

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Stephen Holden, "Rural Life Seen Through a Man Who Has Lived Many Seasons," *The New York Times*, July 15, 2012

## The New York Times

### Rural Life Seen Through a Man Who Has Lived Many Seasons

#### Review: 'Lung Neaw Visits His Neighbors'

**LUNG NEAW VISITS HIS NEIGHBORS** Directed by Rirkrit Tiravanija Documentary 2h 34m



In "Lung Neaw Visits His Neighbors," the director Rirkrit Tiravanija follows a retired farmer in northern Thailand whose days follow a slow yet quietly eventful pattern. Estudio de Produccion

Time slows to a crawl in "Lung Neaw Visits His Neighbors," the first feature by the Argentine-born, New York-based Thai artist, Rirkrit Tiravanija. The subject of this film is a 60-year-old retired rice farmer living in a rural village in Chiang Mai province of northern Thailand. This 2 ½-hour film, which is described by Mr. Tiravanija as "not a documentary and not a narrative" but "more of a portraiture," rewards concentration once you adjust to its glacial pace and its radically minimalist aesthetic. It has no screenplay or story line.

Its title character, a humble well-liked man, might be retired, but he is far from idle. The film shows Lung Neaw (Lung is a Thai courtesy title meaning Uncle) going about his daily rituals as he goes to market, hunts, visits a forest to pick herbs for cooking, bathes in a river, prays, chops wood and takes a long walk during which the nearly stationary camera observes him from afar for several minutes as he recedes into the distance. The camera is so unobtrusive that in a scene of Lung Neaw and a woman (presumably his wife) cooking dinner, their backs are turned as they meticulously prepare the food. Many of Lung Neaw's tasks are followed from beginning to end.

Much of the sparse dialogue consists of his conversations. Some but not all of it is small talk. In one talk with a Buddhist monk the subject is deforestation and its consequences, as trees are cut down to create rice fields. In another, Lung Neaw calmly acknowledges that his generation may be the last to live this kind of existence. In yet another, he and an acquaintance confess to occasional bouts of loneliness.

The movie doesn't sentimentalize Lung Neaw as a heroic primitive living in harmony with nature. When you consider that a vast majority of people in the world live this simply, he is really a global Everyman.

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The village is not so far from a city that urban resources are unavailable. He and another farmer discuss their aches and pains and mention nearby hospitals where treatment can be obtained. The outside world is audible through the static heard on a portable radio whose antenna Lung Neaw constantly adjusts to get better reception.

“Lung Neaw Visits His Neighbors,” shot with a 16-millimeter camera, is visually sumptuous. The electric greens of the fields and forests evoke an all-embracing fecundity. If you imagined that a rural Asian farmer didn’t enjoy as full a life as the most sophisticated and well-traveled urbanite, the film should make you think again.