

SEPTEMBER 16–DECEMBER 8

APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL

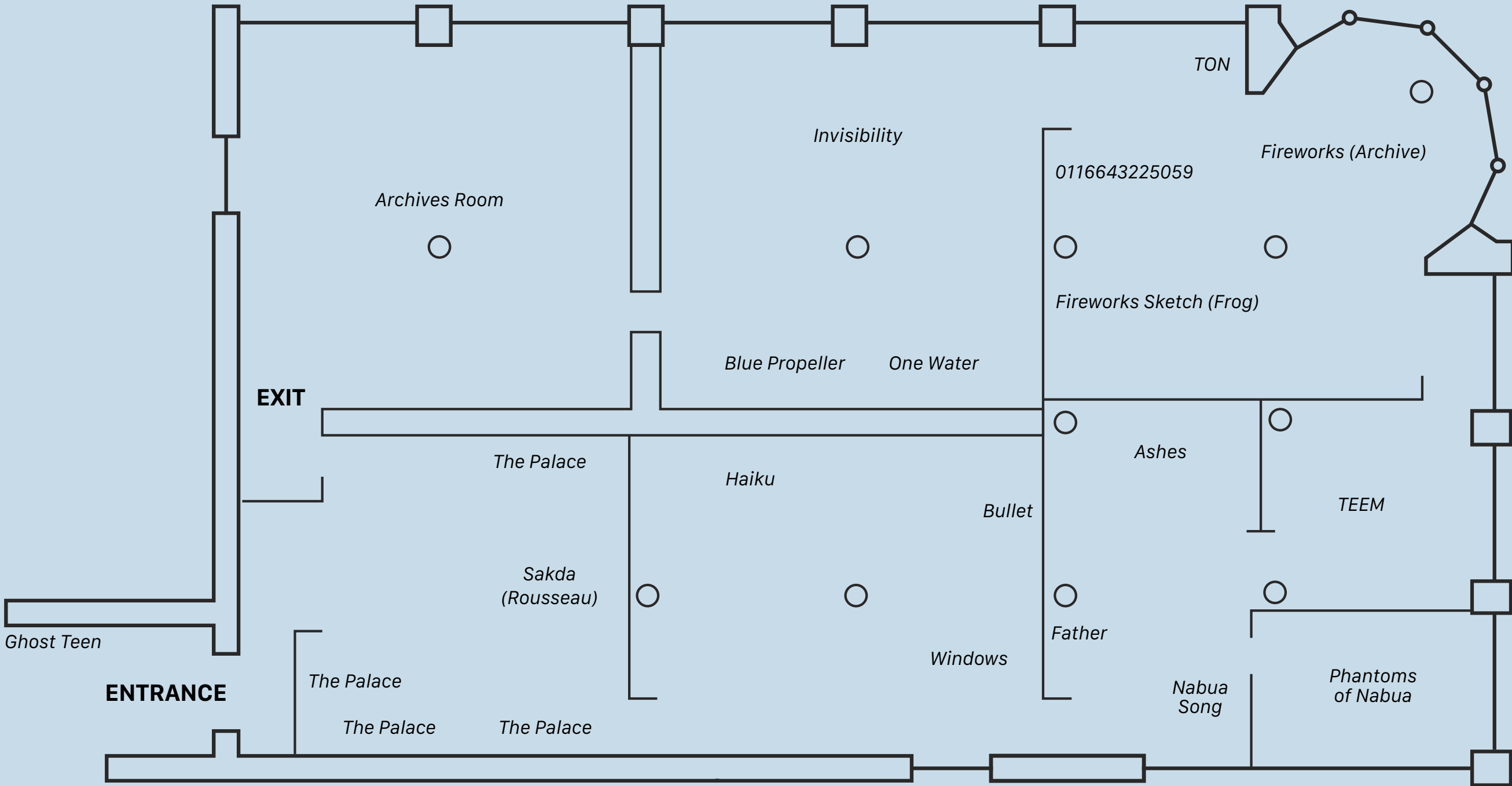
THE
SERENITY
OF
MADNESS



EXHIBITION GUIDE



School of the Art Institute
of Chicago



Sakda (Rousseau), 2012
Single-channel video, HD digital
Stereo
5:30 min.

Weerasethakul was commissioned to create a work to commemorate the centennial of French philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau. *Sakda (Rousseau)* is a portrait of his leading actor, Sakda, accompanied by a few guitar chords on the bank of the Mekong River. The artist was inspired by the works of Rousseau and reflects on the society in which Rousseau lived. Weerasethakul has always been interested in ideas of belonging and the relationship between humans and nature. This film imagines the reincarnation of Rousseau, who doesn’t know if he will manage to keep his memory, and asks, “Once his voice and his image have been captured by the camera, whom do they belong to? Is he the owner?”

The Palace (Pipittapan Tee Taipei), 2008
4-channel video installation, digital
Silent
Various durations

The Palace (Pipittapan Tee Taipei) is a site-specific project that Weerasethakul originally created in response to the collection and architecture of the National Palace Museum in Taipei, Taiwan, as part of the exhibition *Discovering the Other*. He explores spiritual elements of the art institution, which is filled with centuries-old ancient objects and artifacts. The artist saw the room in the museum as a witness of time and space:

“The culture, the languages, the forests, the animals, the treasures hidden in the vast tunnels inside the mountains. We are then forced to move to the Age of Enlightenment when Nothing is meaningful. But the spirits remain, the spirits of the artifacts. At this particular spaceship, outside there used to be two dogs. And it used to be something called the rain. The dogs were always under the spaceship’s canopies and wings, sheltering themselves from the falling water. Now when the sky was empty because there was no sky, their spirits roamed the ship. They immersed themselves in the memories they hadn’t experienced, until they got bored.” — Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Haiku, 2009
Single-channel video, HD digital
Stereo (shown silent)
1:58 min.

Weerasethakul has produced a number of shorts, feature films, and video installations. Over the years he has also made numerous video sketches and studies called “video diaries” with a portable digital camera he carries with him on a daily basis. Some of the videos featured here have later influenced his more narrative films such as *Tropical Malady* and *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall Past Lives*. In this video diary, Weerasethakul documents the set of *Primitive Project* in Nabua, Thailand, particularly the scene when teenagers are hypnotized and sleep inside a time machine.

Windows, 1999
SD digital
Silent
11:56 min.

Windows is Weerasethakul’s first work in video. It is an improvisational piece using little physical movement to capture the “natural phenomena” occurring between the video camera, television screen, and window.

Bullet, 1994
Super 8 transferred to HD digital
Silent
6 min.

Bullet is Weerasethakul’s first film, an experimental, silent short that explores light and time. Here, one can see many tropes that continue to be developed throughout the artist’s career.

Father, 2014
Single-channel video installation, SD digital
Silent
14:07 min.

The original footage in *Father* was shot in 2003 by Weerasethakul’s brother when their father was undergoing kidney dialysis. Forever stuck in his memory, the artist reuses the footage here as well as in a prominent scene in his feature film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*.

Ashes, 2012
HD digital
Stereo, shot with LomoKino, 35mm still films
20:18 min.

In collaboration with Lomo, an Austrian camera company, and Mubi, a global film website, Weerasethakul was invited to make a work to launch the new LomoKino, a portable motion picture camera. *Ashes* juxtaposes the intimacy of his daily routine with the destruction of memories and his observations of the dark side of Thailand’s social realities.

Nabua Song, 2009
Single-channel video, shown on monitor
Stereo with English subtitles
4:15 min.

Petch, one of the young men of Nabua, composes and plays this song about his village. One evening, he sang a song to Weerasethakul’s film crew regarding an August event when the former members of the Communist Party of Thailand gathered to commemorate the first shoot out in the field more than 45 years ago. Weerasethakul layers Petch’s song with an image of his friend, Kamgiang, whose grandfather was killed by the soldiers in the field not far from his home.

Phantoms of Nabua, 2009
Single-channel video installation, HD digital
Dolby 5.1
9:45 min.

Perhaps for economic reasons, fluorescent lights illuminate many houses across Asia. Even though these lights make the skin look pale, and are not necessarily flattering, for many they signify a sense of home, or being home.

Phantoms of Nabua is a re-creation of a fluorescent light pole in the artist’s hometown. The setting is a playground for local teenagers from the village of Nabua who emerge from the dark with a football, set with fire, as they take turns kicking the ball and leaving illuminated trails in the grass. At one point, they burn the screen revealing only the ghostly white beam of a projector. The film portrays light as a communicative medium: the comforts of home on one hand and destruction on another.

TEEM, 2007
3-channel video installation, SD digital (filmed on mobile Vodafone)
Silent

TEEM Nov 20, 9:53 min.
TEEM Nov 21, 22:38 min.
TEEM Nov 22, 27:31 min.

Each projection in this work is a daily morning portrait of Teem, the artist’s partner. As winter approached in late 2007, Teem informed Weerasethakul that he would hibernate until February 2008. As a result, he slept a lot during this time while Weerasethakul observed and sometimes disrupted his partner’s mission with his mobile phone.

Fireworks (Archives), 2014

Single-channel video installation, HD digital
Dolby 5.1
6:40 min.

Fireworks (Archives) chronicles the animal sculptures at the Wat Sala Kaew Ku temple in Nong Khai, a small town on the border of Laos and Thailand. Luang Pu Bunleua Sulilat, the founder of this temple, created statues based on fantasy, folk tales, and political myths to unravel his belief in Buddhist teachings about love and life, as well as legends and reincarnation. He was later accused of being a communist during the Cold War period in the 1960s and sought exile in Laos. Oppressed by the center, and treated unfairly, Sulilat showed signs of his resistance in the vernacular sculptures. Filmed in the dark night, the actors take photographs while lighting fireworks, playing with light and shadow and indexing memories as archival. *Fireworks (Archives)* invites us to experience walking through the temple grounds alongside the actors in a very intimate way.

Fireworks Sketch (Frog), 2014

Single-channel video installation, digital
Sound
1:54 min.

0116643225059, 1994

SD Digital (Originally 16mm)
Sound (shown silent)
5:19 min.

0116643225059 is an early experimental film by Weerasethakul made during his time at SAIC. The work is about a long-distance telephone conversation between the filmmaker and his beloved mother in Khon Kaen, Thailand. Weerasethakul superimposed a photograph of his mother in her youth alongside his own image and his apartment in Chicago. It renders a strong bond between the artist and his family.

TON, 2004

Single-channel video
Silent
11:32 min.

Before Weerasethakul makes a new feature film, he conducts thorough research related to the topic of his interest. For his feature film, *Tropical Malady*, Apichatpong asked his colleague Ton to visit the army in the Kaeng Krachan Dam area to study the lives of soldiers and their daily routines. This video documents Ton during his research trip, which later became a reference for the main character in *Tropical Malady*.

Invisibility, 2016

2-channel video installation
Silent but uses live sound amplified from the shutters
12:29 min.

Invisibility displays Weerasethakul’s continued interest in the issue of perception and memory. The installation takes threads from his recent films, *Cemetery of Splendor* and *Fever Room*, both of which feature the same actors. Here, he takes them deeper into an imaginary world and ponders the future of shared consciousness. The videos depict a landscape where the protagonists are confined to a room, along with the viewers. With no way out, they infiltrate each other’s dreams.

Invisibility mirrors the troubled state of Thailand’s politics. It proposes a decayed vision of the future where one needs to constantly evade reality. The viewing experience shifts between seeing and not-seeing, fact and fiction, space and void.

One Water, 2013

Single-channel video, SD digital
Stereo (shown silent)
1:11 min.

Tilda Swinton, a British actress and friend of Weerasethkul, organized Film on the Rocks, a film festival in the Maldives where she invited the artist to take part in the project. While he was with her, Weerasethakul asked Swinton to recall her dreams in front of his camera. *One Water* portrays a poignant friendship between the actress and filmmaker, who continue to collaborate today.

Blue Propeller, 2013

Video
Silent
0:33 min.

Blue Propeller is made to be shown with *One Water*. The fingernails were painted the color of the sky and the sea. But the sky was grey. The nail color instead matched the plane engine’s blue.

ARCHIVES ROOM

Photophobia, 2013
4 photo etchings and chine-collés

Primates' Memories, 2014
Mr. Electrico (For Ray Bradbury), 2014
Lightbox, LightJet prints on Duratrans

TEEM (The Vapour of Melancholy), 2014
Lightbox, LightJet print on Duratrans

Selected Polaroids from *Mysterious Object at Noon, Blissfully Yours, Tropical Malady*, 2016
Lightbox, Polaroids transferred to LightJet print on Duratrans

Power Boy (Mekong), 2011
Giclée print

VITRINE:

Tropical Malady, 2003
Original film script

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives, 2009
Original film script

Syndromes and A Century, 2006
Original film script

Bradbury Stories: 100 of His Most Celebrated Tales, 2005
Ray Bradbury
Paperback publication

The More Things Change... The 5th Bangkok Experimental Film Festival, 2008
David Teh

CUJO, issue 2, 2009
Apichatpong Weerasethakul
Paperback publication

All material is the personal collection of the artist.

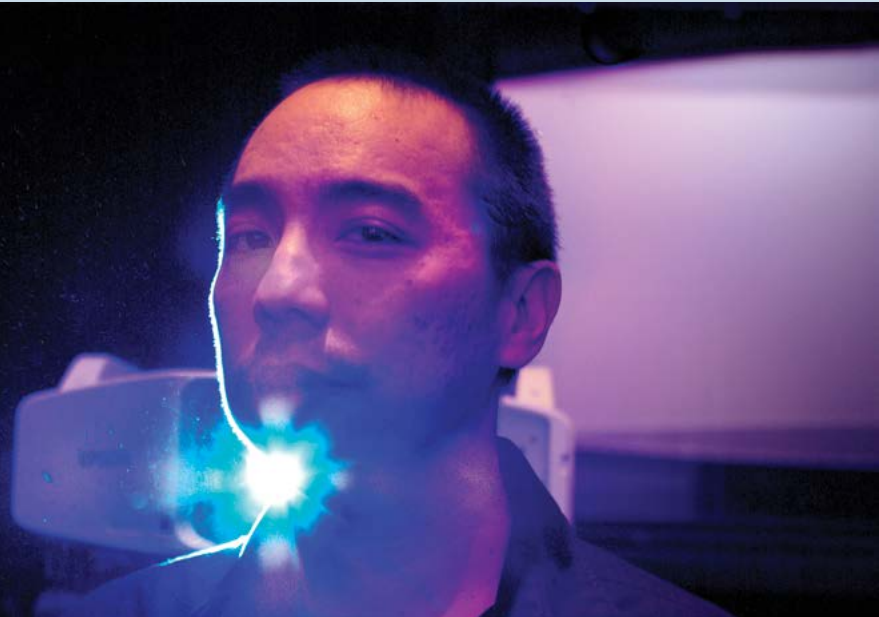


Image courtesy of Kick the Machine films

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Apichatpong Weerasethakul was born in 1970 in Bangkok, but grew up in the city of Kohn Kaen in northeastern Thailand. He studied architecture there before earning his MFA from SAIC in 1997. He currently lives and works in Chiang Mai, Thailand. With Gridthiya Gaweewong, he ran the Bangkok Experimental Film Festival from 1997 to 2008. In 2005 he was recognized with the prestigious Silpathorn Award conferred by the Thai Ministry of Culture, and he has twice been honored by the French Ministry of Culture's Order of Arts and Letters: as a knight of the order in 2008 and an officer in 2011. He was a recipient of the Yanghyun Prize, South Korea, (2014) and the Fukuoka Prize, Japan, (2013). His film, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*, won the Palme d'Or at the 63rd Cannes Film Festival in 2010. Weerasethakul has participated in numerous international

exhibitions including dOCUMENTA 13 in Kassel, Germany, in 2012; Sharjah Biennial, United Arab Emirates, (2013); Liverpool Biennial, United Kingdom, (2006); Busan Biennale, South Korea, (2004); and the Istanbul Biennial (2001). He has been the subject of solo presentations by esteemed institutions, including Haus der Kunst in Munich, Germany; the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota; the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; and Pirelli HangarBicocca in Milan. In 2016, a retrospective of his films was screened at Tate Britain in London. His feature films include: *Cemetery of Splendor* (2015), *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), *Syndromes and a Century* (2006), *Tropical Malady* (2004), *The Adventures of Iron Pussy* (2003), *Blissfully Yours* (2002), and *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000).

The Serenity of Madness

SAIC Sullivan Galleries

33 S. State St., 7th floor

Free and open to the public

Tuesday–Saturday

11:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.

For a complete list of related programs:

saic.edu/serenityofmadness



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