

Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Primitive Opens at Haus Der Kunst



Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Primitive, 2009, Courtesy: Kick the Machine Films. Photo: Chaisiri Jiwarangsarn.

MUNICH.- [Haus der Kunst](#) presents Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Primitive* / a film installation, on view through May 17, 2009. The *Primitive* project is a new work by the acclaimed Thai artist and film-maker Apichatpong Weerasethakul. A multi-faceted project designed to be presented in a number of contexts, its centrepiece is the ambitious multi-screen installation to be premiered at the Haus der Kunst, who commissioned "Primitive" with FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology), Liverpool and Animate Projects in London.

In the course of last year researching a feature film about Uncle Boonmee, a man who can recall his past lives, Apichatpong Weerasethakul visited and worked in the north-east of Thailand close to the Laotian border. Among several villages he visited was the sleepy village of Nabua. It was one of the places the Thai army occupied from the 60s to the early 80s in order to curb those who were accused of being communists. In 1965, it earned a nationwide reputation when the first battle between farmer communists and the totalitarian government broke out. Heavily occupied and controlled by the military for two decades, Nabua was the scene of fierce oppression, fighting and violence. Many people fled into the forest. Those that remained in the district were mainly the women and children.

This reality was echo of an ancient local legend about a 'widow ghost' who abducts any man who enters her empire. She takes them to join her other husbands in an invisible land. Thus in the legend, the district is devoid of men. Its nickname became 'widow town'.

As the Cold War ended, reconciliations were made and the Communist Party of Thailand withered away. The government played down the violence. The public forgot, the dead are forgotten. The young generation doesn't recognise this Nabua of the past.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul's project is about re-imagining this little terrain of Thailand called Nabua, a place where memories and ideologies are extinct. The installation is a portrait of the teenage male descendants of the farmer communists, freed from the widow ghost's empire.

Weerasethakul spent two months in Nabua in late 2008, following and documenting the teen's activities. The project branched out in various forms. It is the manifestation of an artist creating various fictional scenarios in order to implant a memory into a place. Just as in his other work, he shifts between fiction and documentary. Always dreaming of making a movie with a spaceship, he felt Nabua was a perfect place for this vehicle to land and introduce the idea of a journey. He asked the teens of the village to help create the spaceship which features as a central motif of this new installation.

Like his films, "Primitive" is made up of impressions of light and memory. There are natural illuminations from the sun and from fire. Lights seep through the doors and windows and burn the rice fields. There are simulated bolts of lightning that destroy the peaceful landscape and unearth the spirits. "Primitive" is about reincarnation and transformation. It is a celebration of destructive force in nature and in us that burns in order to be born and mutate.

The "Primitive" installation at Haus der Kunst consists of several elements presented on inter-related screens. The main screens capture different kinds of light as the day Apichatpong Weerasethakul *Primitive* progresses from evening into night. The teens are in a rice field, a space ship is seen in the distance, a ghost stands in the sunset, in the spaceship at night the teens dream. Another screen documents Nabua and its open spaces at night, bolts of lightning crash to the ground, explosively. There is a documentation of the building of the spaceship, and two music videos featuring the teens.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul last year won the Fine Prize as 'outstanding emerging artist' at the 55th Carnegie International for his installation "Unknown Forces". His feature films, including "Tropical Malady" (2004) and "Syndromes and a Century" (2006) have received wide critical acclaim and prizes. He is recognised as "one of this decade's key film-makers." (Frieze)

The *Primitive* project consists not just of the installation to be presented at the Haus der Kunst. It has three related components: two additional and separate short films and an artist's book, also entitled "Primitive". The short film "Primitive: A Letter to Uncle Boonmee" will receive its world premiere to coincide with the opening of the installation at the Munich Film Museum on 20th February. "Primitive: A Letter to Uncle Boonmee" is a film in the form of a personal letter, narrated by a teen impersonating the director, it explores the house interiors of Nabua in the evening.

Simultaneously, "Phantoms of Nabua", a short film created especially for the Animate Projects website will go on-line at www.animateprojects.org. "Phantoms of Nabua" portrays a communication of lights, the lights of home, but also the light of destruction, as teens play with a football raging with fire.

The artist's book "Primitive" will feature interviews and diary entries made during Apichatpong Weerasethakul's research trips and a series of photographs. It will be published by Edizioni Zero, Milan later in 2009 as an edition of the *Cujo* series. Major retrospectives of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films will be presented at the Munich Film Museum (3 > 15 April), the Austrian Film Museum, Vienna (26 March > 2 April 2009), and the Arsenal, Berlin (1 > 15 April). The first major monograph in English on his work will be published by the Austrian Film Museum in March.