



— A USEFUL GHOST



64^e SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
CANNES 2025

A Film by Ratchapoom Boonbunchachoke

PRESSKIT



— A USEFUL GHOST

130 MIN

THAILAND, FRANCE, SINGAPORE

2025

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SCREENINGS IN CANNES

FRI. MAY 16th, 9:00 AM @ LERINS 2
(Market - Private)

SAT. MAY 17th, 11:30 AM @ ESPACE MIRAMAR
(Official)

SAT. MAY 17th, 5:30 PM @ ESPACE MIRAMAR
(World Premiere)

SUN. MAY 18th, 8:30 AM @ ESPACE MIRAMAR
(Official)

SUN. MAY 18th, 1:30 PM @ OLYMPIA 9 (Market)

TUE. MAY 20th, 5:45 PM @ LERINS 4 (Market)

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SYNOPSIS

March is mourning his wife Nat who has recently passed away due to dust pollution. He discovers her spirit has returned by possessing a vacuum cleaner. Disturbed by a ghost that appeared after a worker's death shut down their factory, his family reject their unconventional human-ghost relationship.

Trying to convince them of their love, Nat offers to cleanse the factory. To become a useful ghost, she must first get rid of the useless ones.



A CONVERSATION WITH RATCHAPOOM BOONBUNCHACHOKE



The very first image of *'A Useful Ghost'* shows dust floating in the air, beautifully glistening against the sunlight. As the film then introduces a vacuum cleaner possessed by a ghost as a central character, could you share some insight on what dust represents for you in the film?

Over the past decade, there's been raised awareness of dust pollution in Thailand. It's speculated that the pollution is mainly caused by large industries in the country. Yet apart from literal dust, the tiny particle floating in the air, 'dust' has evolved to carry a deeper meaning in Thai contemporary slang—referring to humans who are treated as less than human.

Initially, people joked about the dust pollution. "It's no wonder we have dust pollution because our country is full of dust'. Dust here doesn't only mean airborne particles but also means people who lack voices or power to determine their own lives, who are easily swept, moved, and wiped off at the ruling class's will.

I also feel that ghosts somehow are similar to dust. Both of them occupy the wrong place and the wrong time. Dust doesn't respect the boundary. It shows up in your house, on your TV screen, on your desk. Also, like dust, ghosts are something you don't want at your house. Ghosts are dead people who return to the world of the living. They don't respect the rule of time. They are technically gone but they resist by remaining anachronistically in the world. So, the haunted vacuum cleaner for me is an ironic figure in this equation.

The main narrative of *'A Useful Ghost'* is framed as a story within a story, introduced by the device of a voice over. And then, the main story is punctuated by sequences of dreams. Could you tell us something about this fascination for a storytelling style that seems to reveal itself as a series of Chinese boxes?

In my early drafts, I struggled without a framing device and felt creatively blocked. Attempting to tell the story directly, without layers, left it feeling dry and naked. I needed to dress the story with some clothes, some accessories. I'm fascinated with artifice and theatricality, so this approach suits what I want for the story. It broadens the possibility to play and experiment with storytelling.

The main story of the film deals with a love that wants to overcome death, the possession of an object by an enamoured ghost and the opposition of a family against an unusual romance. It all feels like a quirky rereading of material that could feed a TV drama or a soap opera. Would you say that you like to appropriate elements and inspirations from popular cinema or TV and turned into something uniquely yours?

My initial inspiration for the story is the legend of Mae Nak which is a forbidden love story between a female ghost and her living husband. This legend has tremendous cultural significance in Thailand and has been adapted numerous times across plays, films, and television series. Throughout my previous short films, I always play with Thai historical events and popular culture. I enjoy taking characters from well-known historical anecdotes, literature, and TV drama, and placing them in new contexts. Since Thai audiences are already familiar with these iconic characters, it's easier to subvert their expectations and explore new possibilities that the original stories keep latent.

So, apart the materials from Thai culture, I'm also profoundly influenced by European cinema. I'm not sure whether some critics have already coined the term to call these filmmakers or put them into a group yet, but I'm much inspired by films of Jacques Rivette, Manoel de Oliveira, Joao Cesar Monteiro, Otavio Iosseliani, Raoul Ruiz, Chantal Akerman, Eugene Green (though he's American, but he makes

films in France) etc. What their films are aren't exactly surrealism, yes, it's surreal but it's also something else, plain yet oneiric, mundane yet haunting. In their films, the dreamy quality is present but it doesn't call attention too much to itself. I love their worlds where the line between waking reality and dream are blurred and I want to create that in my film as well. Moreover, their films are so free. I think Oliveira is one of the most free directors. I remember the first time I watched his *I'm Going Home*, and I'm so stunned with how inventive the film was considering the director was in his 90s by that time. But he was so fearless and youthful in his films. These directors taught me how to be confident with narrative, how free could it be, and how exhilarating it would feel. That's something I absolutely admire!

All your cast is wonderful! Can you tell us a bit more about the process and especially why you chose to work with Davika Hoorne, playing Nat, who is a big local star in Thailand?

Casting Davika was a bit of luck. Initially, we didn't think of any specific actress for the role. We just left enough space for the possibility. Then I participated in Talents Tokyo 2021 where Pen-ek Ratanaruang was serving as one of the mentors. Though I had known him for very long time, that was really the first time we talked (though online as it was a Covid edition), so he knew about the project, the story. Then a few months later Pen-ek went to direct *Sixtynin9 the Series* which was produced by one of my producers, Soros, and more importantly, Davika starred as the lead. Later, Pen-ek mentioned this to Davika which, as I heard, she was instantly interested in the premise of this haunted vacuum cleaner. We then got in touch, sent her the screenplay, she liked it and became on board with the project. I think it's really amazing for an actress of her stature to be in this weird, independent film.

A memorable line in the film states that "Ghosts are those who don't give in to Death, their return is an act of protest". Could you elaborate on the personal and political value and power of memory, which seems to be a key theme of your film?

As I mentioned, I think ghosts are entities who defy the natural flow of time. Despite being gone, they return, refusing to be confined to the past. They remain in the present.

However, their presence is somehow incomplete. Some ghosts manifest only as voices without visible bodies, others appear translucent while some remain invisible but can move objects. They exist in an in-between state and try in all their capacity to express and communicate their suffering in different channels through hearsay, rumors, tales, etc.

Thailand is the country full of ghosts as many deaths are without formal closure with several unresolved murders and forced disappearance. I think artists in general and filmmakers in particular are ghosts' allies. We lend our expertise, instruments and skills to give form to the ghosts' words. While ghosts are typically elusive to directly experience, cinema is the ideal medium to give ghosts a form.

Additionally, viewers might notice many references to Thai political context in the film. Without explaining too much, I'd like to mention one specific incident that greatly inspired me while developing the script: the recent wave of destruction and demolition of the 'Khana Ratsadon' (People's Party) architecture. The People's Party was a group of young civil servants and military officers in the early 1930s who staged a revolution that changed Thailand to a constitutional democracy. Though flawed and short-lived, their government built many buildings, statues, and monuments in a certain architectural style that represented their values and their era.

However, in the past few years, there have been consistent attempts to destroy these buildings. For me, this isn't only about the destruction of physical structures and the erasure of that era's tangible legacy and ideology. It also reflects a deeper attempt to erase the memory, history, and revolutionary ideals embedded within those constructions—an effort to make those ideas disappear entirely. And we could see the erased values, the values that failed to exist into the present time, are another kind of ghost. The ghost that we, the living, also need to listen to.

'A Useful Ghost' displays a meticulous and uncanny care for production and costume design and for locations. As samples of those, I would be curious to know more about the space where the electroshock and dream therapies take place.

The discovery of the electroshock room was miraculous! I had no idea such a space existed in Thailand. It's part of a university, normally used for testing electrical appliances, but its surreal, otherworldly design adds a unique atmosphere to the film that I absolutely love.

Tell us a bit more about the design of the vacuum cleaner itself with its glowing circle?

For the vacuum cleaner, initially we considered collaborating with artists to design the appliance. However, SI En, our Singapore co-producer, introduced us to Hao Jie, an award-winning industrial designer with experience creating actual vacuum cleaners. I admit I was initially skeptical about working with an industrial designer, presuming that they might prioritize functionality over aesthetics. However, after discussing my vision for the film—blending practicality with silliness—I was genuinely amazed by the design options Hao Jie presented.



They were all charming and unique. I eventually chose the one we see in the film, the vacuum cleaner with a strange shape looking like the machine slightly bowing forward expressing humbleness, which is the quality that embodies Nat's personality as a friendly ghost who isn't aggressive or frightening. In addition, I incorporated the glowing circle from another design concept. The presence of the glowing circle is more of a practical reason than serving any specific meaning. The glowing light is used to give the machine a sign of life. Even when the machine stays stationary, the light is still circulating so we feel its vitality. Also, the color of the light can change throughout the film depending on the context of the scene. I think it's a funny way for the machine to express her feelings and also makes it a bit uncanny.

Finally, what about the dress of Nat with those huge, padded shoulders?

Nat's dress is so extraordinary, both in terms of design and scale! My initial idea was that, for me, ghosts are something that are out of place. They do not belong to the time and place they currently occupy. They don't blend in their environment. So all the ghosts in the film have colorful hair for no reason. For Nat specifically, I wanted attire that would make her stand out in an unusual way. After exploring several options, we chose a direction inspired by fashion from past eras (I'm particularly fascinated by the campiness of the 80's fashion!) but exaggerated to such an extent that it belongs to no specific time period at all. Her huge, padded shoulders, not only make her stand out but also convey the sense of burden weighing on Nat, constantly anchoring her down. As a ghost who needs to work to stay relevant and useful, this design also evokes the uniform of office ladies from the past, suggesting she's the ghost who needs to work.



BIOGRAPHY RATCHAPOOM BOONBUNCHACHOKE

Ratchapoom Boonbunchachoke is a filmmaker of Teo- chew-Hainanese descent. Born, brought up and based in Bangkok. He graduated from the film department of Chulalongkorn University. Currently he works full-time as a scriptwriter for the studio, writing commercial features and television series.

Apart from writing he also teaches film theory and scriptwriting in the universities and works as a film critic.

In 2020, Ratchapoom was selected to participate in Berlinale Talents program. His short film "Red Aninsri; Or, Tiptoeing on the Still Trembling Berlin Wall" was selected for Locarno in 2020 and won Junior Jury Award – Leopards of Tomorrow (International Competition). Most recently he has been nurturing his own project, a film series of varying length investigating the colonial history and postcolonial situation of Thailand. "A Useful Ghost", the latest film of this series and his first feature. The film will have its World Premiere at Cannes Semaine de la Critique.



FILMOGRAPHY

RATCHAPOOM

BOONBUNCHACHOKE

2020 *Red Aninsri; Or, Tiptoeing on the Still Trembling Berlin Wall*
Short Film – Locarno Film Festival



CAST & CREW

Nat	Davika Hoorne
March	Wisarat Himmarat
Suman	Apasiri Nitibhon
Krong	Wanlop Rungkumjad
Academic Ladyboy	Wisarat Homhuan

Director	Ratchapoom Boonbunchachoke
Screenplay	Ratchapoom Boonbunchachoke
Director of Photography	Pasit Tандаеchanurat
Production Design	Rasiguet Sookkarn
Product Designer	Sim Hao Jie
1 st Assistant Director	Chutigan Seechomphu
Casting	Soifa Saenkhamkon, Tippawan Narintorn
Costume Design	Phim Umari
Line Producer	Tanade Amornpiyalerk
Location Manager	Pakkawat Tanghom
Editing	Chonlasit Upanigkit
VFX	BlocD
Supervising Sound Editor	Lim Ting LI MPSE
Music Composer	Chaibovon Seelukwa
Colorist	Chaitawat Thrisansri

CAST & CREW

Post-production	White Light Studio, Postal Sound, Kantana Sound Studio
Supported by	Aide aux cinémas du monde – Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée – Institut français / CNC/ Singapore Film Commission / Open Doors Award, Locarno/ HBF+EUROPE/ WCF/ THACCA/ Ministry of Culture, Thailand / Department of Cultural Promotion / Purin Pictures/ EWIP
Production	185 Films, Haut Les Mains, Momo Film Co
Producers	Cattleya Paosrijaroen, Soros Sukhum
Co Producers	Karim Aitouna, Tan SI En
Executive Producers	Chayamporn Taeratanachai, Kip Tiaviwat, Annie Yang, Tanat Tananivit, Rachel Y. Wu, Kris Eiamsakulrat, Nopadol Srikiatkajohn
Co Produced by	May Odeh, Zorana Mušikić, Thanarith Satrusayang
Associate Producer	Tanade Amornpiyalerk
Country	Thailand, France, Singapore, Germany
French Distributor	JHR Films
International Sales	Best Friend Forever

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