

## INTERVIEW

**State of Siege**, an adaptation from the Janet Frame novel, earned Vincent Ward critical acclaim both here and overseas, particularly the United States.

Now, at the age of 23, Ward has completed his third film. He talked to **Diana Ward** (no relation) about his latest work called **In Spring One Plants Alone**.

# That personal quality

Somehow I managed to catch Vincent Ward for long enough to talk to him about his new film, **In Spring One Plants Alone**. The film, a 42 minute documentary about an elderly Maori woman and her son, has taken Vincent Ward and his team (Alun Bollinger and Leon Narbey, cameramen; Steve Upton, soundrecorder; Christine Lancaster, film editor) one and a half years to make.

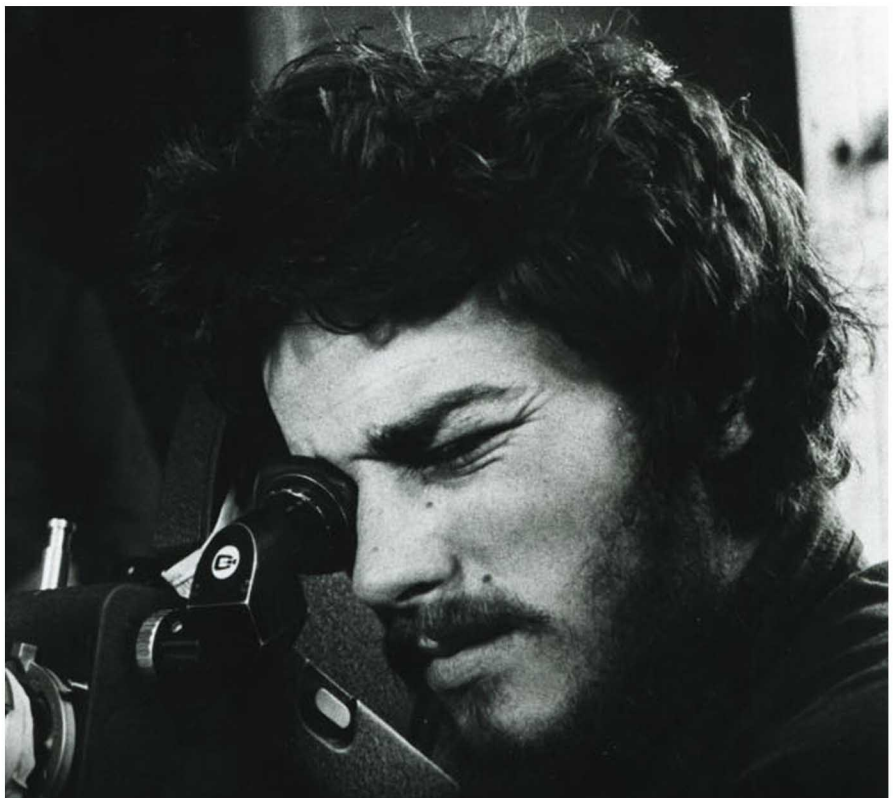
Apart from his early student efforts, Ward, at 23, has directed three films, **State of Siege**, his second, earning him the Golden Hugo Award in Chicago and the Gold Medal (Special Jury) in Miami.

**PHOTO AND AUDIO:** How did you first become involved in filmmaking?

**WARD:** Well, when I was in the sixth form I decided I wanted to study painting and sculpture. I went to Fine Arts School at Canterbury and ended up specialising in film in my second year.

**PHOTO & AUDIO:** *Ma Olsen* (15 15 minute TV documentary), *State of Siege* and *In Spring One Plants Alone* all examine the lives of older women. What motivated you to make three films about women of this age group?

**WARD:** I think I can best answer that question like this. My early films, the ones I made at Art School, were very personal films, fine experiments but they weren't leading anywhere. They were explorations of the self and as such, not films that you could easily show a wide audience. To still retain that personal quality and appeal to a wider audience at the same time, I



Vincent Ward behind the camera

chose women of that age group as my subjects. It wasn't a conscious decision though, it just happened. Women on the whole are much more accessible than men, more open. The man of the house will talk more, certainly, but says less.

**PHOTO & AUDIO:** What is *'In Spring One Plants Alone'* about?

**WARD:** It's about an 82-year-old Maori woman who lives with her wholly dependent son. It explores the rifts and bonds that exist between the two of them.

**PHOTO & AUDIO:** How did you find the subjects for the film?

**WARD:** I travelled 6000 miles to find them. I wanted to make a film about an elderly Maori person living with one other in a very isolated community. I stayed with and spoke to a lot of people over the seven or eight month period and eventually and quite by accident, came across this old Maori woman who lives in the heart of the Urewera country. The first time I met her, I was quite embarrassed. She was squatting on the veranda of her house. The meeting lasted only two minutes, for as she couldn't speak much English and I couldn't speak Maori, we

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didn't know what to say to each other. I went back many times and got to know her quite well. I am now her grandchild. The decision to make a film about the family was made after I'd been living with them for four or five weeks.

**PHOTO & AUDIO:** How have you approached the documentary genre?

**WARD:** For a start, *In Spring One Plants Alone* is not a television documentary. In fact it grew out of a reaction to a lot of documentaries you see on television. Unlike most of them, there is no narration track and a minimal amount of music. Jack Body composed a little flute music for the film... *In Spring One Plants Alone* is very visual, very observational and as far as possible



Miles Hargest

*This old Maori woman has made Vincent Ward her grandchild.*

Miles Hargest



*A scene from In Spring One Plants Alone*

I've tried not to intrude too much. We used prime lenses throughout and preferred not to use the zoom at all. The whole film was shot from just below eye level... we filmed almost the entire thing on our knees.

**PHOTO & AUDIO:** What was the reason for shooting it that way?

**WARD:** Well, one of the themes of the film is that every part of the old lady's life is imbued with a spiritual quality. It was an intuitive choice, I didn't wish to look down on her at all. She is a very spiritual person — a Ringatu, of Rua's line. Everything she did was a sort of ritual. The karakia followed many tasks. For instance, I used to take her to town in my old van and she'd pray from the beginning of the journey to the end and not because I'm a reckless driver either! It's a tradition.

**PHOTO & AUDIO:** How did you arrive at the title?

**WARD:** It's an old Maori saying... "In Spring one plants alone, in autumn many gather". There's no direct link with the film. It just feels right.

**PHOTO & AUDIO:** Did you encounter any difficulties filming in such an isolated region?

**WARD:** Yes. There was no power or running water. Under these conditions, we'd normally have used a generator as power source, but wishing to preserve the silence of the environment (high frequency generators are very noisy), we had to construct a special power unit.

We used 20 car batteries mounted on a trailer, which had to be recharged at a garage everyday.

**PHOTO & AUDIO:** How did you manage to raise finance to make the film?

**WARD:** We've been assisted by the Education Department, the Arts Council and the Film Commission. I don't wish to disclose the budget but I will say it's a low budget film. It has been very difficult and I've had no wage. The film could never have been made if I'd waited until all the finance was available.

**PHOTO & AUDIO:** And finally, what are your ambitions as far as filmmaking is concerned?

**WARD:** I want to travel to gain some fresh stimulus. I'd like to work on a film of a larger scale too. It would be a challenge.