

Welcome - I'm absolutely buzzing to be here today sharing this film with you!

This screening came about following a conversation with Sara about programming a film to show as part of the public programme for our last exhibition, Kian Benson Baile's *Culchie Boy, I Love You*. Sara began to talk through the themes of the work in which a heady mix of Irish folklore, mythology and traditional crafts were coming together in an exuberant expression of queer rural identity.

When I began to think about films that could be shown in conversation with these ideas, *Tropical Malady* immediately came to mind. It felt like an exciting counterpoint to Kian's work in a different cultural context.

The film takes place in a rural Thai city on the edge of a jungle and of course in the jungle itself, a location which Weerasethakul has likened to a protagonist. The story is rich in folklore and magic,

coming explicitly to the fore in the second act, and it's through this that the central theme of raw, consuming desire plays out.

I'd like to use this introduction to draw out elements of Weerasethakul's ideas and process which will I hope open this two-part structure out for you somewhat.

While the actors remain the same in both acts, their characters shift - but these two narratives play into one another and our experience of each part expands with the knowledge of the other.

Weerasethakul's narrative approach more generally in his films is often folkloric and collective in nature. Throughout his work, he draws on his memories and the stories of those around him or has sought out local accounts where he's shooting of experiences that play into the story he's trying to tell. He's cited using the stories of people as an energy source to guide the flow of his work.

It's interesting that he's discussed the blending of fiction and non-fiction found in the films of Abbas Kiarostami, the great Iranian director, as inspiration for his own approach. While Kiarostami's works feel much more entrenched in what we might think of as lived experience, Weerasethakul's approach speaks to an experience of the world where spirits are present and our foggy memories are as present and real as the day-to-day movements of life.

A quote he has often drawn on comes from Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who, reflecting on a childhood memory that blurred between different points in time, stated. "The memory is clear but there is no possibility that it is true."

Speaking of his own cinema, Weerasethakul has said "It was hard to remember the real past clearly, so I made films without knowing how true they really were."

He himself says he had encounters with ghosts as a child which he remembered factually when he was young, but this slowly changed to become fiction as he grew.

Looking at some examples of his narrative approach - a blurring of folklore, and collective and personal memory - we might for instance take *Mysterious Object at Noon* where locals are enlisted to contribute an improvised narration of a tale, becoming a fantastical collective act of folk storytelling, building and diverging with each new voice. In *Syndromes and a Century*, he draws on his own experience growing up in a hospital environment with both his parents being doctors, which also bleeds into *Cemetery of Splendour* - a film that's additionally heavily influenced by the life and memories of the lead actress.

A prominent example is *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* inspired by a book written by a monk who could recall his past 7 lives. Weerasethakul began to search out people who could recall past lives, of which he found many, before landing in a village that had a lot of memories attached to it concerning the brutality during the communist era in the 60s and found that this memory was like a

past life of the local people, who were trying to forget and move on to a different life.

Here - memory and place become a shared experience. Indeed, Weerasethakul has stated that not only has he had his own experiences with ghosts but that for him, ghosts act as a way to express the spaces they are attached to.

It is interesting in this context as you'll find these were ideas he was already formulating during the making of *Tropical Malady*.

His scripts exist to be broken - and to allow for this *Tropical Malady* was filmed in chronological order, so that ideas could emerge through the making of it, in collaboration with the cast, the crew, and the locals - as well as through what naturally emerges for him on camera, be it changes in light or circumstances during filming.

Looking at this jungle setting, Weerasethakul states that the subtlety of shadows in the jungle at night works to emphasise the emotions playing out on screen. At night, little details become the

focus. Weerasethakul has said that this experience of filming *Tropical Malady* at night brought out shamanistic feelings out in himself, and he began to experience the character walking through the jungle in the second act as an out-of-body reflection of himself.

This film emerged from an idea of his experience of love and how he could express the fear and happiness of this emotion. What emerged was a tender romance coming up against a primal tale of hunter and prey.

I'll leave you with these thoughts to explore this fantastic film for yourselves but first I'd like to echo Weerasethakul's thank yous in his Palm D'Or acceptance speech for *Uncle Boonmee* where he thanked the spirits and ghosts of Thailand. I want to thank the spirits, fae & sidhe, invoked so beautifully in Kian's exhibition, who I hope might join us in the dark today. I also really want to thank Sara Greavu for this opportunity, to Cathy Coughlan for her brilliant work planning this Open Day, to all my colleagues in Project for their help, to Second Run DVD for their help making this screening a reality, and Apichatpong Weerasethakul himself for giving us this rare opportunity to show this film. He was initially reluctant as the

film is in need of restoration but given the context we're showing it
in was very happy for us to share it with you today. Thank you all so
much for being here for this rare opportunity - enjoy!