

# Other cinema

## Fresh 'Joe'

With a film in Cannes, a residency at a London gallery and new short film viewable online, just who is this Apichatpong Weerasethakul bloke, asks **David Jenkins**

By the time you read this, Thailand's young master of languid, elemental reverie, Apichatpong 'Joe' Weerasethakul, will have unveiled his new movie, 'Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives', at the Cannes Film Festival. Anticipation is at fever pitch, not least because this is his first full-length feature since he took his place at the table of heavy-hitting world auteurs with the shimmering 2006 masterpiece, 'Syndromes and a Century', but also because it arrives on the back of a clutch of captivating shorter works that have offered a subtle flavour of what we might expect from this new full-length film.

Glancing over his sizeable back catalogue, which consists of myriad shorts, installations, music videos and conceptual doodles, it's clear the director has a voracious appetite for image-making and is willingly flexible when it comes to working with varying media and budgets. The film that brought him to the attention of Western audiences was 2004's 'Tropical Malady', a dreamy diptych which opens as a tender urban love story between a young soldier and a farm hand, then swiftly mutates into an expressionistic jungle-bound dirge of animalistic sex and death. He had completed three features prior to that, most notably his celebrated 'automatically written' 2000 debut, 'Mysterious Object at Noon', in which he invited an assortment of Thai ruralers to add their own twist to a bizarre folk tale.

It's clear that 'Joe' – a nickname Apichatpong adopted for the convenience of non-Thai-speakers – is constantly trying to enliven conventional storytelling, whether through the inventive blurring of the boundary between reality and fiction or via gently surreal manipulations of sound and imagery. Often marshalling Thailand's poor as his

subjects, he's interested in the place of religion and folklore in contemporary society, and one theme he consistently returns to (and will again in 'Uncle Boonmee') is the Buddhist belief in reincarnation. Yet while form and feeling occasionally teeter on the unfathomable, these are not films to be fearful of. Even if scenes don't interlock with one another in expected ways and characters don't embark on tidy three-act journeys, that's not to say that there aren't moments of unambiguous, transcendent beauty to be marvelled at.

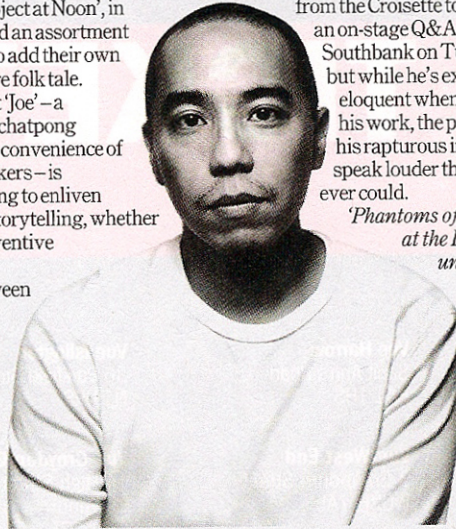
Take 'Phantoms of Nabua', for example, a new ten-minute gallery piece which can be viewed – free of charge – at BFI until July 13. In it, a rabble of anonymous youths punt a flaming football around a piece of scrubland in pitch darkness while a lightning storm dances in the backdrop. It's a work that can be appreciated purely in terms of its peculiar aesthetic, notably the way in which the movements of these youths are illuminated by distinct and varying light sources. Yet dig a little deeper and you'll discover that the film has a pointed political undertow derived from Apichatpong's inspirational sojourn to the north-eastern Thai village of Nabua which, in 1965, was ambushed by the government in an attempt to weed out communist conspirators.

Another short that was made in the area is 'A Letter for Uncle Boonmee', a poignant documentary confessional describing contemporary Nabua to one of Boonmee's past earthly incarnations. This can currently be viewed at the online *cinematheque*, Mubi ([www.mubi.com](http://www.mubi.com)), and is the most direct thematic precursor to the new movie.

Apichatpong will be jetting straight from the Croisette to London for an on-stage Q&A at BFI Southbank on Tue May 25, but while he's extremely eloquent when discussing his work, the potency of his rapturous images speak louder than words ever could.

'Phantoms of Nabua' is at the BFI Gallery until July 13.

'Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives' will be reviewed in next week's Time Out.



## Screenings

### How to use the listings

This section lists predominantly non-first-run fare: repertory programmes, special festival and season packages. Society screenings, film clubs, talks and other events are listed under alt.cinema. For credits and reviews not given below see main *What's on Where* section.

**NB:** Our film listings cover programmes from **Fri 21 to Thur 27 May inclusive**.

### Barbican Centre

See Central for venue details and full listings  
Saturday 22

10.15am: Animate Jr: **Eleanor's Secret** (*Dominique Monferry, 2009, Fr*) Animated feature. 75 mins. With its quirky pastel animation and delicate, jaunty orchestral score, this sweet-natured fairytale might be the most aggressively French animated film since 'Belleville Rendezvous'. Sadly, the English language version currently doing the rounds reduces its charm significantly, so poorly dubbed that it gives one of its central pair of pre-teen siblings an American accent while the other is English, and reduces much of the dialogue to hackneyed Hollywood-friendly platitudes. (Tom Huddleston)

10.30am, 2.30: **The Film Garden 90 m.**  
1.00: Animate Jr: **Princess Lillifee** (*Ansgar Niebuhr, Alan Simpson, Zhu Jian Xu, 2009, Ger*) Animated feature. 70 mins.

3.00: **Yona Yona Penguin** (*Rintaro, 2009, Japan*) Animated feature. 87 mins. *Subtitles.* A young girl obsessed with penguins is spirited to the Goblin Village to lead a rebellion against the evil Bukka-boo, Lord of the Dark Realm, in this cheap but charming kid-friendly cartoon. The sub-Pixar digital animation is clunky and bland and the story is schematic, but there's a lot to enjoy here, notably some great character design and a general sense of unsentimental, off-the-cuff playfulness. (THu)

8.45: Animate: **Metropia** (*Tarik Saleh, 2009, Swe/Den/Nor*) Animated feature. 80 mins. For anyone who thought the problem with 'The Matrix' was all those ideas, action sequences and attractive, interesting people, here's 'Metropia', possibly the most dull-witted entry yet in the ever-expanding 'future sucks' playbook. In a grey-hued future of mud, grit and stormclouds, the cities of Europe have been linked into one giant underground rail system. A cast of emaciated animated bobbleheads – voiced disinterestedly by the likes of Vincent Gallo and Juliette Lewis – engage in a lacklustre continental cat-and-mouse game as they attempt to prevent an evil corporation from controlling the citizenry through their mind-warping shampoo.

Sunday 23

10.30am, 2.30: **The Film Garden**  
11.00am: Animate Jr: **Spirit of the Forest** (*David Rubin, 2008, Sp*) Animated feature. 80 mins.

1.00: Animate Jr: **Pet Pals – Marco Polo's Code** (*Sergio Manfio, 2009, It*) Animated feature. 94 mins. 'The Da Vinci Code' meets 'Dora the Explorer' in a humble little Italian cartoon that sees five animal pals, including an accident-prone rabbit and a supermodel duck, take off on an adventure across the globe and back to their beloved Vienna. The plot lacks cohesion and the animation is distinctly standard but there are some solid laughs along the way and kids will enjoy it. (Jake Attree)

3.00: Animate Jr: **Brendan and the Secret of Kells** (*Tomm Moore, 2009, Fr/Bel/Ire*) Animated. 75 mins. An Oscar-nominated cartoon based on Irish folk tales.

6.30: Animate: **Baron Munchausen** (*Karel Zeman, 1961, Czech*) *Milos Kopecky, Jana Brejchova.* 81 mins. Before Terry Gilliam had a go at the epic travels of fabled liar Munchausen, Zeman had a stab in this live-action version shot in tinted b/w with occasional colour inserts. It uses collage and animation techniques that wouldn't look out of place in the work of Méliès. Curious and fun. + 'Inspiration' (*Zeman, 1949, Cz*).

8.30: Animate: **The Deadly Invention** (*Karel Zeman, 1958, Czech*) *Lubor Tokos, Jana Zatloukalova.* Part-animated feature. 83 mins. Generally considered the crowning achievement of late Czech animator Zeman, this vivid and painstakingly rendered film doesn't merely adopt the words of Jules Verne's 1896 novel 'Facing the Flag', but the illustrations featured in one of its early print runs too. The style is post-Méliès and pre-Gilliam, as Zeman seamlessly fuses live action elements into a world where stop-motion gulls fly in the foreground and human characters frolic aboard an illustrated galleon. The story of a stolen superweapon and the kidnapping of its inventor feel politically prescient, but it's worth seeing to bask in the dumbfounding visuals alone. (David Jenkins) + 'Mr Prokousk – Inventor' (*Zeman, 1949, Cz*).

Monday 24

6.15: Animate: **Up 2D** (U) (*Pete Docter & Bob Peterson, 2009, US*) Animated. 102 m.  
8.30: Architecture on Film: **Chain** (*Jem Cohen, 2004, US/Ger*) *Mira Billette, Miho Nikaïdo.* 99 mins. After documentaries on Benjamin Dickerson and Fugazi, Cohen's first narrative feature alternates between an affectless drifter who works menial jobs at malls and motels and an earnest Japanese businesswoman on a fact-finding trip to exurban America. Pensive and quietly horrifying, 'Chain' was shot in seven countries to create a detailed map of the globalized landscape, in which huge swaths of the world have become increasingly anonymous and interchangeable.

Tuesday 25

6.15: Animate Double Bill: **Summer Wars** (*Mamoru Hosoda, 2009, Japan*) Animated feature. 114 mins. *Subtitles.* 'Tokyo Story' meets 'The Lawnmower Man' in an unpredictable and entertaining slice of weirdo teen anime. Blending high octane virtual reality thrills, pubescent romance and moments of genuinely affecting family melodrama, 'Summer Wars' is hyperactive, ridiculous and tonally inconsistent. It's also smart, assured and surprisingly engaging, particularly in the climactic scenes, where the heroine plays virtual cards with a satanic AI demon in order to stop a satellite from crashing into a nuclear power plant, as her family look on in breathless awe. Yup, it's that kind of movie. (THu)

+8.45: **Dante's Inferno** (*Victor Cook, Mike Disa et al, 2009, US*) Animated. 84 m.

Wednesday 26

8.45: Docspot: **Monsters from the Id** (*David Gargani, 2008, US*) Documentary. 70 mins. Gargani explores the role of the scientist as seen in classic sci-fi movies.

Thursday 27

6.30: Animate: **Fantastic Mr Fox** (PG) (*Wes Anderson, 2009, US*) Animated stop-motion feature. 87 mins.

8.45: Bad Film Club: **Troll 2** (*Claudio Fragassi, 1992, It/US*) *Michael Stephenson, George Hardy.* 95 mins. The worst film ever made? You, the viewer, must decide...