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## Experiencing ‘A Conversation with the Sun (VR)’ by Apichatpong Weerasethakul

BY BRUCE SCOTT

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With the generous support of Chanel, audiences in Bangkok were able to experience the extraordinary ‘A Conversation with the Sun (VR)’ by Apichatpong Weerasethakul – an immersive, multimedia work of art that transports viewers into a meditative exploration of light, memory, and existential cycles. This highly anticipated event was the centerpiece of the Bangkok Experimental Film Festival (BEFF), now in its 7th edition, which ran from January 25 to February 2 at One Bangkok Forum.

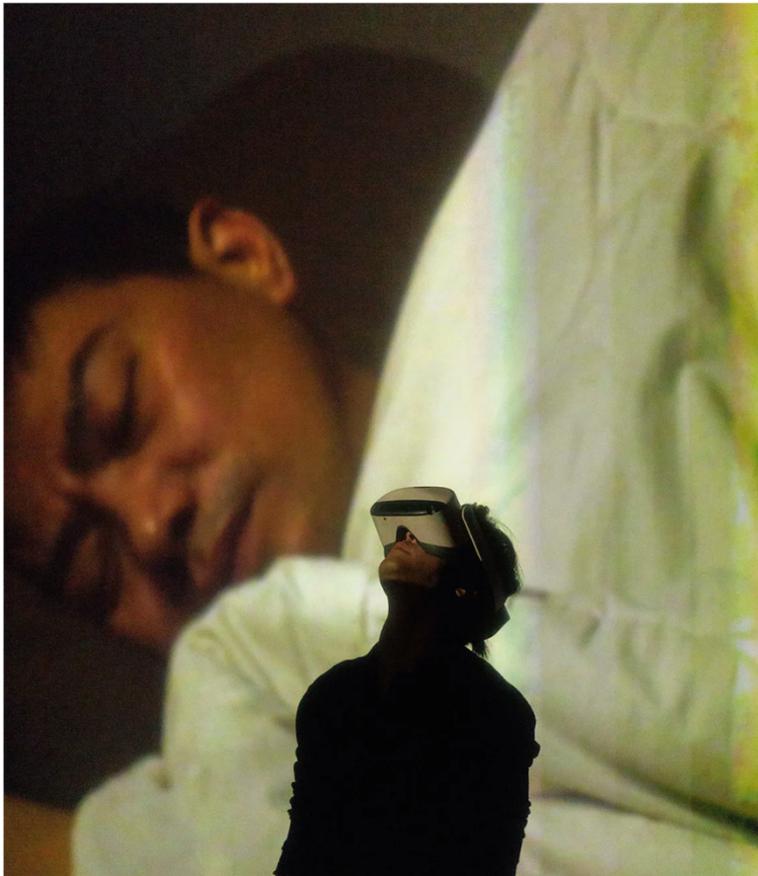
*(All images courtesy of Chanel)*



Acclaimed Thai film director and artist Apichatpong Weerasethakul

When it was announced that 'A Conversation with the Sun (VR)' by Apichatpong Weerasethakul would make its Bangkok debut at One Bangkok Forum, as the centrepiece of the recent [Bangkok Experimental Film Festival \(BEFF\)](#), tickets for the viewings sold out within a day. And after experiencing for myself this incredible blend of virtual reality, performance, music, and moving images, it's easy to see why.

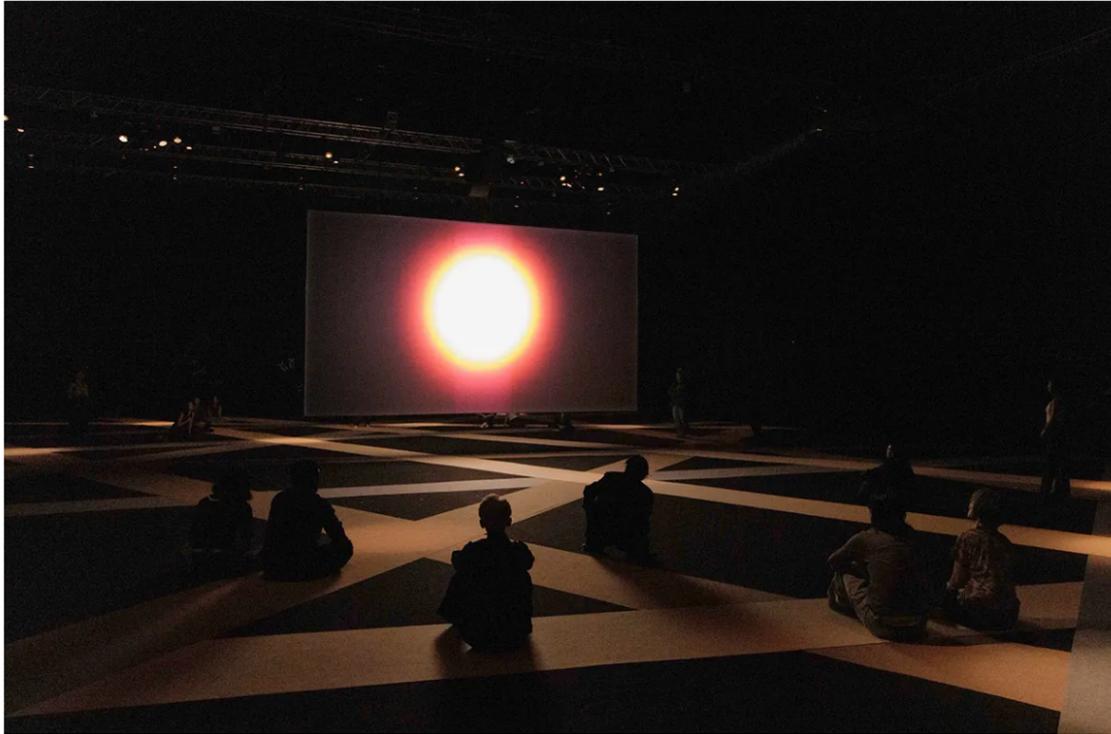
Although the piece is credited to Apichatpong, one of Thailand's most internationally recognised film directors, it's actually the combined efforts of several talented individuals. Aurally, the work is enriched by the soundscapes and compositions of the late Ryuichi Sakamoto, a renowned musician and composer from Japan who pioneered a number of electronic music genres. Visually, the latter half of the piece is an eye-popping showcase of digital art created by Katsuya Taniguchi – also from Japan – whose VR landscapes create a dynamic interplay of shadow, light, and movement that elevates the sensory experience.



Viewers wearing VR goggles during 'A Conversation with the Sun (VR)' find themselves immersed in a whole other world

The staging of this work in Bangkok was made possible by support from Chanel – who also sponsored its premiere at the [Thailand Biennale 2024 in Chiang Rai](#) – and this ongoing collaboration underscores the house's long-standing dedication to nurturing contemporary art and cultural initiatives. To some it may seem strange that a famous fashion brand would be interested in such an avant-garde production, but the Chanel Culture Fund has actually supported generations of filmmakers across Asia. In fact, the company's commitment to nurturing such talents is both a continuation of Gabrielle Chanel's own legacy of championing bold artistic visions, and a celebration of the transformative power of film and the arts.

The term “transformative”, incidentally, is an apt way of describing ‘A Conversation with the Sun (VR)’, although other suitable adjectives include “mind-blowing”, “overwhelming”, and “awe-inspiring”. Of course, anyone familiar with both the films and art installations of Apichatpong will not be surprised to learn that the pace of this piece is slow and meditative, allowing viewers to ponder for themselves what the meaning or message may be.



Some viewers sit while others stand during a presentation of ‘A Conversation with the Sun (VR)’ at the Bangkok Experimental Film Festival

Unfortunately, to talk about the show in any great detail is something of a disservice to potential audiences, since not knowing anything in advance definitely adds to the overall impact. So... spoiler alerts ahead (although I’ll try not to give it all away).

Each viewing of the hour-long work is limited to an audience of about 40 persons, which is why tickets have to be reserved in advance. The experience begins when each group of 20 or so persons is asked to remove their shoes (which are safely stored) and follow the guides down a long corridor and into a very large, darkened room. A double-sided movie screen bisects the space, in which we encounter 20 or so persons, all wearing VR goggles, who appear to be wandering aimlessly about, staring at the walls, the floor and in every direction around them. These people are the first half of the audience, and at the 30-minute mark their VR goggles are removed and a new clean set are ceremoniously handed over to us, the second half of the audience.



The live performance segment of 'An Encounter: The Last Thing You Saw That Felt Like a Movie'

This constant overlap of audiences is a strange touch, but strangeness is nothing new in the dreamlike world of Apichatpong Weerasethakul. Even the film and video clips projected onto either side of the screen in the middle of the room have no obvious explanation, and the non-goggle-wearing viewers are encouraged to wander around the screen, taking in these random short scenes (which are similar, but not identical, on either side). But to maneuver around the room we have to be wary of bumping into those wearing the goggles, who are immersed in a whole other world.



Kong Rithdee moderates the discussion segment of 'An Encounter: The Last Thing You Saw That Felt Like a Movie', with Oscar-winning actress Tilda Swinton (centre) and film director Apichatpong Weerasethakul

When the time comes for us to don these very hi-tech VR goggles, it soon becomes apparent why everyone wearing them was shuffling around in a trance-like state and looking in all directions. What they reveal is a surrealistic, primordial landscape of glowing suns rising from the floor, boulders falling slowly from the sky, and ever-shifting surfaces above, below, and on all sides. As dazzling as it is dizzying and disorienting, it's an immensely powerful piece that by the end had me musing on subjects as wide-ranging as time travel, the afterlife, and the very origins of the universe.



An audience of over 500 showed up for 'An Encounter: The Last Thing You Saw That Felt Like a Movie'

When our goggles are removed and our VR world disappears, the effect is equally disorienting, which is why we're then led to a "decompression" room where beanbag chairs and mattress-sized floor pillows are laid out in front of a screen projecting a video loop by Apichatpong showing people – and pets – being filmed sleeping. I personally zoned out here for a good 10 minutes before returning to reality, letting Ryuichi Sakamoto's otherworldly score, which could still be heard in the distance, gently wash over me.



Tilda Swinton and Apichatpong Weerasethakul were the guests of honour at a private cocktail reception put on by Chanel at Bangkok Kunsthalle

After such an incredible experience, I was eager to return to the BEFF the following day for ‘An Encounter: The Last Thing You Saw That Felt Like a Movie’. This exclusive event, attended by over 500 people, began with a performance piece conceived by Apichatpong and his friend and collaborator Tilda Swinton – the Oscar-winning actress who’s also a Chanel Ambassador and ‘Friend of the House’ – and concluded with a conversation between the two, moderated by film critic and archivist Kong Rithdee.

During the talk the pair offered insights into their long-standing creative partnership, and then read two poems each before the brief Q&A session. Before leaving the stage, Tilda wowed the audience with a poem she wrote herself, to welcome this new year, which she entitled ‘Notes For Radical Living’. Prophetically, the last three lines of her poem are: “Take care of yourself. Believe in goodness. Head for the light.”

[onebangkok.com/en/whats-happening/Bangkok-Experimental-Film-Festival](https://onebangkok.com/en/whats-happening/Bangkok-Experimental-Film-Festival)

**Note:**

*The information in this article is accurate as of the date of publication.*

**TAGS**

Tilda Swinton

Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Film Festival

Virtual Reality

One Bangkok

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Ryuichi Sakamoto