



OFFICIAL SELECTION  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

**Illuminations Films** and **Kick the Machine Films** present in association with **ARTE France – La Lucarne** and with the participation of **The Match Factory**  
**MEKONG HOTEL** แม่น้ำโขงโฮเต็ล Starring **Jenjaira Pongpas, Maiyatan Techaparn, Sakda Kaewbuadee, Chai Bhatana, Chatchai Suban** Production Manager **Chaisiri Jiwangsan**  
Assistant Director **Chatchai Suban** Account Administrator **Parichat Pu-arree** Music **Chai Bhatana** Sound **Chalermrat Kawewattana** Sound Design **Akritchalerm Kalayanamitr**  
Executive Producers **Simon Field, Keith Griffiths** Commissioning Editor **Luciano Rigolini** for **ARTE France – La Lucarne** Post Production supported by **Jacob Burns Film Center** with additional support from **Fuori Orario (Rai Tre)** Filmed, Edited, Directed and Produced by **Apichatpong Weerasethakul** World Film Sales **The Match Factory**

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JACOB BURNS  
FILM CENTER

Apichatpong  
Weerasethakul

# Mekong Hotel

แม่น้ำโขงโฮเต็ล





# Synopsis

Mekong Hotel is a portrait of a hotel near the Mekong River in the north-east of Thailand. The river there marks the border between Thailand and Laos. In the bedrooms and terraces, Apichatpong held a rehearsal with his crew for a movie that he wrote years ago called Ecstasy Garden.

The film shuffles different realms, fact and fiction, expressing the bonds between a vampire-like mother and her daughter, the young lovers and the river. *Mekong Hotel* - since it was shot at the time of the heavy flooding in Thailand - also weaves in layers of demolition, politics, and a drifting dream of the future.

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# Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Apichatpong Weerasethakul has come to be recognised as one of the most original voices in cinema today. His five feature films, short films and installations have won him widespread international recognition and numerous festival prizes, culminating in the winning of the Cannes Palme d'Or in 2010 with Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives. His previous feature Syndromes and a Century (2006) was recognised as one of the best films of the last decade in several 2010 polls.

Apichatong began making films and video shorts in 1994 and completed his first feature in 2000. Lyrical and often fascinatingly mysterious, his 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 production company Kick the Machine Films, founded in 1999.

Apichatpong has also mounted exhibitions and installations in many countries since 1998. His installations have included the multi-screen project Primitive (2009), which was complimented by Uncle Boonmee and which has been acquired for major museum collections and was presented at the Haus der Kunst, Munich, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and The New Museum, New York among others. He will make a major installation for the 2012 Kassel Documenta. His most recent projects include on-line films for Mubi (Ashes, 2012) and the Walker Art Center in the USA (Three Wonders of the World, 2012).

He is currently working on a project focussing on the Mekong River at the Thai-Laotian border.





# Filmography

## Feature Films

- Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives / Lung Boonmee Raluek Chat, 2010
- Syndromes and a Century / Sang Sattawat, 2008
- Tropical Malady / Sud Pralad, 2004
- The Adventure of Iron Pussy / Huajai Toranong, 2003
- Blissfully Yours / Sud Sanaeha, 2002
- Mysterious Object at Noon / Dokfar Nai Meu Marn, 2000

## Selected Recent Installations\* and Shorts

- Mekong Hotel, 2012
- Ashes, 2012
- Sakda (Rousseau), 2012
- \*For Tomorrow For Tonight, 2011
- Monsoon, 2011
- M Hotel, 2011
- \*A Man Who Ate an Entire Tree, 2010
- \*The Primitive Project, 2009
- \*Phantoms of Nabua, 2009
- A Letter to Uncle Boonmee, 2009
- Mobile Men, 2008
- Vampire, 2008
- \*Unknown Forces, 2007
- \*Emerald / Morakot, 2007
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Apichatpong talks about  
Weerasethakul

# Mekong Hotel



Could you say something about the process of making MEKONG HOTEL?

My actress, Jenjira is from the city of Nong Khai. For the past few years she has moved back home to recuperate, after one of her legs was damaged in a motorcycle accident. I visited her from time to time at her house not far from the Mekong River. Sometimes the place would flood badly, sometimes it dried out. The river is living and communicating. I started to make photos and videos at her place, at the river. I stayed at various hotels during my visits. So I dreamt up a film about home, a temporary one or a comfort zone we shelter in; and the river that produces music.

Tell us a little about the music in the film that you chose to lay across the whole film in a very particular way. This is very unusual in your films. Who is the guitarist?

I wanted to try to go against what I was used to. I imagined music that flows like water. It is eternal and always transforming, with minute variations. The guitarist is a long lost high school friend whom I recently met. I found out he was teaching classical guitar and occasionally performed in bars. We had a lot to catch up on. To feature him and his creation in the film is like creating a dialogue with a friend with whom I shared a lot when we were young together in this north-eastern land.





Can you say something about the location? The Mekong River in the north-east of Thailand (where you shot Primitive and Uncle Boonmee) marks the border between Thailand and Laos. There has already been a reference to the relationship between Thai and Lao in your last feature, because Uncle Boonmee's 'carer' is from Laos.

This place that we shot Mekong Hotel is a border town between Thailand and Laos. Both countries had seen big changes in the 60s-70s with the invasion of Communism. People used to be able to commute between the two countries easily, but after the civil war in Laos, it became a mysterious country, semi-isolated. The Mekong River is no longer a bridge, but a barrier. Prejudice towards Lao people grew in central Thailand and in the media. I guess because of this isolation and the wayward nationalism in Thailand.

Can you tell us a little more about Ecstasy Garden, scenes from which are being rehearsed in Mekong Hotel. Is it an abandoned project?

It is one of my impossibly expensive projects. I drafted it in 2002. Now and then, Jenjira's daughter from Bangkok, Namphon, paid her a visit. The sight of the two women together reminded me of the story I had written called Ecstasy Garden. It focuses on a mother-daughter relationship through several centuries. The mother is of a vampire-like species from another planet who lives in Thailand's north-east. In the story, the daughter was in love with a teenage man whose family owned a banana plantation. She did not realise her mother was a ghost. This ghost was like a vampire: it ate raw human and animal flesh. She kills and eats her own daughter while the daughter is at the height of her romance. Later, the mother's alien spirit is kept in a clay pot underwater. Meanwhile, the daughter's spirit keeps following her man in his various reincarnations, in different countries. All along the mother and daughter communicate telepathically.

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ECSTASY GARDEN seems to have been a ghost story that relates specifically to the horror/ghost story tradition in Thai cinema? What is a Pob ghost?

A Pob ghost is a famous north-eastern kind of ghost. When 'infected' or 'possessed' by its spirit, a man or a woman becomes hungry for raw flesh and blood, wandering the village at night to gobble up the neighbours' livestock. I grew up with this belief, hearing this and that person were Pobs. There is a series of Pob ghost movies that popularises Pob as a middle-age woman. The last instalment was just released last year in which the Pob is instructed by her doctor to become a vegetarian.

The synopsis of MEKONG HOTEL mentions your shuffling of 'different realms', Seen in terms of levels of 'reality' this seems very characteristic of many of your films but here you also speak of 'fact and fiction' and the film shifts constantly between the two.

I think I am pretending to mean reality when I say 'fact'. But in movies, reality doesn't exist. One is just trying to capture moments and reconstruct them to simulate your view, your understanding. This film is conscious of these layers and levels of distortion. So I think that it can be called a 'documentary' in a classical sense. It is a contemplation on making a fiction.

Your Primitive Project, which was also shot in the north-east of Thailand touched on political issues and the 'hidden history' of Nabua and Isan province. MEKONG HOTEL does too, particularly through the conversations in the film and Jenjira's recollections.

The story of Jenjira is foreign to me. I always see her with her crochet kit. It is hard to imagine her holding an M-16, ready to kill. When I worked on the Primitive Project and listened to these kind of stories, I felt the need to be more familiar with Thailand. The country's education system sometimes comes in the form of brainwashing, even now. So the film is a self re-education. Then it is not so foreign when you understand that people fought and got killed in the streets. You sense that the country is collapsing, but you cannot leave because you have so many memories and so much pleasure in the country.



The conversations in the film often touch on the fact that you were shooting at the time of the floods in Thailand.

Yes. We called home and checked on the news when we were not shooting. Naturally we just talked about water.

I was a little annoyed that the government tried at all costs to save Bangkok, giving it a priority, when Bangkokians have way more time and resources to defend themselves. The smaller cities near the Mekong have been faced with the floods periodically. They have less support and they don't complain as much. And of course this hydroelectric dam, the Xayaburi in Laos, is alarming. It is pure greed, this politics. Building dams is easy, and brings easy money. We are so ignorant about alternative energy options. We are so used to, and spoiled, by concrete.

Is MEKONG HOTEL the first part of a much more substantial Mekong Project, which will include your next feature?

I hope so, and hope that it won't join those impossibly expensive projects! We can be modest and shoot only in a hotel. It is so convenient to have a bed on the set.

Mekong Hotel was commissioned for the ARTE France programming strand La Lucarne. Recent commissions from Editor Luciano Rigolini have included documentaries by Alexander Sokurov, Alain Cavalier, Kawase Naomi, Stephen Dwoskin, Ben Rivers and Ben Russell, and many others.

## Cast & Crew



### Cast

Jenjira Pongpas  
Maiyatan Techaparn  
Sakda Kaewbuadee  
Apichatpong Weerasethakul  
Chai Bhatana  
Chatchai Suban

### Crew

**Production Manager**  
Chaisiri Jiwarangsarn

**Assistant Director**  
Chatchai Suban

### Sound

Chalermrat Kaweewattana

### Music

Chai Bhatana

### Sound Design

Akritcharlorm Kalayanamitr

### Filmed, Edited, Directed and Produced by

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

### Executive produced by

Simon Field and Keith Griffiths/  
Illuminations Films

### Commissioning Editor for ARTE France – La Lucarne

Luciano Rigolini

### Technical details

Sound: Dolby 5.1 | Color, 2012  
Language: Thai | Length: 57 minutes  
Format: DCP



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