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## Apichatpong Weerasethakul

05.19.10



Still from **Apichatpong Weerasethakul, *Phantoms of Nabua*, 2009** color film, 10 minutes and 56 seconds. Photo by Chaisiri Jiwarangsan.

*Apichatpong Weerasethakul is an acclaimed Thai filmmaker, screenwriter, and producer whose films include Mysterious Object at Noon (2000) and Tropical Malady (2004). His latest video installation, Phantoms of Nabua, is on view at the BFI Gallery in London until July 3, and his film Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives recently won the Palme d'Or at the 2010 Cannes Film Festival. Here, he discusses both works as well as recent political unrest in Bangkok.*

**PHANTOMS OF NABUA** is a very different undertaking than my film at Cannes. The idea behind my large-scale project *Primitive*, of which *Nabua* is just one part, is to explore the memory of Northeast Thailand through one village and its history. *Uncle Boonmee*, on the other hand, delves into the memory of one man. In the video work, the people of *Nabua* try to forget—they don't want to remember the violent abuse and hardship of the communist era. The character in my latest film, however, remembers much from just one lifetime.

Typically, I only work with my own memory; this is apparent in all of my films. But for *Primitive*, I am branching out. This work examines my memory of the landscape that I grew up with, but since my memory is haphazard, the film is told through the eyes of others. It feels very spontaneous at times. For previous projects I've always had a particular subject to spark my memory, but for *Nabua*, I didn't have any plan. When we started, we just traveled, explored, recorded, and met with people until we reached this village that has a particularly violent history. From the 1960s through the '80s, the government occupied this part of Thailand in order to curb communist insurgents. I felt a certain kinship with the teenagers there who are the descendants of the rebel farmers, so I decided to work with them.



Trailer for *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, 2010.

There's a ship that appears in *Primitive* that is handmade by kids. It is kind of a tool to signify or reflect the idea of a dream, or something that can transport us to another place or time. When we were in the village, the political conflict was quite intense, like it is right now. Part of my idea was to introduce the idea of escape or some kind of dream out of this mess. I made this work during 2008 and 2009, and during that time the "red shirts" were gathering momentum throughout the country and they had started street protests in Bangkok that had already led to the clash last year.

The relationship between pleasure and destruction is very interesting. It's like light and darkness, or violence and peace. These are ideas that can coexist. Sound can play off the same paradox: It can express both violence and fun. My sound designer found out that the *whoosh* of the flaming soccer ball we used in *Nabua* is the same used in Hollywood to create flame noises. So fire can, on the one hand, destroy and burn things, but on the other, when it is being played with, it is a pleasure.

— As told to John Arthur Peetz

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