

New Zealand film maker Vincent Ward's MAP OF THE HUMAN HEART, like the writer / director's previous two features, VIGIL and THE NAVIGATOR, charts its fascinating course through the mythic and the majestic. Spanning two continents and three decades MAP is the tale of lives crisscrossing race, war, obsession and love and again Ward has chosen a landscape of extremes to tell his tale. From the frozen and isolated wastes of the arctic circle, to the frightening reality of war torn Europe, MAP's lead characters, Avik a half caste Inuit, Russell the British gentleman adventurer, and Albertine the beautiful part Cree Indian both men love, live their remarkable lives on the periphery more as outsiders than as a part of any society.

There are many things that make MAP OF THE HUMAN HEART remarkable on screen, but to see Ward's vision realised an almost equally remarkable co-production deal, involving Australia, France, England and Canada, had first to be struck and then to follow a casting process almost as epic as the production itself to fill the shoes of these people so cleverly written by Ward and co-cartographer Louis Nowra.

Central to the story, and clearly stated in the film's title is the idea of the map, of charting a course, of laying down boundaries, of crossing borders. One of the real joys of a film such as this is the fun its author allows the viewer to have with the myriad ideas and forces at play in his tale: for instance which walls, which cultures, which boundaries, have been breached to produce the half caste Avik and Albertine. And where does the map making imperialist Brit Russell figure in the course of their pasts and futures. How do you map the infinite purity of an arctic scape, let alone the human heart. And what happens to those lines drawn on charts when war tears maps and lives apart.

Ward's epic romance is strangely alluring. It's exotic, of another world altogether, and another time. In its heart it's humane and of the ordinary, but it beats with its own heady mix of high adventure, the childish and the everyday. This cocktail of glittering myth and human grime is what sets all of this director's work apart. Ward seems uniquely capable of making of human endeavour the grandest of fables, and of utilising his chosen medium to the fullest extent. Not for this artist the shrill lambasts of Hollywood, more the gentle pulsing of life's many, intersecting rivers.