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Asia Society in association with **Cineaste** presents:

Film Series: *Blissfully Thai*

May 13 – June 17, 2011

Asia Society and Museum, 725 Park Avenue at 70th Street, NYC



Tears of the Black Tiger (Magnolia Pictures)

Asia Society in association with **Cineaste** presents a major film series that celebrates the current Thai film renaissance and the emergence of some of the world's most original cinematic voices since the late 1990s. Directors such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Pen-ek Ratanaruang, and Wisit Sasanatieng have put Thai cinema on the international map. Thai films are now regular fixtures in major film festivals, garnering awards around the globe, culminating in the riveting Cannes Film Festival Palme d'Or win of *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Apichatpong 2010).

“Although these filmmakers share an innovative and kindred spirit, what is really exciting is that they embody very different artistic visions,” says La Frances Hui, curator of the series and Senior Program Officer of Cultural Programs at Asia Society. This series includes works made since 2000 by six filmmakers, all born in the 60s and 70s, and offers New York audiences a rare opportunity to sample a diverse group of films from Thailand.

Highlights: In-person appearances by leading filmmakers **Apichatpong Weerasethakul** and **Pen-ek Ratanaruang** and a May 14 discussion focusing on the burgeoning Thai film industry.

Film descriptions and program schedule follow. For stills and screeners and interviews, please contact 212-327-9271 or pr@asiasociety.org.

To view trailers and for more information on the series, visit AsiaSociety.org/blissfullythai.

Tickets: \$7 members; \$9 students/seniors; \$11 nonmembers. Series discount available.

Visit AsiaSociety.org/blissfullythai or call 212-517-ASIA (2742) for more information.

Major support for this film series is provided by the New York State Council on the Arts and the Thai-US Partnership Program of Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Thai Artists Alliance.

PROGRAM SCHEDULE (all films in 35mm print with English subtitles)

Ploy

Pen-ek Ratanaruang. 2007. 107min.

Friday, May 13 at 6:45 PM (Post-screening Q&A with director)

A death in the family brings husband and wife, Wit and Dang, back to Bangkok from America. Jetlagged and restless, Wit encounters a young lady, Ploy, in the hotel bar while she is waiting for her mother to arrive from Stockholm. The couple and this stranger soon find themselves trapped in a hotel room, where paranoia and jealousy force the couple to confront their rocky marriage. Seamlessly moving between dream and reality, this unsettling drama mirrors the characters' state of sleep deprivation.

“a tasty slice of cinema, by turns oneiric, erotic, funny and emotionally perceptive”—Lee Marshall, *Screen Daily*

FIPRESCI Award, Cinefan-Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema

Discussion :

A Conversation with Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Pen-ek Ratanaruang

Saturday, May 14 at 2:00 PM

Two leading and award-winning figures of Thai cinema join La Frances Hui of Asia Society, who is the curator of this series, in a conversation about the current Thai film renaissance. Apichatpong Weerasethakul (b. 1970) is the director of *Blissfully Yours* (2002), *Syndromes and a Century* (2006) and *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), among others. Pen-ek Ratanaruang (b. 1962) is the director of *Mon-Rak Transistor* (2001), *Last Life in the Universe* (2003) and *Ploy* (2007), among others.

Followed by a reception.

I-San Special

Mingmongkol Sonakul. 2002. 110min.

Friday, May 20 at 6:45 PM

On a full-moon night, something unusual takes place on board a bus traveling from Bangkok to I-San in northern Thailand. Seemingly possessed, passengers act out parts of a soap opera playing on the radio. Whenever the bus makes a stop, the passengers spring back to real life. Inspired by an idea of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, this unusual and dream-like road movie playfully explores the dichotomies of real life and drama, and of professional actors on the radio and non-actors playing passengers.

“a new kind of road movie...a unique dreamlike experience.”—Johnny Ray Huston, *San Francisco Bay Guardian*

FIPRESI Special Mention, Singapore International Film Festival 2002

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives

Apichatpong Weerasethakul. 2010. 113min.

Sunday, May 22 at 5:00 PM (Post-screening Q&A with director)

Winner of the Palme d'Or (Cannes Film Festival), *Uncle Boonmee* follows the final days of a man's life. In the lush countryside, Uncle Boonmee is visited by his loved ones, including his deceased wife appearing as a ghost and his long-lost son who has taken on a non-human form. Mysterious as it is, nothing is scary in the world of Uncle Boonmee. This peaceful and poetic film meditates on the myths and secrets of the universe.

“A work of unostentatious beauty and uncloying sweetness”—J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*

Foreign Language Film of the Year, London Critics Circle Film Awards 2011

The Iron Ladies**Yongyoot Thongkongtoon. 2000. 104min.****Thursday, May 26 at 6:45 PM**

Based on the true story of a male volleyball team made up of gays and transsexuals that competed in the Thai national championships in 1996, *The Iron Ladies* portrays the rise of a team against all odds. Filled with colorful characters including a transsexual cabaret beauty, a muscular army sergeant, and three seemingly identical cheerleaders always moving in synchrony, this upbeat and hilarious comedy was a major audience hit in Thailand and has picked up awards in multiple international LGBT film festivals. “queenly, corny and impossible to resist”—Carla Meyer, *San Francisco Chronicle*
Audience Award, San Francisco International Lesbian & Gay Film Festival 2001

Mon-Rak Transistor**Pen-ek Ratanaruang. 2001. 115min.****Friday, June 3 at 6:45 PM**

Newly married with a pregnant wife, the charming rural singer Pan is drafted into the army, where he enters a singing contest and places second. In order to follow his singing dreams, Pan deserts his post and ends up in Bangkok, where he faces a series of misfortunes. “A piece of candy with just a taste of satirical poison at its center,” is how director Pen-ek Ratanaruang describes this tragic, bittersweet tale. Paying homage to the *luk thung* music of Thai pop star Surapol Sombatcharoen (1930-68), *Mon-Rak* brims with melancholy and longing.

“A film to marvel at and be enraptured by.”-- Sukhdev Sandhu, *The Telegraph*
Standard Readers' Jury Award, Vienna International Film Festival 2002

Tears of the Black Tiger**Wisit Sasanatieng. 2000. 113min.****Friday, June 10 at 6:45 PM**

Some call this a Pad Thai western but it is no ordinary cowboy movie. In the center is a doomed romantic affair between the impossibly stunning Rumpoey, daughter of a governor, and Dum, her childhood love turned bandit, a.k.a. Black Tiger. With its corny dialogues, over-the-top action choreography and digitally enhanced pulpy hues, this irresistible eye-candy film—the first Thai film to be screened at Cannes—pushes cinematic boundaries in every direction and is a big-screen must-see.

“A jaw-dropper...delirium-inducing”—David Edelstein, *New York Magazine*
Dragons and Tigers Award, Vancouver International Film Festival 2000

Hi-So**Aditya Assarat. 2010. 102 min.****Saturday, June 11 at 3:00 PM**

Ananda has returned home to become an actor after living abroad. On a seaside movie set, he is visited by his girlfriend from California. Tacitly, the two are drifting apart. Several months later, Ananda is in Bangkok living with a new girlfriend. The two share moments reminiscent of Ananda's previous relationship. A directorial follow-up to the much praised *Wonderful Town* (2007), *Hi-So*, which refers to Thailand's high society types, portrays life between languages and cultures with an eloquent grace.

“An absorbing and beguilingly simple film that is beautifully haunting and effortlessly cool”—Mark Adams, *Screen Daily*

Berlin International Film Festival 2011

Blissfully Yours**Apichatpong Weerasethakul. 2002. 125 min.****Friday, June 17 at 6:45 PM**

Set in a small town and a jungle near the Burmese border, *Blissfully Yours* follows a young Thai woman and her Burmese boyfriend, an illegal immigrant, on an afternoon of blissful interlude. Though peaceful and calm on the surface, the lovers and a middle-aged woman who joins them, and the jungle itself, embody hidden conflicts. With the opening credits leisurely appearing 45 minutes into the film, this early work by Cannes Palme d'Or winner Apichatpong Weerasethakul offers a meditative journey into a world

of nature and manmade conflicts.

“a delicate, ethereal dream of a film”—Manohla Dargis, *The New York Times*
Un Certain Regard Award, Cannes Film Festival 2002

About the filmmakers:

Aditya Assarat (b. 1972) was born in Bangkok. He left Thailand at the age of 15 to study in the United States. He studied History at New York University and earned a master's degree in film production at the University of Southern California. His feature debut *Wonderful Town* (2007) won the New Currents Award at Pusan International Film Festival and Tiger Award at Rotterdam International Film Festival.
Director Filmography (features): *Hi-So* (2010), *Wonderful Town* (2007), *3 Friends* (2005)

Apichatpong Weerasethakul (b. 1970) was born in Bangkok and grew up in Khon Kaen in northeast Thailand. He holds a degree in Architecture from Khon Kaen University and a Master of Fine Arts in Filmmaking from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He began making film and video shorts in 1994, and completed his first feature in 2000. His art projects and feature films have won him widespread international recognition and numerous festival prizes, most notably the Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival for *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010).
Director Filmography (features): *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), *Syndromes and a Century* (2006), *Tropical Malady* (2004), *The Adventures of Iron Pussy* (2003), *Blissfully Yours* (2002), *Mysterious Object at Noon* (2000).

Mingmongkol Sonakul (b. 1971) is synonymous with the rise of Thai independent cinema, having produced the seminal 1998 film *Mysterious Object at Noon* by Apichatpong Weerasethakul. She is also the producer of *Invisible Waves* (2006) by Pen-ek Ratanaruang and *The Tin Mine* (2005) by Jira Maligool. Mingmongkol studied film at the San Francisco Art Institute. As a photographer, she has also mounted exhibitions and installations in many countries since 1998.
Director Filmography (features): *3 Friends* (2005), *I-San Special* (2002)

Pen-ek Ratanaruang (b. 1962) was born in Bangkok and lived in New York from 1977 to 1985. He studied at Pratt Institute, majoring in Art History. He later worked as a freelance illustrator and a graphic designer. He spent 5 years as an art director before directing television commercials in Thailand. Pen-ek has won major film awards including Special Jury Prize at Bangkok International Film Festival for *Nymph* (2009), FIPRESCI Prize at Hong Kong International Film Festival for *6ixtynin9* (1999), and Jury Prize at Fant-Asia Film Festival for *Last Life in the Universe* (2003).
Director Filmography (features): *Nymph* (2009), *Ploy* (2007), *Invisible Waves* (2006), *Last Life in the Universe* (2003), *Mon-rak Transistor* (2001), *6ixtynin9* (1999), *Fun Bar Karaoke* (1997).

Wisit Sasanatieng (b. 1963) was born in Bangkok and studied at the Faculty of Decorative Arts at Silpakorn University, Bangkok where he was a classmate of film director Nonzee Nimibutr. He became an art director for an advertising agency, where he worked with Pen-Ek Ratanaruang. He directed television commercials and was also a cartoonist and illustrator. Wisit entered the film industry as screenwriter for two of Nonzee's films, *Dang Bireley's and the Young Gangsters* (1997) and *Nang Nak* (1999). His directorial feature debut *Tears of the Black Tiger* (2000) won the Dragons and Tigers Award at Vancouver International Film Festival.
Director Filmography (features): *Camellia* (2010), *Red Eagle* (2010), *The Unseeable* (2006), *Citizen Dog* (2004), *Tears of the Black Tiger* (2000)

Yongyoot Thongkongtoon (b. 1967) graduated from Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. He is a film director, producer and screenwriter. He worked in advertising before making the debut feature *The Iron Ladies* (2000), which won him multiple awards including: Teddy - Special Mention, Berlin International Film Festival; Discovery Award (2nd place), Toronto International Film Festival; Audience Award, New York Lesbian and Gay Film Festival; Audience Award, San Francisco International Lesbian

& Gay Film Festival; Audience Award, Dublin Gay & Lesbian Film Festival.

Director Filmography (features): *Best of Times* (2009), *Metrosexual* (2006), *M.A.I.D.* (2004), *Iron Ladies 2* (2003), *The Iron Ladies* (2000)

About Asia Society

Founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, Asia Society is a nonprofit, nonpartisan educational institution. Through exhibitions and public programs, Asia Society provides a forum for the issues and viewpoints reflected in both traditional and contemporary Asian art, and in Asia today. Asia Society is located at 725 Park Avenue (at 70th Street), New York City. www.AsiaSociety.org

About Cineaste

Founded in 1967, Cineaste is internationally recognized as one of America's foremost film quarterlies, featuring contributions from the most articulate and provocative critics, journalists and scholars writing today, offering thought-provoking coverage of world cinema. www.cineaste.com

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