

in a human skull recalls Dali. What makes these works distinctive is the artist's technical skill and his ability to interpret his personal experiences in an interesting and original manner.

Harithon Akarapat's obsession with sexual desire is what sets his work apart. Images of male and female genitals form the basis of his art. In *Voice of Desires* (1988)(Fig.104), these forms are attached to musical elements. To our knowledge, Harithon has experimented with the technique of automatism but without any prior planning. His main concept and manner of expression are, in our view, very similar to those of surrealists like Miró and Giacometti. In *Terracotta Sculpture in the Form of a Human Face* (1986)(Fig.105), there is a certain resemblance to Magritte's *The Rape* (1934). In both works, parts of the face are replaced with objects resembling female genital organs. Yet, in our opinion, Harithon's aims are not as provocative as those of Magritte.

Mongkol Keudwan is a Thai sculptor whose works, based on the male and female bodies, are characterized by a strong sense of sexual provocativeness. The sculptor feels free to move and enlarge his figures' genital organs to produce humorous, playful works such as *Imagination born out of Solitude* (1999)(Fig.106) and *Cemetery of the Imagination* (2000)(Fig.107). Mongkol also employs automatism when working certain kinds of media. In working with lime, for example, he must complete the work quickly before the lime dries – a factor that forces him to make use of a technique similar to automatism.



Fig104



Fig105



Fig106

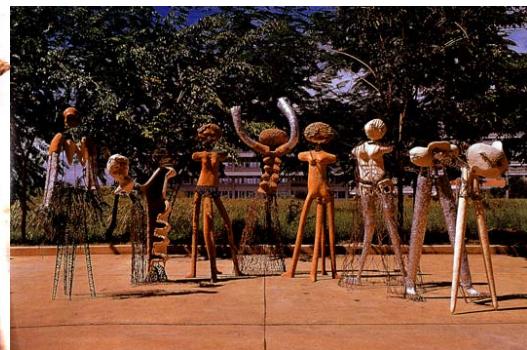


Fig107

Pinaree Sanpitak has produced a series of work based on the physical changes that occur to pregnant women. Her focus is on the size and shape of the breasts, which she reimagines as utensils, stupas, leaves and pillows. Other works include a series of sculptures in the shape of truncated candles (Fig.108), volcanoes, and standing female torsos (Fig.109). In all these cases,



Fig108

the sculptures are propped up on stakes, a technique employed by Dali. In one last series called *Press on the Breasts* (Fig.110), female breasts take the form of cushions that one can touch.

Pinaree began by using a two-dimensional approach and gradually moved into a three-dimensional style before taking an interest in installations. If there is a correspondence between this artist's works and those of the surrealists, it rests on a single point: the use of the female body as the basis for her art. But her aims, her ideas and her imagination cannot really be seen as surrealist-inspired, as Pinaree has no real intention to provoke, arouse desire, or showcase values that run counter to those of mainstream society. On the contrary, it seems to us that her aim is to make the public aware of the tenderness of the human body and the fragility of love. Her art, which is seductively appealing, expresses an affection for the female sex.

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook also seeks to express something about the nature of male-female relations in her paintings *Isolated Moral Female Object in a Relationship of a Male Bird I, II* (1995)(Fig.111) (Fig.112). Symbolically, these works may point to a rupture in the male-female relationship. Representing the male is a bird, situated in the center of the canvas



Fig111



Fig112

in the first of these paintings, and appearing to fly away out of the frame in the second. Meanwhile, a female head, on the edge of the picture, casts a glance toward the center. But the point of view employed in the two paintings is entirely different. In the first work, an elliptical shape (the shape of a vagina) symbolizes the sea and the sky, but the second painting seems lifeless and empty. All that is visible is the shadow of the crescent moon near the bottom. The sky and sea in the first ellipse



Fig109

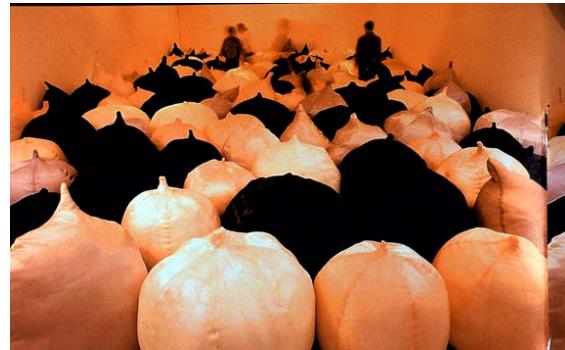


Fig110

is probably meant to convey nature, to which man and woman are both attached, but in the second work, the sexes are separated and no longer feel this shared attachment.

At the top of the first painting is a pair of female legs in a provocative pose; in the second, however, there is a pair of female arms in a gesture indicating the man's departure. The woman's head rests on a pointed stake. Araya's purpose is to portray the conflict between a licentious lifestyle and traditional Thai values. The use of the bird as a male symbol recalls Max Ernst's *Two Children Are Threatened by a Nightingale* (1924), and the legs in the first painting are meant to provoke in a manner similar to the European surrealists.

While the surrealist writers were among the first to use the corpse as a vehicle for satire, as can be seen in Robert Desnos' *Freedom or Love* (1927), Araya adopts a similar approach by videotaping an actual corpse and incorporating it into her installations, as in *Reading for Female Corpse* (1997)(Fig.113), *2nd One of a Thai Medley* (2002)(Fig.114) and *I'm Living* (2002). To Araya, reading aloud to the corpse or dressing it in clothes is an expression of love and a way to form a bond between the living and the dead. She has no wish to make fun of the dead, as the European surrealists would most likely have done. But her behavior is very atypical of most Thais, and for this reason, her installation pieces can shock or dumbfound some of the people who see them. The Thai tradition is more often to make offerings to honor the dead. Because the corpses have been videotaped and are not actually present, the element of fesignificantly reduced, as most Thais would simply refuse to be in the same room with a dead body. By choosing shocking subject matter (especially corpses), Araya shares common ground with the surrealists, but the ideas that inform her work and her artistic message are entirely different.

In the literature of the period, there are still a few Thai writers who draw inspiration from surrealism. Some appear to have

some understanding of the surrealist tenets; others would have gained a certain familiarity through their education, or their reading of books and articles between 1983 and 1989. A work like Suchart Sawatsii's *Imagination in Three Lines* (1988) has clearly been influenced by experimental writing that traces its origins back to the surrealist movement. Yet, despite certain formal similarities, Suchart's work was born out of completely different motivations and shows signs of other equally important influences.

Imagination in Three Lines combines articles and sketches, and is a demonstration of Suchart's wish to blend art and literature, much as the surrealists had done. He admits to having been struck by a visit to an exhibition of works by Thai and foreign artists.



Fig113



Fig114

“They aren’t poems” but rather sentences in the form of haiku. It is important to point out here the erotic, albeit satirical, nature of much of what is contained in this work. Suchart sees sexual intercourse as a pleasure and the starting point of all reincarnation. The writer’s satirical side can best be seen in the illustrations and wordplay. For instance, “In the water in the rice paddies there are fish, in the rice paddies there is rape,” where the rice paddies refer to young women from upcountry or to women in general. Reincarnation and the playful elements are highlighted in a strange and interesting comparison he makes in a chapter on Gauguin and Chagall:

Golden body
On the drowsy body
Let me reincarnate myself in your body.

Loud cries at full force
Strip bare the body of the embracing sky
The past disappears, the dream

And at the very beginning of the book, he writes:

For Daoreung
Fly across the stomach of the sky
I will sleep beside the stars.

The word play here evokes a positive image of sex, chiefly because of the name *Daoreung*, the pen name of the writer’s wife, which in Thai means “a shining group of stars.” The phrase “sleep beside the stars” and the use of “the stomach of the sky” instead of simply “the sky” work together to conjure up images of sexual union and birth. This type of word play is similar to that found in many surrealist works. But Suchart claims to have been influenced by Japanese haiku. In the chapter entitled “This is not a preface” he speaks of his own work as an attempt to create a blend of uniqueness in diversity, a collage of the possible and the impossible, the wish to construct a type of incoherence out of the pieces of a shattered mirror:

I will go down to the bottom of the cliff, gather up the fragments of the mirrors to put them back together....I will make a moving image that suits my fancy, like dreams or nightmares during sleep, like turmoil and peace in the soul, like the music that floats softly above the silence, like in the moment of a dream between what’s possible and what’s impossible, like the hands and feet of a blind fate: before night, there is still time for pleasure.

The author employed the metaphor of the mirror in an earlier collection called *A Silence* (See Chapter 4) to describe his writing process:

Certain consequences are sometimes made up of words of silence, sometimes of a movement or a rhythm that comes up from the imagination, even more often from a reaction to various definitions of the words *speech* and *word*, sometimes from the dark side of stories willingly blown apart for no reason like the fragments of a mirror that falls from a movement of the body or the soul: a lack of understanding that has no need to be understood...when one gets to this point, one must get beyond it...only think about what one is able to

understand...no point in forcing yourself to put all the pieces back together again.

What is interesting here is the way in which Suchart encourages his readers to think for themselves and form their own *image of reality*.

The book *Imagination in Three Lines* is the outcome of the author's use of a technique similar to that employed by the surrealists. In the form of haiku, the book is written from a highly personal point of view that allows Suchart to level criticism against society. Despite his positive depiction of sex, the body of his work overall tends to focus on the negative (See Chapter 4). The most obvious example is "Welcome through Thailand," a biting attack against sex tourism. While Magritte's *La Durée Poignardée* may have been an influence, Suchart claims to have been more directly inspired by a pornographic engraving from Japan.

Although *A One-dimensional Man* (1988) and *Let's Start Over Again* (1990), two literary works by the poet, painter and engraver Wasan Sitthikheth, reflect a certain surrealist quality in their focus on ideas contrary to social and ethical conventions, Wasan's blunt language is closer in spirit to the writers of the Dadaist and expressionist movements. *Let's Start Over Again* is a single, solid block of text. It has no paragraph breaks, no punctuation, and the first word of every new sentence is the same as the last word of the preceding sentence. The book is an attack against religion, the stock market, war, racism, and the state of the environment. Visually, this style of writing recalls Keo Laithong's *Confession of the Unconscious* and *The Immaculate Conception* (1930), an attempt by Breton and Masson to simulate madness. But because Wasan repeats the same words over and over, he fails to bring his images and comparisons sufficiently to life. In addition, his decision to repeat words in order to make the text obscure relies more on the conscious rather than the unconscious mind.

Parithat Hutangkoun also has certain surrealist leanings. The short stories in his collection *Witch in the Building* (2002) deal with erotic subject matter presented in a way that bucks social rules and conventional morals. But he makes no real protest against the traditional fables that are the inspiration for his stories. Nor does he intend to lead some sort of linguistic revolution as the original surrealists in Europe had set out to do.

In her short story collections *Oriental Woman* (1993) and *The Night the Pleasure Ended* (2000) Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook treats sexual themes and creates striking metaphors concerning traditional social conventions, but here again there is a certain restraint. It seems to us that she does not dare to attack directly the social and moral norms of Thai tradition.

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