

Press Release

## **PRIMITIVE: Apichatpong Weerasethakul Launches 17 February 2009**



Phantoms of Nabua, Apichatpong Weerasethakul

The **PRIMITIVE** Project is a new work by the acclaimed Thai artist and filmmaker **Apichatpong Weerasethakul**.

A multi-faceted project designed to be presented in a number of contexts, its centrepiece is the eight screen installation to be premiered at the **Haus der Kunst, Munich**, from **17 February 2009**, who commissioned **PRIMITIVE** with **FACT** (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology), Liverpool and **Animate Projects** in London.

Two short films commissioned specially for Animate Projects will also launch on 18 and 20 February respectively.

The **PRIMITIVE** project consists of:

**PRIMITIVE** - the installation is to be presented at the Haus der Kunst from 20 February – 17 May 2009 and at FACT from 25 September – 29 November 2009.

**PRIMITIVE: A LETTER TO UNCLE BOONMEE** - a short film commissioned for Animate Projects which will receive its world premiere to coincide with the opening of the installation at the Munich Film Museum on 20 February.

**PHANTOMS OF NABUA** - a short film created especially for the Animate Projects website which will premier online at [www.animateprojects.org](http://www.animateprojects.org) on 18 February

**PRIMITIVE** – the artist's book, published later in 2009 as an edition of the artists' book series CUJO published by Edizioni Zero, Milan.

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Apichatpong Weerasethakul's project is about re-imagining a 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, the legend of which steeps Nabua in mythology.

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 eight inter-related screens. At its heart are three large screens that capture different kinds of light as the day progresses from evening into night. The teens are in a rice field, a strange presence haunts the sunset, 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 a spaceship, and two music videos featuring the teens.

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 20 February. 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 premier online at [www.animateprojects.org](http://www.animateprojects.org) on 18 February. 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 later in 2009 as an edition of the artists' book series CUJO published by Edizioni Zero, Milan.

Apichatpong Weerasethakul won the Fine Prize as 'outstanding emerging artist' at the 55<sup>th</sup> 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 the most important contemporary film-makers, in Frieze he has been described as "one of this decade's key film-makers".

#### **Notes to the editor:**

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 the communist insurgents. 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.

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 and different levels of reality and the imaginary 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.

**Credits:**



illuminations

KICK THE MACHINE

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hausderkunst

FACT

FOUNDATION FOR ART AND  
CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY

**Listings information:**

**PRIMITIVE**

20 February – 17 May 2009

Haus der Kunst

Prinzregentenstrasse 1

80538 Munich

+49 (0)89 21127-113

[www.hausderkunst.de](http://www.hausderkunst.de)

Opening Hours:

Mon–Sun 10am – 8pm

Thurs 10am – 10pm

**PRIMITIVE**

25 September – 29 November 2009

FACT

88 Wood Street

Liverpool, L1 4DQ

0151 707 4444

[www.fact.co.uk](http://www.fact.co.uk)

**PRIMITIVE: A LETTER TO UNCLE BOONMEE**

A short film commissioned for Animate Projects

20 February

Munich Film Museum

Filmmuseum

St.-Jakobs-Platz 1

80331 Munich

+49(0)89-233 22348

[www.stadtmuseum-online.de](http://www.stadtmuseum-online.de)

**PHANTOMS OF NABUA**

A short film created especially for the Animate Projects website which will premier online at

[www.animateprojects.org](http://www.animateprojects.org) from 18 February

**PRIMITIVE**

Artist's book, published later in 2009 as an edition of the artists' book series CUJO published by Edizioni Zero, Milan. More tba.

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