

# Apichatpong Weerasethakul

## Primitive

24 September - 29 November 2009

FACT presents Apichatpong Weerasethakul's first solo exhibition in the UK  
featuring the new multi-platform artwork, *Primitive*.

# INTRODUCTION

Thai artist-provocateur Apichatpong Weerasethakul, known to many as simply 'Joe', makes films and videos that feature in art biennales and commercial film festivals alike. His works slip between genres and reject conventional narrative structures in favour of open, collaborative processes that highlight hidden histories and capture real human experience.

Originally trained in Architecture before completing a Masters in Fine Art at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1997, Apichatpong set up his own production company Kick The Machine to support artists and independent filmmakers in Thailand where he continues to work. His videos are deeply political, strewn with metaphors and a nod to Buddhist philosophy to which he very much subscribes.

For this exhibition Apichatpong draws together a new body of work that revisits catastrophic political events in Thailand. *Primitive* is set in Nabua, now a sleepy village in North East Thailand, which shields a violent history of clashes with the totalitarian government militia, who heavily occupied the region to curb communist insurgents between the 1960s and 1980s. These events have a strong resonance with the contemporary situation in Thailand, where freedom of speech remains restricted and security forces continue to engage in extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary arrests.

Survival and extinction is a recurring feature of Apichatpong's work, and characters are endlessly reincarnated out of the artist's concern for things that are lost in the ongoing merging of cultures and species. His works are also vehicles that take us between different worlds, asking questions about the future and revealing a much bigger story than at first appears. By living in each location he films, Apichatpong becomes part of a community and is able to develop a deeper understanding of the history of a place and its people, which for him is fundamental. In creating an archive of experience gathered from many lifetimes, his spaceships and vehicles take us between worlds that give us time and space to re-dream the past and ask what can be learned to create a better future?

**Karen Newman, Curator**



*Primitive* (2009) Apichatpong Weerasethakul  
Photo: Chaisiri Jiwarangsarn



*Primitive (I'm Still Breathing)*, (2009) Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Modern Dog

## Gallery 1

### **Primitive** (2009)

Throughout the production of *Primitive*, which coincided with the anniversary of the first communist shoot-outs in the ricefields in 1965, Apichatpong lived in the village of Nabua where he recorded people's memories and invited male descendents of the communist farmers to come together and build a spaceship. The result is a cathartic and liberating expression of past and real-time experience, played out in the form of a multi-screen video installation, two short films, a music video and an artist's book.

The narrative of *Primitive* unfolds through the video installation across individually titled screens depicting the creation of the spaceship, explosions hitting the ground like lightning strikes,

portraits of soldiers, ghosts and young men playing, sleeping and dreaming. Just outside Gallery 1, the music video *I'm Still Breathing* is an ecstatic portrait of youth set free, made in collaboration with Thai rock band Modern Dog.

A central feature of the *Primitive* installation is a specially commissioned watchtower structure, designed by the artist and seen at FACT for the very first time. The watchtower casts an eerie military feel in the gallery to echo the presence of the Thai army in Nabua. It also acts as a support for a public address speaker system through which the main channel of sound can be heard; an intense series of explosions that add a chaotic dimension to the work, while a synchronized lighting system casts an evocative red haze around the space at programmed intervals.



*Phantoms of Nabua*, (2009) Apichatpong Weeraesethakul

## Gallery 2

### Primitive (Nabua Song)

*Primitive* continues in Gallery 2 with *Nabua Song*, one of the seven screens of the *Primitive* installation. This video shows a filmed portrait of a young man whose grandfather was killed by soldiers close to his home, with a moving song written to commemorate the first communist shoot out.

### A Letter to Uncle Boonmee

Also in Gallery 2 the short film *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* gives vital insight into the *Primitive* project. Originally intended for screening in cinemas, this piece traces Apichatpong's journey to find the enigmatic character 'Uncle Boonmee, A Man Who Can Recall His Past Lives', who provides the fundamental motivation behind *Primitive*. The accompanying short film *Phantoms of Nabua* can be viewed online at [www.animateprojects.org/](http://www.animateprojects.org/).



*A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* (2009) Apichatpong Weeraesethakul

*Primitive* was commissioned by FACT and Haus der Kunst, Munich in partnership with Animate Projects, London. Produced by Illuminations Films and Kick the Machine Films.

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/P Animate  
Projects

KICK THE MACHINE  
making the most of our time

Illuminations

## RELATED EVENTS

### Apichatpong Weerasethakul Master Class

Screen 2, 24 September, 4.00pm £7.00/£5.00 (Members & concs)  
Drawing from his personal archive of film and photographs, Apichatpong's masterclass will give you valuable insight into his practice, through the making of the *Primitive* project.

### Special Blind Carbon Drawing Screening:

#### Blissfully Yours (Sud sanaeha) (18)

The Box, 07 October, 6.00pm £5.00/£4.00  
(Members & concs)

Artist Anna Lucas' blind movie drawing technique captures the time and light of a movie, and the mood of the viewer in a random and chaotic tangle of lines, inspired by Apichatpong's film.



### New Tools for Young People: LIGHTS/MUSIC/ACTION

The Box, 26 & 27 October, 10.00am - 5.00pm FREE

Pre-workshop planning session 17 October 2.00pm - 5.00pm

(For young people aged 13-19 years old. Booking essential)

Work with artist, film maker and VJ Jacqueline Passmore to create a collaborative and innovative music video using the work of Apichatpong Weerasethakul as inspiration.



### Family Workshop: FACT, Fiction and Narrative

The Box, 08 November, 12.00pm - 4.00pm FREE  
(Booking essential. For children between 5-12 years and their parent/guardian)

Join one of our resident media arts specialists in a workshop where you and your family can experiment with fiction and narrative to create your own dream-like films.



## FILM PROGRAMME

### Tour and Screening: Syndromes and a Century

The Box, 23 October, 5.30pm £4.00/£3.00 (Members & concs)  
Curator Karen Newman leads a tour of *Primitive* followed by a special screening of the artist's most recent feature film, *Syndromes and a Century*, a beautiful and resonant meditation on the mysteries of love, memory, and misunderstandings.

### Thai and Southeast Asian Shorts Programme

The Box, 10 November, 6.30pm, £4.00/£3.00 (Members & concs)  
Filmmakers and artists from Southeast Asia reveal the political histories, culture, family, tradition and death in this special short film programme.

### Tropical Malady (Sud Pralad) (12A)

The Box, 24 November, 6.00pm £4.00/£3.00 (Members & concs)  
Directed by Apichatpong, this film explores the passionate relationship between two men with unusual consequences as reality and myth magically entwine.

## OFFSITE EVENT

### The Southeast Asian Social: Screenings and Thai Food

14 November, 12.00pm onwards, £3.00 (Tickets on door)

A selection of the best experimental short films from Thailand and Southeast Asia at Static Gallery, Roscoe Lane, accompanied by delicious Thai cuisine, and discussion with David Teh of the Bangkok Experimental Film Festival and Karen Newman, FACT curator.

STATIC  
GALLERY

## ALSO SHOWING AT FACT

### FACT Flying Sculpture Hall

#### Halliburton SurvivaBalls

The Yes Men

The Yes Men practice what they call 'identity correction' by posing as spokespersons for prominent organisations. They create spoof websites and make subversive appearances in conferences and TV shows. Two of The Yes Men's *Halliburton SurvivaBalls* - mock survival suits designed to protect corporate managers from natural disasters - have been commissioned for FACT to coincide with *Keep It Slick: Infiltrating Capitalism with The Yes Men*, at LJMU Art and Design Academy until 25 October.

*Keep It Slick* was organised by Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh and Feldman Gallery at Pacific Northwest College of Art, Oregon. Curated by Astria Suparak.

#### Media Lounge

##### The sound before you make it

Jaki Middleton & David Lawrey

*The sound before you make it* is a sculptural flipbook in which miniature zombies are brought to life through the flashing of a strobe light. The work uses the technology of the zoetrope, a 19th Century optical toy, and re-contextualises it with Michael Jackson's *Thriller* music video. The figures are cursed to a circle of repetition as the piece loops relentlessly, like Jackson's image itself, preserved and immortalised through the constant play of his iconic records.



*Halliburton SurvivaBalls* The Yes Men



*The sound before you make it* Jaki Middleton & David Lawrey

## EXHIBITION WORKS LIST AND LOCATION OF GALLERIES

#### Gallery 1 - Ground Floor

*Primitive*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul

*Primitive (I'm Still Breathing)*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Modern Dog

#### Gallery 2 - First Floor

*A Letter to Uncle Boonmee*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul

*Phantoms of Nabua*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul

*Primitive (Nabua Song)*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul

#### Media Lounge - Ground Floor

*The sound before you make it*, Jaki Middleton & David Lawrey

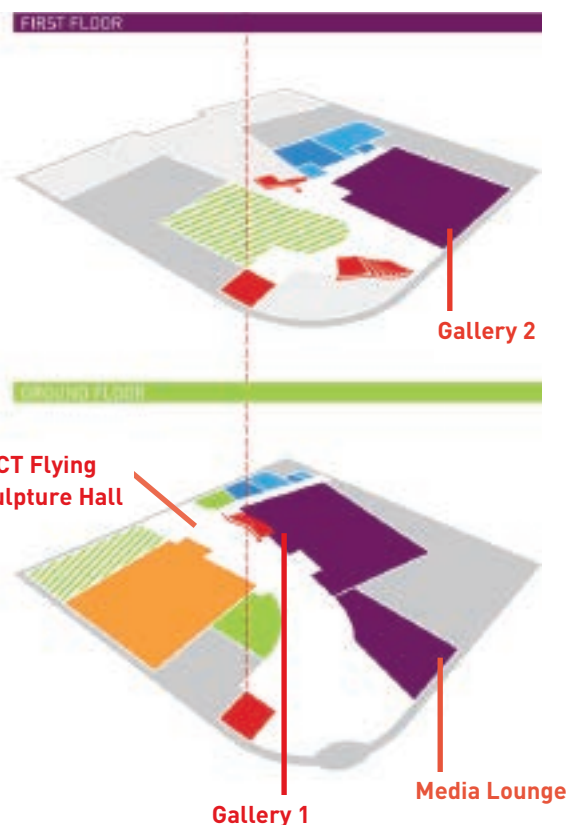
#### FACT Flying Sculpture Hall - Ground Floor

*Halliburton SurvivaBalls*, The Yes Men

**This gallery guide and entry to the galleries at FACT is FREE. If you would like to support the continuing work of FACT please place a donation in the box in the foyer. Thank you!**

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**Please note that photography is not permitted in the galleries.**



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