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EXHIBITION

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Periphery of the Night

JULY 2ND - NOVEMBER 28TH 2021

INSTITUT
D'ART CONTEMPORAIN
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

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The IAC presents *Periphery of the Night*, an ambitious monograph on Thai artist and filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul.

From films to artworks, environments to videos, an expanded conception of cinema is represented by this artist, who sees motion pictures as the deployment of our soul, an interface filtering the various processes that animate us, both visible and invisible. Presenting an immersive project for every room, in which animals and humans, ghosts and forests, the living and the dead cohabit in slumbering interstitial worlds, the artist echoes the perceptual and cosmomorphic approaches of the IAC and the *Laboratoire espace cerveau*: the obscurity of his artworks is charged with subversive power, as though the experience of darkness might transform us and reactivate our conversation with the living. At the heart of this alternative half-light, the idea is to deploy a relational ecology that represents a true science of compassion.

Periphery of the Night

Featuring dark rooms and comprising around twenty artworks, including unprecedented pieces, the exhibition multiplies projection media and devices, creating all kinds of initiatory environments in which a tremendous art of expansion is undertaken. Swept up in the bewitching rhythm of the videos, with their plays of light and dark and the penetrating soundscape that accompanies them, visitors are invited to circulate from one to the other in a state of altered consciousness, on the borders of wakefulness and sleep.

It is this liminal border, this nocturnal ‘periphery’ that the artist explores. The periphery of the night: a distinct space-time, yet nevertheless within reach, a stone’s throw from daylight. From the outset, in Apichatpong Weerasethakul’s work, plastic beauty, the subject of the gaze, is extended by a broader poetic meaning, which notably touches on language: this literary trend for metaphor permeates his works, from both interior and exterior – the artist regularly accompanies his videos with poems or allegorical tales. The image cannot take everything into account; it must be opened up, confronted with different means of perception, in order for the colours, micro-movements, light, and sensations in his videos to be more acutely felt. The spatialisation of his work, far from rendering us passive, allows us to partake in this exacerbated sensoriality, allowing us to physically embrace its contours.

So it is a matter of us experimenting in turn this broader form of attention, at once acute and sensitive, which the artist accords to his inner circle and living space, capturing a strange beauty – sometimes comical or disturbing – among fragments of everyday life. His ‘video journals’, created with the small camera that he constantly keeps near him, attest to a vibrant empathy that penetrates everything it touches, to the point of blurring the limits between what belongs to the self and to others. Here, we encounter the men and women around him, human and animal friends (like his production studio Kick the Machine which juxtaposes on his website the sections ‘people’ and ‘animals’). We also see familiar faces here (such as Sakda Kaewbuadee and Jenjira Pongpas-Widner), actors encountered elsewhere, in his feature films, barely dissimulated under the mask of fictional characters.

The incomparable sweetness of the gaze that he brings to bear on these beings coexists with the bitterness of Thailand's political situation, explicitly evoked in several videos. But beyond references to power and the army, it is in the heart of his perceptual question that Apichatpong Weerasethakul's political gesture is rooted: for him, the camera is capable of illuminating an invisible community, by skimming the surface of reality, the network of forces that flow between beings and things, between the various forms of life (animal, plant, spectral). The technical and spiritual merge at the very core of a single process of revelation, which aims to extend our inner cinema: the 'projection apparatus' to which the artist compares the human spirit. Endowed with this ability to probe and foster the invisible, the moving image appears as the refuge of secret connections, a fragile sanctuary that must be preserved from exterior aggressions. The sleepy bodies that populate the videos in the exhibition are intended as the guardians of this virtual memory, switching from dream to dream, to exchange their knowledge and maintain its vitality¹.

By placing us on the cusp of these exchanges, *Periphery of the Night* leads us along dreamlike pathways, which are embodied in a vast gallery of rhythms and energies, sometimes very distant from the diffuse calm and languor characteristic of his feature films. Using singular devices (backlighting, suspended projections, and holographic filters), the idea is to modify our biological clock, to the point of enabling us to experience new cadences and transforming us, as suddenly and discreetly as the atmosphere changes, when the light fades with the flutter of a curtain, a breeze through the trees, or when the sun shifts to the other side of the horizon.

Curator : Nathalie Ergino
Assisted by Elli Humbert

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In partnership with the Institut Lumière (Lyon), the cinema le Zola (Villeurbanne) and the collective MÉTÉORITES.

¹ Érik Bordeleau, Toni Pape, Ronald Rose-Antoinette et Adam Szymanski, *Fabulations nocturnes : Écologie, vitalité et opacité dans le cinéma d'Apichatpong Weerasethakul*, Open Humanities Press, 2017.



Power Boy (Villeurbanne), 2021

© Kick the Machine

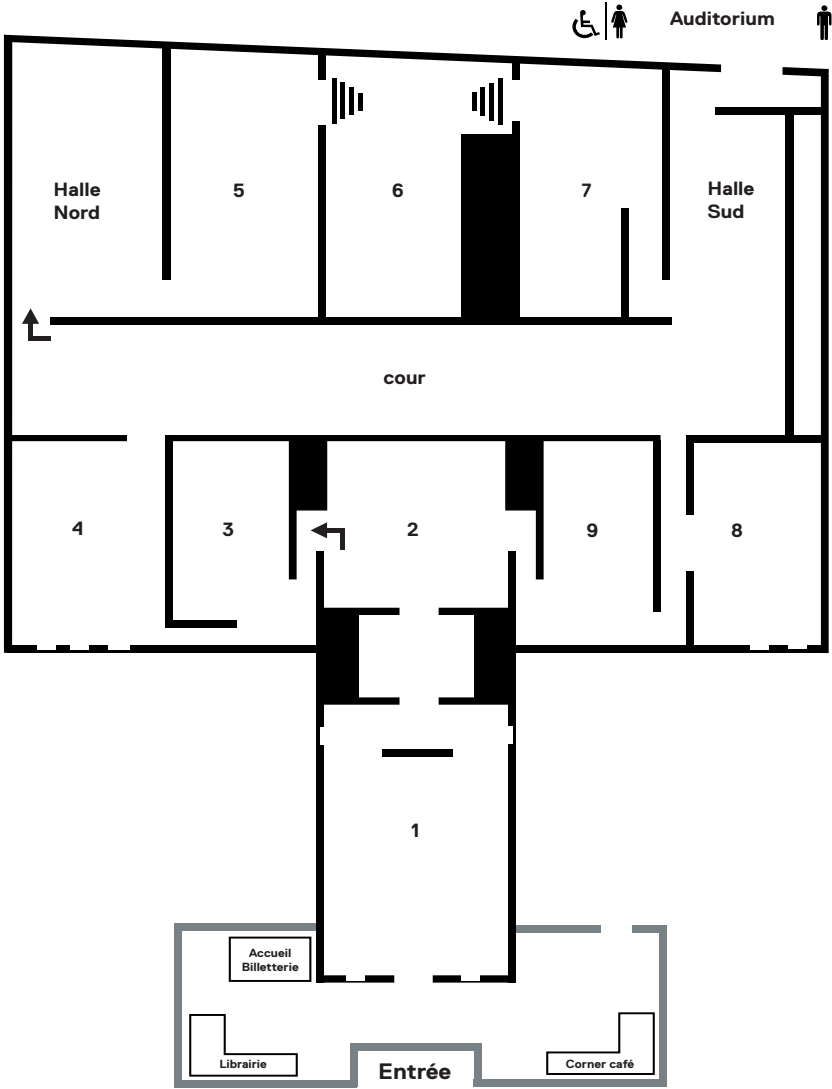
Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Apichatpong Weerasethakul was born in 1970 in Bangkok and grew up in the city of Khon Kaen, in northeastern Thailand. Independently of Thailand's commercial film industry, he strove to promote experimental and independent cinema through his production company Kick the Machine, which he founded in 1999. With his friend Gridthiya Gaweewong, he founded the experimental film festival of Bangkok in 1997, which he presented three times, up until 2008. He lives and works in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

His work has largely been presented in international artistic and cinematographic contexts, notably at the Venice Biennial (2019), Sharjah Biennial in the United Arab Emirates (2013), dOCUMENTA 13 in Kassel (2012), the Liverpool Biennial (2006), the Busan Biennial (2004), and the Istanbul Biennial (2001), as well as in the context of individual and collective exhibitions in art centres such as the Haus der Kunst in Munich, Germany; the Walker Art Center of Minneapolis; the New Museum in New York; the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin; and the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris.

In 2009, Weerasethakul's film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, won the Palme d'or at the 63rd Cannes Film Festival. His other feature films, earning considerable acclaim in France, are *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015), *Syndromes and a Century* (2006), *Tropical Malady* (2004), *The Adventures of Iron Pussy* (2003), *Blissfully Yours* (2002) and *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000). His most recent feature film, *Memoria* (2021) was awarded the Jury Prize at Cannes in 2021. He also presented *The Year of the Everlasting Storm*, a set of shorts co-directed with other filmmakers and shown in a special session.

Exhibition rooms



List of works

ENTRANCE

Power Boy (Villeurbanne), 2021

Photograph on adhesive

ROOM 1

Haiku, 2009

Single-Channel HD Video, color, stereo,
2:00 minutes

The Palace, 2007

Single-Channel Videos, color, silent,
4:03 minutes

ROOM 2

Sakda (Rousseau), 2012

HD Video, color Dolby SRD, 5:30 minutes

The Palace, 2007

Single-Channel Videos, color, silent,
4:03 minutes

ROOM 3

Blue, 2018

HD Video, color, 5.1 audio, 12:16 minutes

ROOM 4

Ashes, 2012

HD Digital Video, color, stereo, 20:18 minutes

COURTYARD

Ghost Teen (From the Primitive Project), 2009

HD Print on Jet Tex, 447 x 817 cm

Video Diaries, 2001 - 2020

11 projectors

Memoria, Boy at sea, 2017

Single-Channel Video Installation, SD Circular
Projection, color, 5:03 minutes

NORTH HALL

Invisibility, 2016

2-Channel Synchronised Video Installation,
black&white, silent, 12:29 minutes

ROOM 5

Fiction, 2018

Single-Channel Video, Glass Projection with
Holo Film, color, silent, 13:37 minutes

ROOM 6

Phantoms of Nabua, 2009

Single-Channel Video, color, 5.1 Dolby,
9:45 minutes

ROOM 7

Fireworks (Archives), 2014

Single-Channel Video, Glass Projection with
Holo Film, color, 5.1 Dolby, 6:40 minutes

SOUTH HALL

Ghost of Asia, 2005

Digital Video Co-Directed with Christelle
Lheureux, color, 5.1 Dolby, 9:11 minutes

Memoria, Nuqui, 2017

Photograph, Inkjet Printing, 63 x 83,5 cm

ROOM 8

Durmiente, 2021

Single-Channel HD Video, color, silent, 11:03
minutes

async - first light, 2017

Single-Channel HD Video, color, 5.1 Dolby,
11:03 minutes
Music: Ryuichi Sakamoto, poem: Arsény
Tarkovsky read by David Sylvian

ROOM 9

Teem, 2007

Digital Videos, color, silent,
9:53 minutes / 22:38 minutes /
27:31 minutes

entrance

Power Boy (Villeurbanne), 2021

Photograph on adhesive

This photograph belongs to the series *Power Boy* representing a young man sitting on the edge of the Mekong, wrapped in a multicoloured garland.

A poetic image that is also an allusion to the political upheavals caused by the construction of the Xayaburi hydroelectric dam, on the Mekong River. Many protest movements took a stand against the project, arguing that it threatened the human and environmental balance of the region, without benefit to its inhabitants.

room 1

Haiku, 2009

Single-Channel HD Video, color, stereo,
2:00 minutes

In the course of research that led to the creation of his film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), Apichatpong Weerasethakul criss-crossed the rural regions of Northern Thailand. There, he discovered the village of Nabua in the province of Isan, near the Mekong River, which constitutes the natural border with Laos. The artist got to know the locals in the village and the local history. The zone had been the theatre of violent events between the years 1960 and 1980, at the time when the army was repressing the communist peasants in the region with an iron fist. The communist rebellion opposed the authoritarian and military regime then in force. In 1965, after attacks between villagers and soldiers, the men of the village sought refuge in the forest, leaving women and children behind them and profoundly modifying the social life and organisation of Nabua.

For several months, Apichatpong Weerasethakul filmed a group of teenagers, the descendants of these rebels, and questioned them regarding Nabua's past. From these encounters came *Primitive Project*, a series of seven videos filmed on site. Within this framework, the teenagers built a circular structure, between a spaceship and a time machine: it became a home base to lay down their heads and dream.

The room celebrates the color red, that have been prohibited in Thailand for being too political.

The Palace, 2007

Single-Channel Videos, color, silent,
4:03 minutes

The Palace was devised for the exhibition *Discovering the Other* at the National Palace Museum in Taipei, Taiwan. Apichatpong Weerasethakul was struck by the presence there of many stray dogs, which he assimilates to spirits. At the Institut d'art contemporain or in Taipei, the exhibition space becomes a time machine, blurring the line between real animals or invisible entities. Heightened by an incandescent red colour, the three dogs become the ghostly guards of this site.

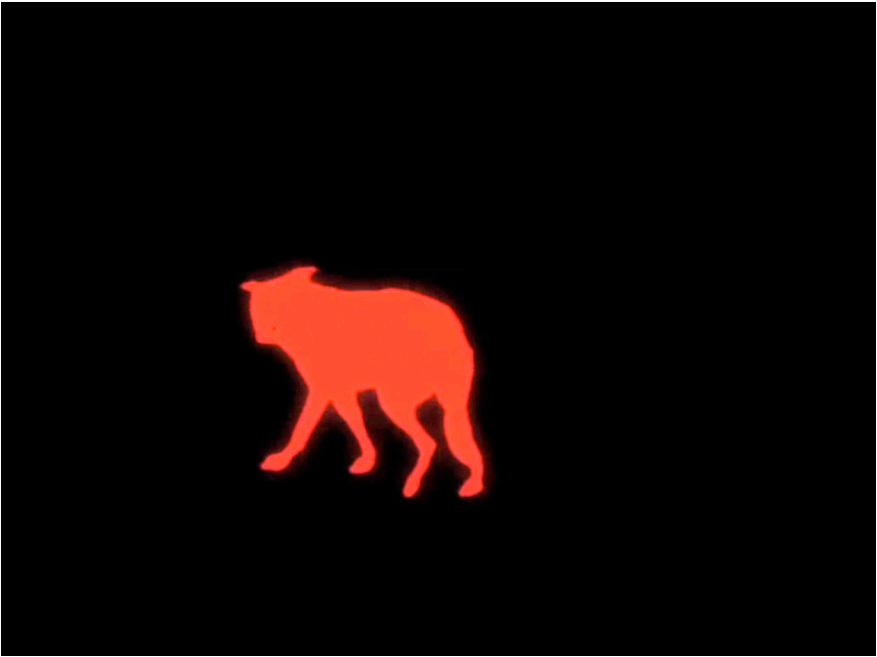
room 2

Sakda (Rousseau), 2012

HD Video, color Dolby SRD, 5:30 minutes

Sakda (Rousseau) comes under a collective project of short films created for the tricentenary of philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Not without humour, Apichatpong Weerasethakul transforms his actor Sakda Kaewbuadee into a reincarnation of the author of *The Social Contract*. While the reflections from a mirror ball slowly pass across the actor's face, he murmurs a monologue into a microphone. The same words later resonate on the terrace of a hotel on the edge of the Mekong, caught by a recorder.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul weaves relationships between contemporary Thai society and Rousseau's writings on the relationships between individuals. Sakda/Rousseau navigates between the eras and reflects on the longevity of his memory and image.



The Palace (still), 2007
© Kick the Machine



Sadka (Rousseau), 2012
© Kick the Machine

room 3

***Blue*, 2018**

HD Video, color, 5.1 audio, 12:16 minutes

Blue opens on the image of a woman lying on a bed, enveloped in a blue blanket. In a reverse shot, canvases representing colourful landscapes loom. On the body of the woman, suffering from insomnia, a flame appears and gradually spreads without her seeming to mind. From one shot to another, the camera moves and progressively reveals the full scene. A wood fire burns in front of a reflective surface and its image is superimposed onto those of the woman and landscapes.

Blue was shot over several nights in the heart of the Thai jungle. It was made for 3^e Scène, the digital creation program of the Opera de Paris. The film immerses the visitor in some of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's favourite themes: wakefulness and sleep, oneirism, and the evocative power of light.

room 4

***Ashes*, 2012**

HD Digital Video, color, stereo, 20:18 minutes

Ashes was mostly shot with a LomoKino, a small non-digital camera with a crank that allows 144 images per film to be captured, without sound. At full capacity, it can record more than three to five images per second, producing an impression of jerky movement.

Oscillating between city and countryside, *Ashes* brings together fleeting visions, interspersed with blackouts. A man walks his dog among the fields and farms. Activists protest against Article 112, which enables anyone who criticizes the King of Thailand to be persecuted¹. A group of friends are sharing a meal outdoors. Added digitally, the soundtrack combines echoes of nature, footsteps, and fragments of discussion, including the voice of the artist who intimates a story about a dream. Now and then, the clicking of the camera's crank predominates. Later, set to a melancholic guitar tune, a bright light spreads across the screen, made up of kaleidoscopic views and a funeral ceremony.

1. The crime of lese-majesty was expanded in 2020 and used against the urban youth protest movement.

courtyard

Ghost Teen (From the Primitive Project), 2009

HD Print on Jet Tex, 447 x 817 cm

Hidden by a mask, a young man in a tracksuit becomes a ghost or threatening spirit, frequent characters in Thai culture. Through the representation of spectres and reincarnation, Apichatpong Weerasethakul highlights the way in which the political exactions of the past still permeate the young generation.

Video Diaries, 2001-2020

11 projectors

For *Periphery of the Night*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul presents a new selection of eleven *Video Diaries*. Often a source of inspiration for his works, his set of videos is the artist's daily journal and contains fragments of personal life and memories.

Decameron, 2020

Single-Channel Video, SD Digital, color, silent, 00:57 minutes

Decameron was shot in lockdown during the Thai monsoon season, in 2020. In a dark room, a woman removes insects from a mosquito net in order to cook them. The moving light she holds briefly reveals her face, the transparent panel of the mosquito net and the insects left outside.

Sarit, 2018

Single-Channel Video, SD Digital, color, 2:00 minutes

The bas-relief represents Sarit Thanarat, former Thai prime minister who ruled Thailand in the early 1960s. This wall is located in Khon Kaen, where Apichatpong Weerasethakul grew up. The artist represented Sarit in various artworks, calling into question the value of his sculpture as an object of worship and as a glorification of the role of the army in Thai politics. For Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Sarit was a product of American involvement during the Cold War and an archetype of generals of the army who subsequently took power through coups d'état, including the most recent in 2014.

Father, 2001

Single-Channel Video SD, color, silent, 14:07 minutes

The images from the video *Father* were shot in 2003 by Apichatpong Weerasethakul, while their father was undergoing kidney dialysis. Remaining etched in his memory, these images were reused by the artists and constitute the matrix of a major scene in his feature film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010) in which the main character suffers the same problem.

Home, 2018

Single-Channel Video, SD Digital, color, silent 1:49 minutes

Home is a portrait of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's house in Chiang Mai, during monsoon season.

Jenjira, Brother Triam, 2018

Single-Channel Video, SD Digital, color, silent, 1:43 minutes

Apichatpong Weerasethakul has worked with the same crew and actors for nearly twenty years. Here the actor Jenjira Pongpas-Widner shares a childhood dream in which her dead brother reappears.

Tong, Somchai, 2018

Single-Channel Video, SD Digital, color, silent, 2:25 minutes

Sakda Kaewbuadee (Tong) describes a dream in which he and his friend Somchai find themselves in a room full of a huge book collection.

For Monkeys Only, 2014

Single-Channel Video SD, color, silent, 1:12 minutes

For Monkeys Only was made during preparation for *Fireworks (Archives)*, at the temple Sala Keoku. It superimposes the sculpture of a monkey and a slot machine delivering predictions.

Fireworks sketch (Frog), 2014

Single-Channel Video SD, color, mono, 1:54 minutes

This video is a preparatory sketch for *Fireworks (Archives)*, which explores animal sculptures of the Sala Keoku Temple in north-eastern Thailand.

Tone, 2004

Single-Channel Video SD, color, silent, 1:32 minutes

For his feature film *Tropical Malady* (2004), the director asked his colleague Ton to pay a visit to the army in the region of the Kaeng

Krachan Dam, in order to study the lives of the soldiers and their daily habits.

Jenjira, Death, 2018

Single-Channel Video, SD Digital, color, silent, 2:39 minutes

Jenjira Pongpas-Widner describes a dream in which she discovers her lifeless body in a field.

One Water, 2013

Single-Channel Video, SD Digital, color, silent 1:11 minutes

Tilda Swinton, British actress and friend of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, organised *Film on the Rocks*, a film festival in the Maldives, and invited the artist to take part in the project. During his stay, he asked Tilda Swinton to evoke her dreams in front of his camera.

Memoria, Boy at Sea, 2017

Single-Channel Video Installation, SD Circular Projection, color, 5:03 minutes

Memoria, Boy at Sea belongs to the *Memoria Project*, initiated by Apichatpong Weerasethakul in 2017 in South America. The video brings in Canadian actor Connor Jessup, who paid a visit to the artist during the filming of a documentary in the region of Nuquí.

The film begins with the image of waves in succession on a circular screen. Gradually, other aquatic landscapes and geometric shapes are superimposed in transparency, in an interplay of currents and reflections. A lone protagonist is sitting on the beach, allowing us to think that the successive images are perhaps his memories or dreams.



Blue, 2018

© Kick the Machine



Invisibility, 2016

© Kick the Machine

north hall

***Invisibility*, 2016**

2-Channel Synchronised Video Installation,
black&white, silent, 12:29 minutes

With its web of shadowplays, *Invisibility* extends the themes of the feature film *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015), centred on the characters of a soldier suffering from a sleeping disorder and a woman receiving treatment for her deformed leg. We recognise the silhouettes of the two actors, Jenjira Pongpas-Widner and Banlop Lomnoi, as well as the decors: a hospital bed, but also the statue of Sarit Thanarat, a violent and corrupt marshal who governed Thailand from 1957 to 1963. The artist was surprised to discover this monument to Khon Kaen, the city where he grew up, since it didn't exist during his childhood.

Invisibility reflects the troubling state of Thai politics. On the dual screen, the bedrooms where the characters are shut in are juxtaposed, doubling up and seeming to meet then dissociate, evoking the phases of a revolutionary communication.

room 5

***Fiction*, 2018**

Single-Channel Video, Glass Projection with
Holo Film, color, silent, 13:37 minutes

Night has fallen. A pair of neon lights provides a pallid, oscillating light that attracts a myriad of small insects. They come and go, buzzing around the protagonist's hand. He attempts to express, in his notebook, his dream from the night before: he repeats himself twice, as though his retelling dissatisfied him. It is a matter of attaining a state of 'awareness' within the dream.

I read somewhere that the idea of constant time doesn't exist in dreams. In case you find a clock in your dream, you'd see that the hands are moving erratically, or that the hands are not visible. But last night in my dream I stared at this clock that displayed the time properly – 3:40 pm. I was also aware of its little hand moving by the second. tick tick tick.

I dreamt about a mixture of horror film and meditation. I was followed by an alien in an anonymous town. Eventhough it had big eyes it didn't really "see" me. It sensed me. When my mind went in different directions, this alien sensed the thoughts and appeared in front of me. The way to escape was to be mindful and focus on my breath. So in the whole dream I was trying to be mindful. I was among the a crowd who were walking uphill, in silhouettes. It was about awareness, yet I wasn't aware that I was dreaming.

room 6

Phantoms of Nabua, 2009

Single-Channel Video, color, 5.1 Dolby,
9:45 minutes

In a nocturnal landscape the contours of a cloth screen emerge, on which a film is projected. Also shot by night, it shows a village onto which violent lightning continuously strikes.

A group of teenagers plays with a flaming football. An intermittent light source, the ball lights them up alternately and leaves trails of light in the grass. It sets fire to the screen, which slowly burns and the projector's lamp appears.

Like *Haiku* and *Ghost Teen*, *Phantoms of Nabua* belongs to the *Primitive Project*, shot in north-eastern Thailand. The village of Nabua has been the subject of violent military repression between the years 1960 and 1980, leading some of the locals to withdraw into the forest. The name of the film evokes these tragic events, but the idea of destruction, ever present (the lightning and the burning fabric), contrasts with the playful attitude of the teenagers. As always in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's work, the memory is not uniform and the image thwarts any attempts to understand it one-dimensionally.

room 7

Fireworks (Archives), 2014

Single-Channel Video, Glass Projection with
Holo Film, color, 5.1 Dolby, 6:40 minutes

Fireworks (Archives) functions as a hallucinatory memory machine. It explores a key setting of the feature film *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015): the Sala Keoku sculpture park. These divine animals were created by an eccentric character, the cult leader Bunleua Sulilat, on the border of Laos and Thailand. The site, which very freely combines Buddhist, Hindu, and mystical influences, is not recognised by the state and constitutes in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's eyes a gesture of rebellion, in a region which itself has a long history of insurrections.

Illuminated by the intermittent flashes from fireworks, the two characters pace around this nocturnal garden, take photos, approaching one another and disappearing just as they came. A handful of photographs shows rebels from the region that have been prosecuted and murdered from the late 1940s to the 1960s.



Fiction, 2018

© Kick the Machine



Phantoms of Nabua, 2009

© Kick the Machine



Fireworks (Archives), 2014

© Kick the Machine



Ghosts of Asia, 2005

© Kick the Machine

south hall

Ghost of Asia, 2005

Digital Video Co-Directed with Christelle Lheureux, color, 5.1 Dolby, 9:11 minutes

The double screening *Ghost of Asia* stems from a collaboration between Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Christelle Lheureux. The 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia was the starting point of their project. The artists use the story of a ghost who wandered along the rocky coastline of a Thai island. Transformed into a series of accelerated movements, the wandering of this lone figure becomes a gesture of affirmation of life, carried by a lively score. The directors asked two children if they'd like to compose the film with them: they suggest and film the actions of the actor playing the ghost. Their ideas, even the most outlandish, are carried out by this half-real, half-imagined creature. The childlike game finds itself amplified by this other 'game' which the film shoot represents.

Memoria, Nuqui, 2017

Photograph, Inkjet Printing, 63 x 83,5 cm

After having long worked in Thailand, Apichatpong Weerasethakul embarked on his first major series of works created in another part of the world, the *Memoria Project*. Guided by the similarities between the Amazon and the Thai jungle, he explores South America and works on a film that takes place in Colombia. The artist is passionate about the topography of this land where active volcanoes and landslides constantly transform the natural landscapes. The name 'Nuqui' is that of a region in the Chocó department in western Colombia.

The *Memoria Project* brings together memories – both personal or collective – through photographs and videos. This photograph shows the back of the neck of one of the actors of *Memoria*, Connor Jessup, suffering from an allergic reaction to insect bites. Apichatpong Weerasethakul immortalised this image, which to him resembles a constellation or a firework, where beauty and pain are inextricably linked.

room 8

Durmiente, 2021

Single-Channel HD Video, color, silent,
1:1:03 minutes

async - first light, 2017

Single-Channel HD Video, color, 5.1 Dolby,
1:1:03 minutes

Music: Ryuichi Sakamoto, poem: Arsény
Tarkovsky read by David Sylvian

Durmiente / async - first light is a production by Apichatpong Weerasethakul for the exhibition *Periphery of the Night*. Here, he juxtaposes very recent images, shot during his latest film shoot, *Memoria*, with images filmed in recent years.

Durmiente shows Tilda Swinton, the lead actress of *Memoria*, sleeping in a bedroom as the shadows grow longer.

async - first light is a collaboration with composer Ryuichi Sakamoto, who combined several tracks from his album *async* for the project.

The alternation of natural and artificial lighting is central to some scenes, which follow in succession through various decors. Some of the shots were filmed by friends of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, to whom he assigned portable cameras, asking them to film their loved ones while they slept.

This double screening belongs to the *Memoria Project*, within which the director develops his interest in memory as well as for the variety of light sources. In the two videos, the sun sets and the characters fall asleep. The artist presents the project as an attempt to create ties between light, cinema, and dreams.

David Sylvian reads the poem *Dreams* by Arsény Tarkovsky. The english translation can be found in *Life, life: Selected Poems*, translated from Russian by Virginia Rounding (Crescent Moon Publishing, 2000, 2007, 2009, page 67).



Durmiente, 2021
© Kick the Machine



async - first light, 2017
© Kick the Machine

room 9

Teem, 2007

Digital Videos, color, silent,
9:53 minutes / 22:38 minutes /
27:31 minutes

These three simultaneous screenings show a man sleeping, dozing, and occasionally waking up. It is Teem, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's close friend, filmed by the artist using a cell phone, during three days in a row. A few days before that, when winter was approaching in Thailand, Teem intimated to him that he was preparing to hibernate until the month of February: Apichatpong Weerasethakul took this opportunity to observe and sometimes disturb his morning sleep. The figure of the sleeper is recurrent in the director's work. He is fascinated by this absent, elusive presence of the sleeper.

A rubber band snaps on a drum
a loud bang
a metallic ball shatters a rock to pieces
liberating its memory
Smoke clouds over a burning ship
A tint of orange before nightfall
echoes a daybreak that looms like the face of a tiger
He turns towards the periphery of the night
With the eyes closed
I walk the dream

Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2021

From A to Z

Animals

Buffalo, monkey-man, tiger-shaman: the cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul deploys a strange and fantastic bestiary, fuelled with mixed beliefs (Buddhism, superstitions, and local legends). The presence of these creatures does not surprise, or surprises very little, the humans that live in close proximity to them: from the human to the animal kingdom, an endless flow seems to be maintained, occasionally punctuated by an in-between of intersections or hybridizations.

The *field recording* restores this profound interdependency: the birdsong and above all the stridulation of insects enveloping the image (*Blue, Ashes*) procure a density, a heady vibration. In *Fiction*, the sound disappears and this presence becomes at once visible and highly insistent: the insects, attracted by the light, never stop their to-and-fro from the frame, disrupting the character's project.

Each time, the same attention is paid to the tiniest details, the same ear is lent to the background: the art of Apichatpong Weerasethakul convokes all forms of life to the screen, down to the most elemental forms. Animals are among us and surround us constantly – like the ghostly dogs of *The Palace*, which seem to watch over the first rooms. Let's not forget his closest companions, cat and dogs named after cinematic monsters (Godzilla, King Kong, Dracula), whom he also films in their sleep, integrated within a series of human faces (*Durmiente / async – First Light*).

Animism

Animist beliefs pervade Apichatpong Weerasethakul's work, who is particularly interested, through them, in the culture of Isan and the Khmer ethnicity that populates this region of Thailand. Based on Buddhism, animist rituals intervene within the order of the present, in everyday concerns. This mode of thinking attributes an inner life to places, beings, and objects: a life force that is different to that of humans, but that constantly enters into contact with it.

It is much more than a cultural theme. Like a living fabric, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's shots are also split into several layers, several modes of existence, which can gradually emerge on the surface of the image, notably through the use of overprinting. His plastic research is deployed in harmony with this notion of an open world, an 'organic spirituality' that structures an infinite network of interactions.

Buddhism

Apichatpong Weerasethakul evokes 'contradictory feelings' with respect to the relationship between Buddhism and cinema: sometimes, he admits, they oppose one another. In cinema, 'it is not a matter of looking in itself, but of creating an illusion of this process.' A monk confided in him one day that meditation was the equivalent of directing a film, and even substituted it. At heart, there is no need for cinema in order to meditate: the mind is 'our best projector'. However, cultural aspects relating to Buddhism in Thailand recur throughout his films, notably owing to the presence of monks, whom he

represents in a quotidian, sometimes comical way, which is not always to the taste of the censors: his feature film *Syndromes and a Century* (2006), focusing on childhood memories, was therefore deprived of a scene in which monks were playing with a miniature flying saucer.

The combination of animism and Buddhism are major components in *Tropical Malady* (2003) and *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010). In these two films, ghosts, animal figures, or princesses from the past visit characters living deep within a jungle. However, while cinema is 'something that is a part of us', 'like an extension of our soul manifesting itself', we must identify in Apichatpong Weerasethakul a 'Buddhist way' of devoting oneself to moving images: without any apparent transition, informed by an archaic movement, his scenes shift us into an unreal atmosphere, creating a non-dualistic world in which spirits are embodied in the living world, where temporalities are layered and spaces merge. Henceforth, Buddhism finds itself mobilised 'not really as a religion', but instead 'as a channel for exploring our internal mechanisms'.¹

Brain

'At a certain period, I was reading a lot of articles about the brain and cognitive sciences. A professor from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology manipulated neurons to

revive certain memories using light beams. If these theories are to be believed, her discoveries contradict the theory of Descartes whereby the body and mind are two distinct entities. This hypothesis concurs with my idea that meditation is no more than a biological process. You can always enter someone's sleep or memory. If I was a doctor, I would try to heal sleep disorders using light interferences at the cellular level².'

In the exhibition, the perceptual experience opens onto an exploration of the subconscious whose first sign, in the artist's view, would be the general configuration of space, which he assimilates to a brain: dark chambers divided into so many cerebral areas, separated into two hemispheres around the central courtyard. In the first room, the video *Haiku* thematises this envelopment within a 'brain-space', scrutinising a group of teenagers sleeping in a capsule bathed in red light.

Bruce Baillie

When he studied cinema in Chicago, the discovery of the films of Bruce Baillie (1931–2020) were a revelation for Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Pioneer of the American avant-garde of the 1960s, and yet less famous than Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, or Hollis Frampton, Bruce Baillie was part of a realistic, lyrical, and contemplative vein: his 16-mm films stem from an observation of the infinitesimal, capturing colours and light traversing faces or landscapes. Paving unconventional narrative pathways, devising films as 'living beings', subtle and spontaneous extensions of the self, this is what Apichatpong

2. Weerasethakul Apichatpong, Interview included in the DVD *Cemetery of Slendour* (2015, Pyramide Vidéo).

1. Apichatpong Weerasethakul, interview with Camille De Rijck (Radio Télévision Belge Franco-phone), exhibition and retrospective Memorandum, from 12 April to 29 May 2016, Kunstenfestivalarts and Cinéma Galeries, Brussels (online: https://www.rtbf.be/musiq3/dossier/a-ne-pas-manquer/detail_apichatpong-weerasethakul-memorandum?id=9268117). Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 'For Bruce', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 766, June 2020, 55.

Weerasethakul retains from this master, who is also a follower of Zen and Tao. The artist has evoked the spiritual and ritual dimension of his work in a tribute published in *Cahiers du cinéma*: 'In Bruce, there is a sense of animist ritual that takes me back to a distant memory buried deep in my DNA, to the period when we venerated light.'³

Care

In the video *Father*, the artist's mother and sister-in-law administer dialysis to his father, who is suffering from renal failure. That was in 2003. This very intimate scene echoes many other gestures of care in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's feature films. The medical world, which he experienced with his parents at the rural hospital where they were working, has permeated his work. 'For me, listening to heartbeats with a stethoscope or using a microscope with an integrated light was already something magical. [...] Cinema and medical equipment were the most beautiful inventions of my childhood⁴, he confides. This fascination for the organism is found in his attention to skin, sexuality, sensations of pleasure and pain, and the imperceptible rhythms that traverse us. Most of his films may seem endowed with curative virtues: they settle us into a different temporality, welcoming us and soothing us with restful light and sound waves. 'In my cinema, I'm looking for a remedy to confusion and madness,' he confides.⁵

3. Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 'For Bruce', *Cahiers du cinéma*, no. 766, June 2020, 55.

4. Weerasethakul Apichatpong, Interview included in the DVD *Cemetery of Slendour* (2015, Pyramide Vidéo).

5. Apichatpong Weerasethakul, entretien avec Olivier Joyard, « Apichatpong Weerasethakul, chaman de l'image », Numéro, mis en ligne le 15 septembre 2015.

These caring gestures thus stem from a solicitude that is perfectly aligned with the Buddhist notion of compassion. Within this spiritual framework, the exercise of compassion is a natural activity, ideally without effort and reward; the goal is to end all suffering and all the causes of suffering that sensitive beings in the world might experience. Extending this aspiration through the practice of video and film implies, for the artist, the development of a 'science of compassion': not a rational and calculated version of this feeling, but a concrete concern for all forms of life, elevated to an almost biological level by the capacities of observation and preservation of the film medium.

Cinema

'The museum space can be compared to a very specific cinema, in which you yourself become a character. I don't devise my short films as autonomous pieces, but instead as the documentation of a performance. They need the audience: they do their own 'postproduction' phase. The spectator imagines various scenarios, as if each one was a character and could remember their different lives. Cinema is a different experience, which falls within a more linear theme⁶.' Apichatpong Weerasethakul devises his exhibitions and feature films in parallel: besides the difference of duration or format, it is the role attributed to the visitor-spectator that distinguishes the two practices, in his view. Nevertheless, his characters, themes, and fetish locations circulate from one to the other, as though the work were splitting into the two directions at the same time. In this

6. Scherf Angeline, 'Entretien avec Apichatpong Weerasethakul', *Primitive*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, 2009.

sense, the videos from *Primitive Project (Haiku, Phantoms of Nabua)* can be seen as a prefiguration of the film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010): we see the teenagers from Nabua village again in a decisive sequence, composed with photographs. Beyond the limits separating artistic fields, his works mobilise film as one medium among others, one vector between the world of the spirits and that of the living, whose future he systematically questions.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul's interest in the brain has some crossover with his exploration of memory and dreams, and the way in which stimuli from the outside world – such as light – influences, modifies, and regenerates them. His short films attempt to express this flux between internal and external, by presenting what we might create, through meditation practice, using no more than our minds: an interior vision, a cinema activated by ourselves and for ourselves.

Invisible Entities

On the screens, invisible entities are fleshed out. This is explained, first and foremost, by the ghostly connection that the photographic image maintains with the past: 'Cinema tends to preserve souls. When you see films from the past, the actors are young, and at the same time, they are dead. The film preserves their spirit and presents it to a new generation of spectators who ensure their survival⁷.' The videos from the exhibition, notably those dedicated to the artist's loved ones and family members, practice this

preservation of souls. In general, this goes for all forms of life and cultures threatened by extinction, which he also seeks to preserve.

But invisible entities also live beyond images. When the filmmaker won the Palme d'Or in 2010, he thanked ghosts and spirits in his acceptance speech. Affecting the heart of reality, these forces exercise actions that could be beneficial or malevolent – so they might refer to repressed exactions from political history, as in *Fireworks (Archives)* in which the grainy portraits of activists executed by the Thai government in the 1950–1960s suddenly appear.

Isan

Isan is the north-eastern region of Thailand where Apichatpong Weerasethakul grew up. Neighbouring Cambodia and Laos, on the other side of the Mekong, Isan has historically and geographically been influenced by Laotian and Cambodian cultures. Most of the population speak the Isan language, which is different from Thai, as their mother tongue, and have their own culture, distinct from that of central Thailand. Although the population of Isan represents about a third of the total population of Thailand, Isan is considered the poorest region of Thailand and, even now, is subject to prejudice from the inhabitants from the centre of the country.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul has researched and created works based on Isan, by studying its history, with the aim of acquiring a new understanding of his country.

7. Weerasethakul Apichatpong, Interview from June 3rd 2010, included in the press pack for *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010).

Jenjira Pongpas-Widner

One of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's fetish actors, Jenjira Pongpas-Widner made his acquaintance by bringing actors to his office for the casting of his first feature film, *Blissfully Yours* (2002). After a motorcycle accident that left one of his legs paralysed in 2003, Jenjira Pongpas-Widner suspended her career as an actress, but the filmmaker kept casting her in his films. She currently resides in her hometown of Nhong Khai.

'Jenjira is like my memory bank. Over the years, she's been in my features, my shorts, and my installation works. She remembers everything, whereas I tend to forget. Working with her has become a source of knowledge for me, a way to connect to what happened in Thailand. She is a bit older than me and experienced first hand the period when Thailand and its neighboring countries like Laos were going through upheavals and transitions. So, working with her is a way for me to understand the Northeast. I don't know the reality, but I am interested in her point of view. Through her, I can present a world that keeps changing. We see her body change over time though my films⁸.'

Light Sources

The works of Apichatpong Weerasethakul attest to a heightened sensitivity to light in all its forms: flames, neon lights, fireworks, bright and sometimes saturated light, and natural landscapes. It is not a simple compositional tool or staging technique: it is matrixial, deeply connected to the ebb and flow of

consciousness, varying according to the rhythm of its interactions with the world. Often 'audible', crackling or humming, it serves less to illuminate than to represent ambivalent processes, moments of 'joy and destruction'⁹, as the artist puts it with respect to *Phantoms of Nabua*. Its materialisation relates to memory, to the imprints left by the events in memory. Apichatpong Weerasethakul thus treats light sources as a medium that directly affects visitors, creating a proximity with them and 'activating' them, both physically and mentally.

Memory

'For me, a memory is like a ghost in the way it keeps transforming, sometimes appearing, sometimes disappearing. What I am trying to say is that memory is not solid¹⁰'.

The artist likes to present gaseous states of memory, 'memory particles' similar to light particles. In this way, memory, whether personal or collective, never stems from a continuous flow, from a guaranteed connection between past and present. It takes the form of disparate elements, allusions that are made owing to their unusual character, but which remain highly opaque. Rather than memory, it seems more appropriate to speak of reminiscence with respect to Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films: the word refers to a process rather than an established fact, the return to the consciousness of an impression altered by time and deformed by emotion, so much so that it is barely recognised.

9. Regnier Isabelle, 'Apichatpong Weerasethakul joue avec le feu, puissance de joie et de destruction', *Le Monde*, octobre 29th 2009.

10. Beguin Cyril, Tesse Jean-Philippe, 'Adieu Thaïlande : entretien avec Apichatpong Weerasethakul', *Cahiers du cinéma* n°714, September 2015.

8. Dallas Paul, 'I have been thinking specifically about the cave of humankind', Interview with Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Bomb Magazine*, october 9th 2015.

Teenagers dressed like soldiers, intimidating fireworks, exploded figures in a stone garden: the reminiscence involves this return of a past life or an old friend – the reappearance, under a new guise, of a reality that had nearly fallen definitively into oblivion.

The Mekong

Although it does not reveal itself frontally, the Mekong River occupies the background of many of the filmmaker's videos. More than just a setting, it is a regular presence, an autonomous entity. It seems to be a witness of the subtle transformation of the character, in *Sakda (Rousseau)*, whose voice detaches from the body, broadcast by a recorder on the terrace already glimpsed in the film *Mekong Hotel* (2012). The two works were shot during the serious flooding that the country experienced in 2011. On the other hand, the photograph *Power Boy*, at the entrance to the IAC, comes from the project *For Tomorrow For Tonight* (2011), evoking the drought provoked by the multiplication of dams built upstream, in Laos and China. In the same period, the artist directed *Cactus River* (2012), a short film exploring the new home of his girlfriend, the actress Jenjira 'Nash' Pongpas-Widner, whose life is closely connected to the river.

The Mekong marks the border between Northeastern Thailand and Laos: from the top of the terrace of *Sakda (Rousseau)*, the 'Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge'. The region is charged with the history of the two countries, successive immigration, and political struggles. This historical dimension sustains the works created in *Nabua (Primitive Project)* or in the *Sala Keoku Sculpture Park (Fireworks (Archives))*, two sites very near the Mekong. Hence at the confluence of

individual and collective memories, the river represents a line of demarcation, a passageway between the dead and the living: it is in its waters that the ashes of a lost father are strewn, during a funerary ceremony reconstituted by the filmmaker, his actors, and a handful of villagers (*Luminous People*, 2007).

Metamorphosis

The work of Apichatpong Weerasethakul regularly returns to the idea of the periphery, of liminal states. In *Haiku*, teenagers dressed in military uniforms play the soldiers who mistreated the residents of Nabua in the previous generation. However, they retain their everyday lives of contemporary young men; they don't play soldier, they simply assume their symbolic appearance. In *Sakda (Rousseau)*, Sakda Kaewbuadee becomes a reincarnation of writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau: both actor and character coexist, with no illusions or rivalry. For *Ghost of Asia*, the same actor is transformed into a ghost obeying the orders of three children. In Buddhist thought, existence is cyclical and the soul successively inhabits several bodies. A person is not frozen within an individuality, but always at the borders of several identities. Whether it is through costumes, masks, or the film's title, metamorphosis in Apichatpong Weerasethakul is always incomplete, leaving the characters to wander between two worlds.

Narration

'My cinema really isn't narrative, it is more environmental'¹¹. If story exists in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's work, it

11. Lalanne Jean-Marc, 'Sur les traces de Tropical Malady', *Les Inrockuptibles*, december 18th 2002.

is of very low intensity, in the form of the limp and incongruous imbrications of dreams, memories, songs, or tales told by the characters. In the exhibition, the 'environmental' aspect is further accentuated, even if the artist prefers the word 'performance', commenting on *Primitive Project* (from which *Haiku* and *Phantoms of Nabua* derive):

'I had a compelling desire to do something in Nabua, to live on site and film everything that was happening there. It comes from the field of action. For *Primitive* [Project], I spent a lot of time, with the teenagers of Nabua, doing nothing. Inspiration came from the stories they told me. I recorded them and a script was gradually developed¹²'.

Fiction and editing arise in contact with others, as well as in reaction to the problematic and unequivocal story narrated by the government.

Night

'I am fascinated by the dark¹³', writes Apichatpong Weerasethakul. In his films, night takes on all colours, all possible textures, from the most transparent blue to the deepest black. The world of night-time is that of the invisible, of appearances and disappearances. His way of lighting by night is very often paradoxical; a fire, a simple neon light, a spark, a whole host of light sources strong enough to impress themselves on our retina, yet too weak to guide our understanding of the space. The dark is therefore

an initiatory milieu, in which our perception must manage to exert and refine itself.

On a screen, the dark veil that the night lowers across the filmic space brings things closer together: Apichatpong Weerasethakul regularly draws on the sensation of contiguity experienced in confrontation with figures and objects suddenly appearing out of the gloom, whereas the limits of the screen evaporate, dispersing into the darkness of a room.

Perceptual Experience

Producing films both for movie theatres and exhibition venues enables Apichatpong Weerasethakul to envisage a wide variety of approaches. In a movie theatre, the viewer is in a static position with a single point of view, the body relaxed, immersed in the light: for the artist it is a state that is akin to sleep or trance. In an exhibition, the visitor moves and experiments with different distances and positions with respect to the artworks. Viewers are active in both cases, but do not engage their body in the same way.

In the exhibition *Periphery of the Night*, visitors might have the sensation of a loss of bearings due to the darkness and the division of the space. The systems of display of the artworks nevertheless imperceptibly guide them, from one artwork to the next and towards certain behaviours. The presence of a bench implies the possibility of long attention, whereas cushions placed on the floor almost invite sleep (*Phantoms of Nabua*), a suspended screen encourages them to walk around it (*Fiction, Memoria – Boy at Sea*), while a series of images suggests a slow displacement (*Video Diaries*). Apichatpong Weerasethakul

12. Blouin Patrice, 'Entretien avec Apichatpong Weerasethakul : l'art, la jungle, le cinéma', *art press* n°362, december 2009.

13. Weerasethakul Apichatpong, Apichatpong Weerasethakul Sourcebook: *The Serenity of Madness*, Independent Curators International & MALLIAM Contemporary Art Museum, 2016.

plays on the modes of projection, with rooms in which the body of the visitor is almost integrated within the image (*Fiction, Fireworks (Archives)*). These immersive experiences lead audiences to explore the exhibition with heightened intensity.

Politics

The history and political climate of his country subtly colour the work of Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Statues and silhouettes of soldiers pervade his videos. In *Ashes*, we glimpse people fighting for the abolition of the crime of lese-majesty, used very abusively by the authorities. Several times, the author underwent censorship and he regularly denounces in interviews the absence of democracy that reigns in Thailand, all the more so since the political crisis of 2014 and the military coup. He is currently working on a project dedicated to the protest movements undertaken by the young generation.

Bathing in this repressive climate, his films use the art of 'camouflage', as indicated by an intertitle in *Invisibility*, and suggest alternative ways of creating community. Firstly, by their way of accommodating otherness, of familiarising themselves with the strange, and then, for both spectator and visitor, of using mise en scène as a vector for hospitality. But also by organising subterranean communications, dialogues between the various forms of life within a space excavated by dreams.

Primitive Project

Primitive (2009) is a multiform project created by the artist in the village of Nabua, in Northeastern Thailand. During the years 1960–1980,

the place was used as a Thai army base for driving out Communism. To flee this control and the violence that accompanied it, many villagers headed for the surrounding jungles and vanished. It is with the descendants of these villagers, a group of teenagers, that the artist created a series of 'performances' unearthing this traumatic memory while reinventing it. Apichatpong Weerasethakul roamed the region in search of testimonies about a certain Boonmee 'who recalls his past lives', based on the title of a book given to him by a monk, a friend of his father's. This search focused on reincarnation was thus displaced and broadened in contact with a memory resurfacing, neglected by the national historical narrative.

The artist describes the videos of *Primitive* as 'impressions of light and memory': the different states of light – natural, artificial – serve in these works as the signs of a reappearance, an incandescent inscription of the past at the surface of the image. *Phantoms of Nabua*, electrified by the play of lightning and the to-and-fro of a flaming ball, form a dazzling synthesis of this newfound memory, through luminous flares and trails.

Sakda (Tong)

Sakda Kaewbuadee, nicknamed 'Tong', is an actor born in Kanchanaburi, Thailand, into a farming family. In 1996, he moved to Bangkok and did various jobs, notably on a construction site. In 1998, he was drafted into the army and served as a soldier for two years. In 2002, he met Apichatpong Weerasethakul in a nightclub and two years later, he appeared in his feature film *Tropical Malady* (2004). Since then, he has performed in several Thai

films and in many films by Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Recently he moved to Montpellier, France.

Sala Keoku Sculpture Park

The statues found in the video *Fireworks (Archives)* as well as the video diaries (*For Monkeys Only*, *Fireworks sketch – Frog*) come from the same location, the Sala Keoku Park, both a temple and garden, featuring concrete creatures designed by the mystic Bunleua Sulilat (1932–1996) and his followers near Nong Khai, in Northeastern Thailand. Before he fled to Thailand at the time of the 1975 Communist Revolution, Bunleua Sulilat had already created Buddha Park in Laos. Sala Keoku became the hub of a spiritual community brought together around this eccentric guru, professing a Buddhism combining Hindu influences.

His unorthodox vision is represented in the style of the park's statues, more ambitious and extravagant than its Laotian counterpart: the divine figures merge into animals armed like warriors. Apichatpong Weerasethakul sees in these sculptures the expression of a resistance, and more broadly, the artistic translation of the movement of revolt that has animated the region of Isan, oppressed by the central power. Beyond the *Fireworks (Archives)* project, Sala Keoku Park is invested elsewhere in his work: it is found in the feature film *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015), the statue of a couple of skeletons from the park, mysteriously 'displaced', by the magic of editing, over 200 km south to Khon Kaen, the city of the filmmaker's childhood.

Sarit Thanarat

Sarit Thanarat (1908–1963) was a field marshal of the Thai army who organised a coup d'état in 1957 and put an authoritarian, repressive, and anti-Communist government in place, an ally of the United States during this Cold War period: under his authority, the parliament was closed, political parties were forbidden, and the media was censored. Since his government (1957–1963), the king and the military joined forces to rule the country. Nearly a thousand people have been detained and imprisoned owing to their opposition to Sarit's regime, leading to an escalation of violence with respect to people suspected of Communism in Thailand.

Despite these facts of violence and the posthumous discovery of its corruption, the memory of the former prime minister continues to be honoured, notably through a statue erected in Khon Kaen, the filmmaker's hometown, coupled with a large fresco recounting his military exploits. Sarit's profile thus finds itself in several works: covered with ants in the video diary Sarit, photographed like a shadow by a passer-by in *Invisibility*. The feature *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015) and the short film *Song of the City* (2018), which both take place in Khon Kaen, also allude to him. The figure of Sarit symbolises the persistence of militarist ideology in Thailand as well as a certain blindness of the population, maintained by the ruling authorities.

Screen

Apichatpong Weerasethakul sees the screen as a shifting, porous surface that must be opened up to the surrounding space – the movie theatre or exhibition venue. The

place filmed is designed to stretch out virtually beyond the rectangular limits of the screen. In his videos, human silhouettes regularly emerge, backlit, within a window frame, doubling the position of the visitor-spectator facing the illuminated image. In *Invisibility*, they move from one screen to the other. As though to transpose this proximity between body and screen, the projection apparatus are diversified within the exhibition: screens are suspended, more or less transparent, and sometimes circular (*Memoria – Boy at Sea*). It becomes possible to move around them and become permeated by the films.

Screens are also materialised within the filmic space, in the form of canvases or vaporous veils. In *Phantoms of Nabua*, the screen located at the edge of the playing field eventually catches on fire in contact with the flaming ball, revealing behind it the eye of a projector, which radiates at full beam towards the visitor. The screen is therefore ourselves, contaminated in turn by the image.

Unfolding

The cinematic apparatus relies on the discontinuity of the filmstrip, divided into series of photograms whose intermittent projection, at a given cadence, produces an illusion of continuity. As is often the case in experimental film, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's videos deconstruct the illusion of movement by disturbing the flow of images: in *Ashes*, the clicking of the camera with its crank, reproduces a kind of sound effect within the soundtrack of the œuvre, accompanying the sensation of visual discontinuity and contributing to the creation of a dreamlike impression. Similarly, in the double screening

Invisibility, mechanical chapters alternately block the pathway of the image. However in *Ghost of Asia*, the progression of the image is accelerated, producing a feverish burlesque that is deliberately kitsch. These manipulations shed light on an important aspect in the work of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, for whom the apparatus is never masked or eclipsed in favour of an authoritarian hypnosis: as the name of the production studio that he founded indicates – 'Kick the Machine' – it is important to find points of engagement between technique and the fiction it deploys.

Wakefulness – Sleep

Whether it be at the moment of waking (*Teem*), of falling asleep (*Blue, Durmiente / async – First Light*), or deep in slumber (*Haiku*), the characters in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films experience a rare variety of states of consciousness. The director says he is 'obsessed by images of people sleeping. I love the idea that to be asleep, unconscious, is to be between two worlds'¹⁴. By scrutinising them, the director does not seek to track the dream so much as represent the immaterial world that the sleepers are exploring, to capture a certain availability of the body, a physical state of release, an intimacy that he presents with benevolence and discretion to the visitor's gaze. The separations between wakefulness and sleep prove false, invented by culture at the expense of some of the transitory phases dotted throughout our physiological cycles.

14. Beguin Cyril, Tesse Jean-Philippe, 'Adieu Thaïlande : entretien avec Apichatpong Weerasethakul', *Cahiers du cinéma* n°714, September 2015.

A tacit exchange is established between these bodies and our own, to the extent that we all integrate the same vaporous space, the same prone state of availability: 'I try to immerse my characters, and by extension the viewers, in an atmosphere akin to sleep, drawing on lights that I see in my head and that I try to reproduce in the film. In this respect, I align myself with a political notion of sleep: as a collective space in which sleepers are active and no longer passive¹⁵'.

15. Perrot Hugues, 'Une idée politique du sommeil. Entretien avec Apichatpong Weerasethakul', *Cahiers du cinéma* n°751, January 2019.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

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tél. +33 (0)4 78 03 47 00
fax +33 (0)4 78 03 47 09
www.i-ac.eu


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