the same period, chiefly by poets and writers who were also painters or who had some connection with the plastic arts, which show signs of European surrealist inspiration. The last chapter looks at the influence of surrealism on visual arts and literature produced after 1984.

Let us state from the outset that the influence of European surrealism on Thai painters and writers with surrealist tendencies is generally limited to certain techniques or stylistic approaches to self-expression. The specific philosophical underpinnings of the original movement escaped them almost completely. What the artists have sifted out from the original movement has depended almost entirely on the taste and intention of the individual painter or writer. It is the history of this sifting that we will trace here.

In other words, the surrealist-inspired painters and writers who make up the subject of this book never shared the same beliefs nor the same political or psychological perspective as the surrealists of France and elsewhere in Europe. For the Thais, surrealism was only a means of self-expression, not a strategy for living.

Readers will surely notice that the European paintings frequently cited throughout the text are not reproduced here. Only reproductions of works by Thai artists have been included. We count on our readers to be able to find illustrations of the paintings unfamiliar to them at the appropriate Internet sites.

Readers should understand that in undertaking the research for this book, we were setting out across uncharted territory and that the facts we uncovered were purely historical in nature. It has never been our intention to make a specifically esthetic analysis of the artists and works we studied. That is a task we leave to future researchers.

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To all the Thai painters and writers who have so graciously allowed us to reproduce their works here.

S.C. and J.M.