

CEMETERY OF SPLENDOUR

a film by apichatpong weerasethakul

รักที่ซ่อนแก้ว




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SYNOPSIS

Soldiers with a mysterious sleeping sickness are transferred to a temporary clinic in a former school. The memory-filled space becomes a revelatory world for housewife and volunteer Jenjira, as she watches over Itt, a handsome soldier with no family visitors. Jen befriends young medium Keng who uses her psychic powers to help loved ones communicate with the comatose men. Doctors explore ways, including coloured light therapy, to ease the men's troubled dreams. Jen discovers Itt's cryptic notebook of strange writings and blueprint sketches. There may be a connection between the soldiers' enigmatic syndrome and the mythic ancient site that lies beneath the clinic. Magic, healing, romance and dreams are all part of Jen's tender path to a deeper awareness of herself and the world around her.



APICHATPONG'S CEMETERY



Cemetery of Splendour is set in Khon Kaen, your home town. You've written of the film being "a personal portrait of places that have latched onto you like parasites". How are these places so personal to you?

The film is a search for the old spirits I knew as a child. My parents were doctors and we lived in one of the hospital housing units. My world was the patients' ward where my mother worked, our wood house, a school, and a cinema. The film is a merging of these places. I haven't lived in my home town for almost 20 years. The city has changed so much. But when I went back I only saw my old memories superimposed on the new buildings. However one of my favourite spots, the Khon Kaen lake, remains the same.

You mention your upbringing in a hospital environment. How has this influenced your films with their focus on medical equipment and your pre-occupation with illness?

For me, listening to heartbeats through a stethoscope or using a magnifying glass with a light was already magic. On rare occasions I was treated with a view through a microscope.

Another exciting memory was to watch 16mm films at the American institution in Khon Kaen. They had bases in the northeast during that time to counter communism. I remember very well the black and white *King Kong*, among other films. The movies and medical tools were the best of inventions for my childhood.





Where did this idea of telling the story of the sleeping men come from? What first drew you to this mysterious sleeping? A true story?

There was a news story 3 years ago about a hospital in the north, where there was a mysterious disease that forced the hospital to quarantine 40 soldiers. I merged the image of the soldiers together with my hospital and my school in Khon Kaen. Over those three years, the political situation in Thailand had come to a dead end (up to the present actually). I was fascinated with sleeping and jotted down my dreams. I think it is a way to escape the terrible situations on the streets.

Is the coloured light treatment based on any sort of actual treatment? It also seems to come from your interest in science fiction.

At one point I was reading articles about brain science. There was an MIT professor who manipulated brain cells into re-enacting certain memories, via lights. He said that the findings sort of disproved Descartes' belief that the mind and the body are separate entities. This hypothesis aligned with my thinking that meditation is nothing more than a biological process. Sleep and memory can always be hacked into. If I were a doctor I would try to cure sleeping sickness by light interference at a cellular level. The lights in this film vaguely reflect this idea. They are not only for the soldiers but also for the audience as well.





Jenjira discovers Itt's notebook with its strange drawings and plans. There are real spaces that we see in the film, but equally 'present' are others spaces, a mythological space of a palace and a cemetery.

When we were young we were told about this most amazing place where the water is full of fish and the land covered in rice fields. The signs of wealth were always idyllic, omitting the brutalities. We have this burden of fabricated history. It effects generations: how do we view ourselves? With the information that is surfacing and recent studies, our sense of identity is shifting. I think the film plays with this shaky sense of belonging.

Could you say a little about the Jenjira's journey through the film? You have worked regularly with her in your films but here she has an even more central role than in the past ...

We started working together on *Blissfully Yours* (2002). After that she hung out at our office a lot. I loved her personality, her daughters, and her stories. She has a brain that I wish I had, a brain that remembers everything. I think she can recall what we had for lunch on what particular shooting day, 10 years ago, for example. So we worked together on numerous projects including a book with her writings. She inspired me to learn more about Isan's history. As it developed, this film became my dream, hers, and a little bit of what I imagine of my mother's.



Most of the cast are from Isan and the film is largely spoken in Isan dialect. Are there particular traditions and beliefs peculiar to Isan as against Thailand as a whole?

Isan area used to be made up of different empires – Cambodia, Lan Chang (Laos). This was until the unification (or Thaification) when the Bangkok authority took over the northeast. My family moved there from Bangkok a few years before I was born. It is a dry place, not as splendidous as the central plains (where Bangkok is). However to me it is very colourful because of the trace of the Khmers' animism. So people are not only living in an everyday life world, but a spiritual world as well. Simple things can be magical.

Could you say something about your casting. You work regularly with the same actors, like Jenjira, but also seek out non-professionals.

Because the film was shot in Khon Kaen, we did a casting session in town. I was happily surprised to see so many talents. There are also several young, enthusiastic filmmakers. To me making this film was like making a first film. I tried to throw away some of my restrictions on filmic styles and embraced the town's energy. Working with the non-professionals helped me find the rhythm.





On this occasion, the one exception was your Director of Photography Diego Garcia, who you worked with for the first time.

Mr. Miguel Gomes stole away my regular DoP to Portugal, to make his impossibly long film, (*Arabian Nights – Volume 2, The Desolate Ones*). I was happy for him because Gomes is one of the best. But I was troubled. So I asked around for suggestions. Carlos Reygadas introduced me to Diego who is likely to work on Carlos' next film. So I might be Carlos' guinea pig. I am very happy with the experience, of course. What I admire most about Diego is his personality. Besides being very talented, he is very calm. I don't like it when there is yelling on the set (mine included). All the crew love him. After a few days of shooting I felt like I had worked with him for a long time. For this film I preferred natural light, I wanted a shade of melancholy. He has delivered beautifully.

In some ways, this film is closer to a linear narrative than your other films.

As with my other films, the development of *Cemetery of Splendour* was very organic. I observed my dreams and thought that they were quite narrative, more than my own films. I give equal importance to my dream as to my waking experience. In retrospect, *Cemetery ...* can be a dream of being awake or a reality that is seemingly like a dream.



You have described the film as, “a rumination on Thailand, a feverish nation”?

There have been endless cycles of coups since 1932 when we changed the government system from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. We have a cycle of dreams and a cycle of coups. Propaganda has changed shapes over the years. People have been thrown in jail. Film is a place where I can communicate. I don't want to talk with images of guns and blood. I am sharing my thoughts in the form of humour, knowing that fear and sadness are the true forces that bred this film.







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APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL

Writer-Director

Apichatpong Weerasethakul is recognised as one of the most original voices in contemporary cinema. His previous six feature films, short films and installations have won him widespread international recognition and numerous awards, including the Cannes Palme d'Or in 2010 with *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. His *Tropical Malady* won the Cannes Competition Jury Prize in 2004 and *Blissfully Yours* won the Cannes Un Certain Regard Award in 2002. *Syndromes and a Century* (2006) was recognised as one of the best films of the last decade in several 2010 polls. *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000) his first feature has been recently restored by Martin Scorsese's World Cinema Foundation.

Born in Bangkok, Apichatpong grew up in Khon Kaen in north-eastern Thailand. He began making films and video shorts in 1994 and completed his first feature in 2000. He has also mounted exhibitions and installations in many countries since 1998 and is now recognised as a major international visual artist. His art prizes include the Sharjah Biennial Prize (2013) and the prestigious Yanghyun Art Prize (2014) in South Korea. Lyrical and often fascinatingly mysterious, his film works are non-linear, dealing with memory and in subtle ways invoking personal politics and social issues. Working independently of the Thai commercial film industry, he devotes himself to promoting experimental and independent filmmaking through his company Kick the Machine Films, founded in 1999, which also produces all his films.

His installations have included the multi-screen project *Primitive* (2009), acquired for major museum collections (including Tate Modern and Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris), a major installation for the 2012 Kassel Documenta and most recently the film installations *Dilbar* (2013) and *Fireworks (Archive)* (2014) variously presented in one-person exhibitions in important galleries in Oslo, London, Mexico City and Kyoto.



Selected Installations

Dilbar, 2013

The Importance of Telepathy, 2012

The Primitive Project, 2009

Unknown Forces, 2007

Emerald / Morakot, 2007

FAITH, 2006



Feature Filmography

2015: *Cemetery of Splendour / Rak Ti Khon Kaen*

2012: *Mekong Hotel (medium length)*

2010: *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives / Lung Boonmee Raluek Chat*

2006: *Syndromes and a Century / Sang Sattawat*

2004: *Tropical Malady / Sud Pralad*

2003: *The Adventure of Iron Pussy / Huajai Toranong*

2002: *Blissfully Yours / Sud Sanaeha*

2000: *Mysterious Object at Noon / Dokfar Nai Meu Marn*








JENJIRA PONGPAS WIDNER as Jenjira

Jenjira first met Apichatpong when she brought actors to his office for the casting of *Blissfully Yours*. After repeated meetings, Apichatpong gave her a lead role in the film. Apart from his films, Jenjira worked as a supporting actress for films, advertising, and television shows. After a motorcycle accident in 2003 that crippled her leg, Jenjira suspended her acting career. However, Apichatpong continues to feature her in his works. She's currently staying in Nhong Khai, her hometown, with her American partner, Frank Widner. She's intending to live there for the rest of her life, while producing handicrafts for a living. Later in 2015, Jenjira plans to have an operation on her leg.



JARINPATTRA RUEANGRAM as Keng

Jarinpattrra holds a first class honours degree in Business Administration and had worked in a cement and oil exporting company before she joined this film. Jarinpattrra is now working at Suvarnabhumi Airport as a Brand Ambassador for Pan Thai Air.



BANLOP LOMNOI as Itt

Banlop worked as camera operator and director on many video projects for various organizations. After appearing as the lead role in Apichatpong's *Tropical Malady*, he went back to producing many television series and programmes, as well as being presenter in commercials. He also had the opportunity to play the lead in a Taiwanese film, *Detours to Paradise*, directed by Rich Lee. He later founded his own company, Fah Sang Bang Sapan, producing Buddhism and Sports programmes for television. Banlop also makes and sells moon cakes in the northeast region.



DIEGO GARCIA

Director of Photography

Diego Garcia was born in Mexico City in 1979. He studied at the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica, CCC. He started his professional career photographing documentaries and indie films mostly researching and developing natural light techniques. He has worked in different countries and collaborated with various authorial-directors like Mark Jackson, Yulene Olaizola, Gabriel Mascaro and Apichatpong Weerasethakul. The films he's worked on have been selected by Cannes, Locarno, Sundance and London among many other international film festivals. He currently lives in Mexico.



AKRITCHALERM KALAYANAMITR

Lead Sound Designer

He has worked with Apichatpong Weerasethakul on all his films and art installations since *Tropical Malady*. In 2008, he founded an open art space, SOL (Space of Liberty) with his frequent sound collaborator, Koichi Shimizu. They were invited to create Anat(t)a, a sound installation, for the 37th Rotterdam International Film Festival in 2008. His recent credits include Pen-ek Ratanaruang's *Headshot* (2011), Kongdej Jaturanrasamee's *Tang Wong* (2013), Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit's *Mary is Happy, Mary is Happy* (2013), Lee Chatametikool's *Concrete Clouds* (2013) and Jakrawal Nilthamrong's *Vanishing Point* (2015).



LEE CHATAMETIKOOL

Editor & Post Supervisor

Lee Chatametikool is an award-winning editor and filmmaker. After studying in the United States, he returned to Bangkok in 2001 for Apichatpong Weerasethakul's first feature, *Blissfully Yours*, marking the start of a decade of fruitful collaboration with Thailand's new generation of filmmakers. While collaborating closely with prominent independent Thai directors – he has worked with Apichatpong on four of his films – he has also worked on commercial projects, including the hit Thai horror flick, *Shutter* (2004). He was twice awarded Best Editor at the Asian Film Awards, for *Syndromes and a Century* and *Karaoke*. The Bangkok Film Critic's Assembly also named him Best Editor in 2008 for *Wonderful Town*. He took a break from editing to direct his debut feature film, *Concrete Clouds* (2013), which premiered in Busan and was screened in competition at Rotterdam, Taipei, Shanghai and Edinburgh. Most recently, *Concrete Clouds* swept the Thai 'Oscars' with big wins for Best Film, Best Director and Best Supporting Actress. In 2002, Lee founded his own post-production company, Houdini Studio, which he expanded into a full-service digital laboratory, White Light Post, in 2010, to do colour grading and finishing for Thai and regional feature films.

SUCHADA SUWANNASORN

Line Producer

Although Suchada never studied filmmaking, her love for cinema from an early age urged her to study on her own, reading books from libraries and second-hand bookstores. Suchada has collaborated with Apichatpong on various films, from *Mysterious Object At Noon* to *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. Besides Apichatpong's films, she's also a freelancer working with other directors on films such as, *Killer Tattoo*, *Flower of The Night*, *Bangkok Kung-Fu*. Her personal works are installations and short films, which have been shown in many film festivals.

SOMPOT CHIDGASORNPONGSE

1st Assistant Director

Sompot Chidgasornpongse has been working in the film industry; both local and international. He started his collaboration with Apichatpong Weerasethakul as an intern in *The Adventure of Iron Pussy*, and later as assistant director on many of Apichatpong's shorts and features, such as *Worldly Desires*, *Tropical Malady*, *Syndromes and a Century*, etc. His personal short films explore the representations of everyday life in creative and thought-provoking ways. They were shown at various international film festivals, including Rotterdam, Oberhausen, Viennale, Vision du Réel, Signes de Nuit, Indielisboa, etc. He graduated from a MFA Film/Video programme at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) and currently lives in Bangkok. He's now finishing his first feature documentary, *Railway Sleepers*, about the experience of train travel in Thailand.



CEMETERY OF SPLENDOUR (RAK TI KHON KAEN)

a film by Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Thailand/UK/France/Germany/Malaysia
122 mins – DCP – 1.85:1 – 7.1 and 5.1 surround sound – in Thai

MAIN CAST

Jen: Jenjira Pongpas Widner

Itt: Banlop Lomnoi

Keng: Jarinpattri Rueangram

Nurse Tet: Petcharat Chaiburi

Meditation Instructor: Tawatchai Buawat

Goddess # 1: Sujittraporn Wongsrikeaw

Goddess # 2: Bhattaratorn Senkraigul

Tong: Sakda Kaewbuadee

Library Director: Pongsadhorn Lertsukon

Cream Hostess: Sasipim Piwansenee

Singing Woman: Apinya Unphanlam

Richard: Richard Abramson

Parasite Doctor: Kammanit Sansuklerd

Doctor Prasan: Boonyarak Bodlakorn

Soldier's Wife: Wacharee Nagvichien

MAIN CREW

Written, directed and produced by Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Director of Photography: Diego Garcia

Production Designer: Akekarat Homlaor

Art Director: Pichan Muangdoug

Costume: Phim U-mari

Sound Design: Akritchalerm Kalayanamitr

Editor: Lee Chatametikool

Line Producer: Suchada Sirithanawuddhi

1st Assistant Director: Sompot Chidgasornpongse

A Kick the Machine Films (Thailand) and
Illuminations Films (Past Lives) Production (United Kingdom)

In co-production with Anna Sanders Films (France), Geißendörfer Film- und
Fernsehproduktion (Germany), Match Factory Productions (Germany),
ZDF/arte (Germany)
and

Astro Shaw (Malaysia), Asia Culture Center-Asian Arts Theatre (South Korea),
Detalle Films (Mexico), Louverture Films (USA), Tordenfilm (Norway).

Producers: Keith Griffiths, Simon Field, Charles de Meaux, Michael Weber,
Hans Geißendörfer.

Co-producers: Viola Fügen, Najwa Abu Bakar, Moisés Cosío Espinosa,
Eric Vogel, Ingunn Sundelin, Joslyn Barnes, Caroleen Feeney, Danny Glover.

Associate Producers: Georges Schoucair, Susan Rockefeller, Holger Stern (ZDF/arte).

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World Sales: The Match Factory



A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a floral-patterned shirt, sits on a concrete bench in the foreground, looking away from the camera towards a large, muddy construction site. In the background, several children are playing in the mud, and an orange excavator is visible on the left. The scene is surrounded by green trees and foliage under an overcast sky.

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phone +33-9-7044-9865 (leave messages)

e-mail: IntlPressIT@aol.com

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WORLD SALES

THE MATCH FACTORY GmbH

Balthasarstr. 79 - 81

50670 Cologne/Germany

phone +49 221 539 709-0

fax +49 221 539 709-10

e-mail: info@matchfactory.de

www.the-match-factory.com

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