

FILM REVIEW



Neaw Lung in Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Lung Neaw Visits His Neighbours*. [PHOTO: ESTUDIO DE PRODUCCIÓN]

Lung Neaw Visits His Neighbours ★★★★★

BY [KALVIN HENELY](#) ON JULY 16, 2012

For an artist known for being one of the main practitioners of relational aesthetics, a term coined by French theorist Nicolas Bourriaud to describe a kind of art that's more about social interactions than traditional objects, Rirkrit Tiravanija would appear to have left his past behind in choosing to make a film, a medium that demands an audience keep a room dark and quiet. It's not just that: For most of its 154 minutes, *Lung Neaw Visits His Neighbours* languidly follows a wandering, mostly solitary, "retired" Thai farmer around the countryside, sans storyline. But the film is a hypnotic achievement, a slow-burning meditation session by way of its accumulative moment-to-moment idyllic idleness. This, then, does follow from the Buddhist artist's prior work in that it allows him to take credit for again blurring Western boundaries: Just as Tiravanija had done in the '90s when he converted New York City galleries into live kitchens, he changes one's relation to a movie theater to a space for meditation.

While not necessary, it certainly helps to be familiar with some of Tiravanija's work going in, lest *Lung Neaw Visits His Neighbors* seem less like a completed work and more like, say, the leftover B-roll footage from fellow Thai artist-cum-director Apichatpong Weerasethakul's more well-crafted run through the jungle, [Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives](#) (incidentally, "lung" means uncle in Thai). Tiravanija's work has mostly explored the social role of an artist, focusing on the immaterial and ephemeral experiences of art-going. More of a conceptualist than a craftsman, his artistic output, such as his gallery feedings and his utopian farm, known as the Land Foundation, near where this film was shot, often have a casualness to them that belies a deeper rift between Eastern and Western values. And where Tiravanija has dabbled in filmmaking, the results have been similarly off-handed, such as in *Chew the Fat*, an almost *MTV Cribs*-style video in which he visits and interviews 11 of his relational aesthetics peers, and *Lung Neaw*, an eight-hour-plus Warholian video loop which reportedly features Neaw picking his nose, combing his hair, sleeping, and eating.

That Tiravanija has again chosen Neaw, a laborer he met through working on the Land Foundation, as the subject of his film speaks to Tiravanija's increasing interest in a way of life that's becoming obsolete. The cool way Tiravanija films Neaw in this film recalls the extemporaneousness of his past work; it's also a sign of Tiravanija letting go of the reins, allowing the film's gravitas to evolve through not only Neaw and the small tasks he performs through a kind of playacting, but the mesmerizing settings that surround him (which were also featured last year in the similar [Agrarian Utopia](#)). In other words, like Warhol before him, it's Tiravanija's minimal interference that allows the artificiality of his simple setup to be infused with a naturalism that grows through duration. Also like Warhol's cinema, Neaw, no longer the farmer inexperienced in front of the camera, operates as a kind of model or "superstar" for Tiravanija's portraiture. It's in this sense that the pleasure of watching *Lung Neaw Visits His Neighbors* is in Neaw's seemingly invisible performance, his artlessness appearing almost as affectations, like he's pretending to be himself, which is attributable to a kind of second-hand direction on the part of the mostly absent-seeming Tiravanija.

To call *Lung Neaw Visits His Neighbors* a work of laziness would be both to acknowledge its effortless creation and neglect its ideas and purpose. The amount of effort that went into shooting and editing it was surely minimal compared to Weerasethakul's relatively sparse productions, and there's not much that happens in the film, or in its construction, that could be considered traditionally intentional. But, like it or not, that's essentially the point. By selecting a *former* farmer and filling the film with small "nothing" moments (we see Neaw walk, bathe in the river, sit, listen to the radio, eat, chop wood, chit-chat, etc.), Tiravanija is illustrating the Buddhist concept of impermanence, of changing moments that flow together into the illusion of a continuous river. And with *Lung Neaw Visits His Neighbors*'s hyper-attention to the present moment, its appreciation for tranquility, Tiravanija simulates a kind of meditation.

DIRECTOR(S): Rirkrit Tiravanija CAST: Neaw Lung RUNTIME: 154 min RATING: NR YEAR: 2011