

intended as a rejection of social conventions. This explains why in *Crash* (Fig.86) and *Paradise, perhaps* (1997)(Fig.87), the central nude figure sits with its back turned to the spectator. In *Sickly Sweet* (2000) (Fig.88) the artist displays a talent for combining elements from different contexts. It is a strategy that corresponds to the rules established by the surrealists, who sought to generate feelings of shock and surprise in the public by foregrounding sex and sexuality.



Fig85

However, in the case of the Thai artist, there is no attempt to arouse sexual feelings; instead, his intention is to make sarcastic comments on events actually happening at the time (the financial crisis or sex tourism).



Fig86

He makes skillful use of a certain mood and esthetic as a means of reining in powerful emotional responses to the work.



Prateep Kochabua also adopted surrealist techniques in

Fig87

combining unrelated elements or modifying reality, as in such works as *Bat Eating Bananas* (2000)(Fig.89). Here, the artist has transformed a female body into a musical instrument made up of two pairs of breasts. Her arms are outstretched and look like flippers, and her legs, which resemble the keys of a musical instrument, gradually change into the head of a *naga*. The male figure is an imaginary dragon-like creature with strange legs, arms and chest. He holds the woman in his arms, plucking her hair like the strings of a musical instrument.



Fig88

The composition of *Daydream* (2001) (Fig.90) appears to have been inspired by Max Ernst (*Surrealism and Painting*, 1941). The artist also borrows from Arcimboldo in the multiplicity of elements and the use of metamorphosis to create an allegory of daily life.



Fig89

In addition to the artists already discussed, one could also mention two other well-known artists characterized by religious themes and inspired by traditional Thai art, namely Thawan Datchani and Panya Vijinthanasarn (see Chapter 3). These artists remain active today and continue to exhibit their works.



Fig90

An examination of Thawan's works shows that the triangular and circular or semi-

circular structures of Dali's famous *Christ of Saint John of the Cross* have been permanently engraved on his memory. *Untitled 4* and *5* (Fig. 91, 92), two works completed in 1984, are evidence. The overall structure of these paintings is defined by the combination of these geometric shapes, although some changes have been made.

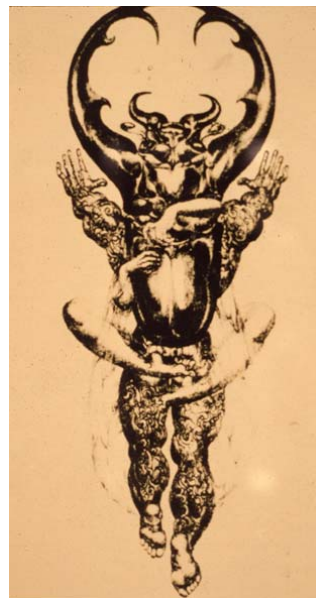


Fig91



Fig92

The main figure is half-human and half-animal, and the paintings' principal theme is the union between different species. Thawan's reputation as an artist rests in the power of his draftsmanship and his gift for creating patterns filled with imagination, intensity, and originality.

Panya Vijinthanasarn emulates the traditional Thai style of Khrua In Khong and Prince Narisara Nuwattiwong, while adding and underlining typically Western features. His paintings are often filled with objects made of some heavy material that nonetheless stand upright or float thanks to the support of what appear to be crutches. His favorite technique consists of making holes in things that one can take in at a glance. The result is an atmosphere of timelessness, evidence of his admiration for such works by Dali as *Symbol of the World* (See Chapter 3) (1980). Between 1984 and 1988, he completed one of the frescoes in the series *Clash of the Demons* (Fig. 93) at the Buddhaprathipa Temple in Wimbledon, England. The work blends contemporary art and traditional Thai painting. The resulting contrast between different time periods and the juxtaposition of different cultural elements correspond to the surrealist ideology. This artist's strengths lie in his use of lines and colors, namely silver, pink, orange, blue, dark green, ochre and purple, to create an atmosphere that is at once both soft and intense. In a number of his canvases, he depicts different animal species (the twisted body of a snake, the head of a crocodile or a swan) locked in perpetual





Fig93

struggle. In his mural painting, however, he includes an unusual looking elephant, figures from the known world, weapons and symbols of advanced technology, such as missiles and aircraft, and combines them with imaginary people and animals from the demonic realm. This work has a particularly powerful impact on the spectator.

More recently, Panya has turned increasingly to sculpture. *Conquering the Demons* (2003)(Fig.94), for example, shows the head of the Buddha, a symbol of Buddhahood and serenity, with knots of mythical beasts engaged in conflict, symbols of material desires. Of greater interest, though, are the bent legs in the background and the hand (not that of the Buddha) which emerges from the bottom to lean on the other side. The painter may have wanted to refer to that moment in the life of the Buddha when he succeeded in vanquishing the demons and renouncing all earthly desires.



Fig94

Since 1990, other artists some 20 years younger than Thawan have continued to display paintings, sculptures, and installations having some slight evidence of a surrealist influence.

Prasong Luamuang, for instance, developed a passion for the composition and atmosphere in works by Western artists like Miró, Chagall, Klee and Kandinsky. At the same time, he has also been influenced by Asian art, most notably from Thailand, China, Japan and Tibet. As the son of craftsmen from northern Thailand, he has been successful in integrating details of rural life into his paintings to create a dreamlike atmosphere inhabited by simple shapes.

But his work is not wholly abstract. Since 1992, he has added words or phrases to his canvases. In *As If We Were United* (Fig.95), most of the figures are shown in profile, as in Miró's *Ploughed Earth*, but those elements representing rural life (people, animals, etc.) are more realistic than in the work by the Spanish painter, and



unlike Miró, Prasong gives greater importance to humor than to sexual

Fig95

provocation. There is a double dimension in Prasong's work. The shape and size of the canvas do not depend on normal rules of perspective but on the importance he gives to the various things that belong to him. He attaches particular importance to the checkerboard pattern in the background of his paintings, each different in terms of size and intensity and each giving the canvas greater weight and density. In the painting *Hundreds of Millions of Stars* (Fig.96), completed in the same year as the previous work, he portrays a man (himself perhaps?) above an animal (half-pig, half-cow) in front of a rice barn where stars are shining. Above this is an otter or rodent-like animal with a fish in its mouth. There is also a branching pattern (which recalls Dali) and a pattern of lines resembling letters in the middle and at the bottom of the painting, similar to the style employed by Miró.



Fig96

The painting consists of elements from village life: a scarecrow, clothing, a hat, a handkerchief, overlapping feet and hands. But the combination of these elements has nothing to do with reality; it is much closer to the tenets of surrealism. But beyond these formal similarities, in terms of the basic message or meaning, a wide gap separates this artist's work from that of the European surrealists.

In *Sculpture of July No. 2* by (fig97) Wijit Apichatkriengkrai, the spectator's attention is drawn to the various elements held up by columns or intersecting lines, a style that recalls Dali. But this may simply be a coincidence for as far as we know, Wijit's works are inspired by elements drawn from life and nature, and of course, he also has enough native talent and imagination to create original works of art.

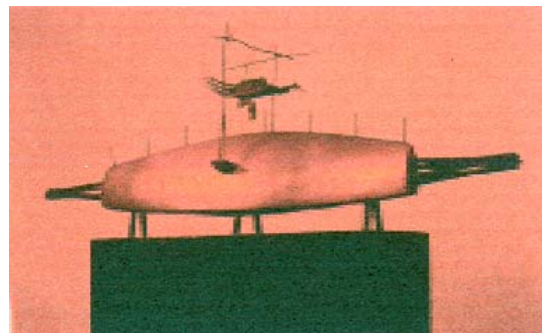


Fig97

Pasut Kranrattanasuit is fond of the ambiguity one finds in the works of Chirico, in particular his use of elongated shadows, which he associates with the Thai concept of self-reflection – one expressed in the proverb: "Look at your own reflection in the inside of a coconut shell filled with water." In fact, a mirror like the inside of a coconut shell tells us something about the thickness of the container but it is not really suited to produce an accurate reflection. *Magic Mirror* (2001)(Fig.98) portrays a hollow human head or its silhouette. In *Non Absolute Reality* (Fig.99), which appeared in the same show as *Magic Mirror*, a human figure looks into a distorted semi-circular object ill-suited to self-reflection.



Fig98



Yet, despite Pasut's infatuation with surrealist art, the ideas that inform his paintings are worlds away from those that motivated the European surrealists. While the latter sought to externalize and celebrate the desires of the inner self, Pasut is a Buddhist, who sees self-reflection as a means of reducing or even eliminating altogether one's earthly desires.



Fig99

In the sculptures of Manop Suwanapinta such as *Song of the Night* (1988)(Fig.100) and *Rest for Troubled Souls* (2000)(Fig.101), the holes in the human body and the use of a staircase recall the techniques Dali employed in



Fig100



Fig101

*The Weaning of Furniture-Nutrition* (1934) and *Flaming Giraffe* (1936-37). But again, as with fellow Thai artist Pasut, Manop's intention is to express interpretation of the teachings of the Buddha. The only difference is that Manop's emphasis is on the troubled soul that seeks a release from human suffering.

The stylized sculptures of Noppadon Viroonchatapun also make use of human figures with holes in them, as, for example, in *Open Mind* (1997)(Fig.102) and *Remember* (1998)(Fig.103). The first of these works employs the technique of a frame within a frame, like Max Ernst's *Two Children Are Threatened by a*



Fig102



Fig103

*Nightingale* (1924). In the second, the presence of a staircase