

The kids are not exactly sure what he's up to, but John Reeves' camera catches them totally absorbed. When O'Huigin sets them to work on their own names they jump right in. And filmmaker Aido Suzuki uses two cut-out photos to plan a script for a film with another group. When one small boy complains that the pictures are not all the same size she challenges him: "Why does everything have to be so symmetrical?"... Good lessons to open the minds of kids of all ages, but especially those growing up in the heart of the city.

Intimacy, fun, concentration and dignity are what the Angels teach. Live sound and the editing of Yolles and John Bradshaw bring these elements together. John Reeves' cinematography creates a bright collage that naturally lifts the spirits. Edie Yolles began the project as a film student at Ryerson. It is to her credit that she could bring together fellow students, professional film people, government officials, public and private money, and of course the Inner City Angels to produce a film that ought to be seen by urban folk everywhere.

John Brooke

## The View From Vinegar Hill

p./d. Barbara Boyden cam. Mark Irwin ed. Paul Caulfield music consult. Heather Conkie exec. p. Don Haig p.c. Film Arts running time 12 minutes col. 16mm dist. Canadian Filmmaker's Distribution Centre and Kinetic Film Enterprises

*"When we moved here to Vinegar Hill, I thought it was a very magic spot. It's very close to nature and there's a sort of pioneer feeling about it. And I think too many people ignore their history. This felt like my place in the world and so I decided to do a lifetime series... it's my view of life as seen from Vinegar Hill."*

- Barbara Elizabeth Mercer, in **The View From Vinegar Hill**

Barbara Boyden's film asks little more of us than that for a few minutes, we share painter Barbara Elizabeth Mercer's view of life, a view that is, as she puts it, "child-like and wonderlike."

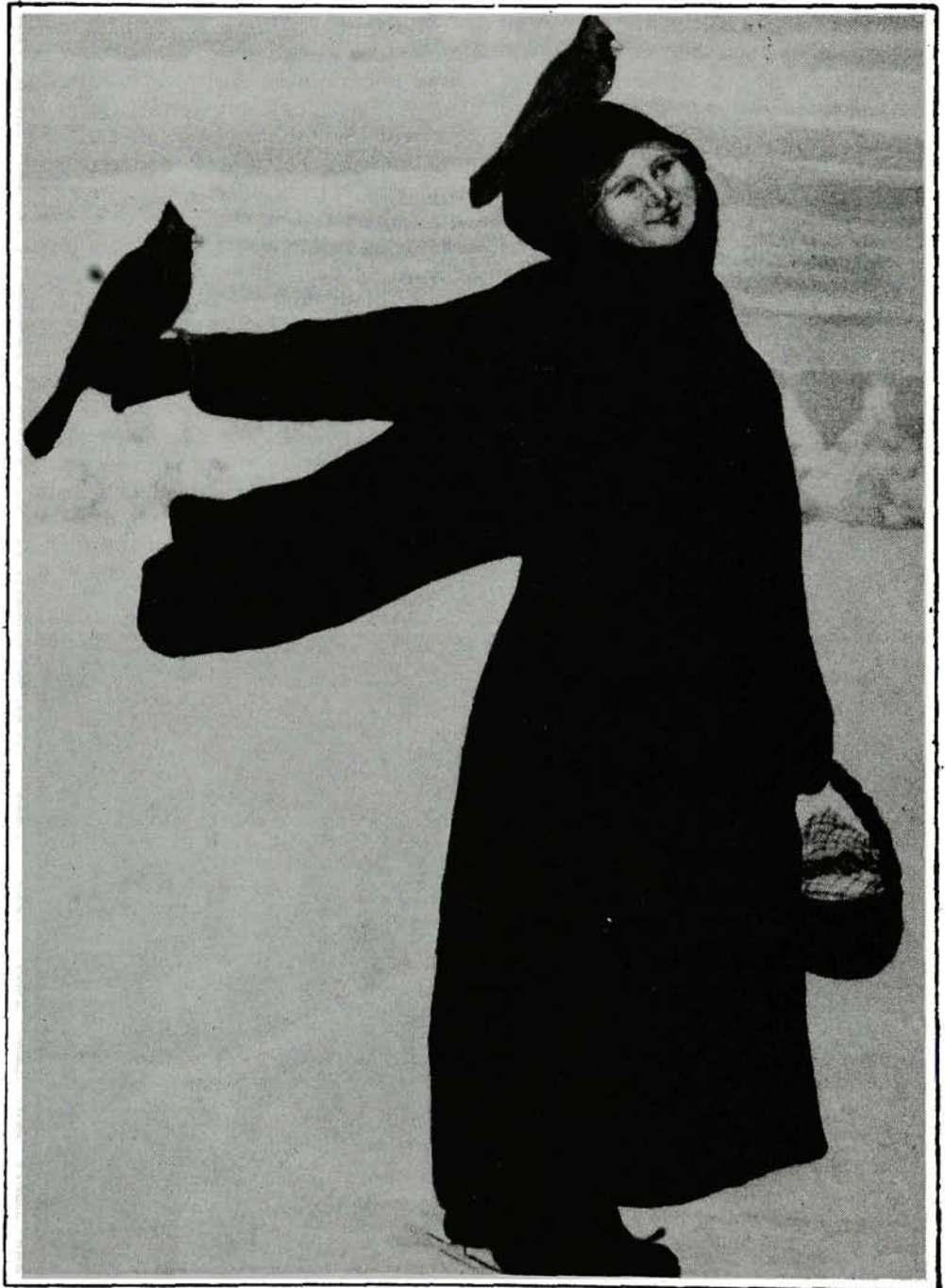
That the film seems longer than its 12 minutes is a testimony to the combined

skills of producer/director Barbara Boyden, cameraman Mark Irwin, editor Paul Caulfield, and music consultant Heather Conkie. Ultimately, they draw us into Mercer's world so completely that at the end, we feel we understand both her work and what led her to live at Vinegar Hill, to create there a series of naive paintings that have an undeniable force and charm.

Barbara Elizabeth Mercer is a beautiful, serene woman, with a face and a voice that the film affectionately uses. Her house, its setting, and her obvious love

and appreciation of both, are carefully and succinctly set down for us before we go on to look at her work.

It is through the exploration of her work that the film widens from what might have been only a finely-drawn vignette. The convention of slow panning shots over the paintings does more for the artist's work, and our viewing of it, than most of us could do unaided. Perhaps a trained eye can see a painting the way the camera sees it here; but I, for one, feel more at ease with film than with static forms of art, and therefore Irwin's camera leads me to



The wonder of life as seen through artist, Barbara Mercer's eyes

## SHORT FILM REVIEWS

see things in the pictures that I would have missed on my own.

Some people feel uneasy at the coupling of two art forms in this way, with one explaining and illuminating the other. Shouldn't the pictures be able to stand on their own? Isn't the camera intruding by leading our eye over the pictures rather than letting us explore them in our own way? Certainly not. What better use for any art form than to help us understand something better, even another art form.

It would be difficult to come away from the film without feeling that living the way Mercer lives would be good for all of us, and that her work, if unknown to us, should not be. She diffidently points out that Harold Town wanted to trade one of his paintings for one of hers. The film leads us to believe that he got a good deal.

Alan Stewart

### Where The Bittersweet Grows

p./d. Kim Ondaatje cam. James B. Kelley, Steve Behal, Derek Redmond graphic design Michael Talley ed. Margaret Van Eerdewyk, Kim Ondaatje neg. cutter May Bischoff p.a. Ben Moran, James Moyer research Killaloe area, Gordon Flagler sd. ed. Margaret Van Eerdewyk re-rec. Len Abbot original mus. Bill Whiteacre dist. Canadian Filmmaker's Distribution Centre running time 26 min. col. 16mm.

Kim Ondaatje's **Where the Bittersweet Grows**, Part I, is a documentary film which deals in a factual way with three families who have chosen to live in the country, in homes they have built themselves. Part I is the first of three intended films that will be made at five-year intervals to report and reflect on the families as they develop, age, and settle further into their chosen environments. All three families are attractive, well-educated, and have children. Their choice to live where and how they do seems to be the result of a calm decision, rather than an hysterical flight from the city. All of them appear to be enviably fulfilled and content.

The appeal of these modern settlers is undeniable, but it is the houses and the rural environment that give the film its magic. This does not detract from the homebuilders themselves; after all, it is their dreams, imagination, and hard work which the houses represent. However, we have all seen films that use the building theme — everything from the rain-forest villages in those **Burma, Land of Contrast** things that people show in high school gyms, to **The Shining** — but in few cases are we drawn in to the extent that we are in **Where The Bittersweet Grows**.

If Ondaatje intended in Part I to introduce the families, give us a capsule history of each one, and show us their respective houses in the woods, she has certainly succeeded. The quiet interviews and voice-overs give us most of the factual information necessary to understand the

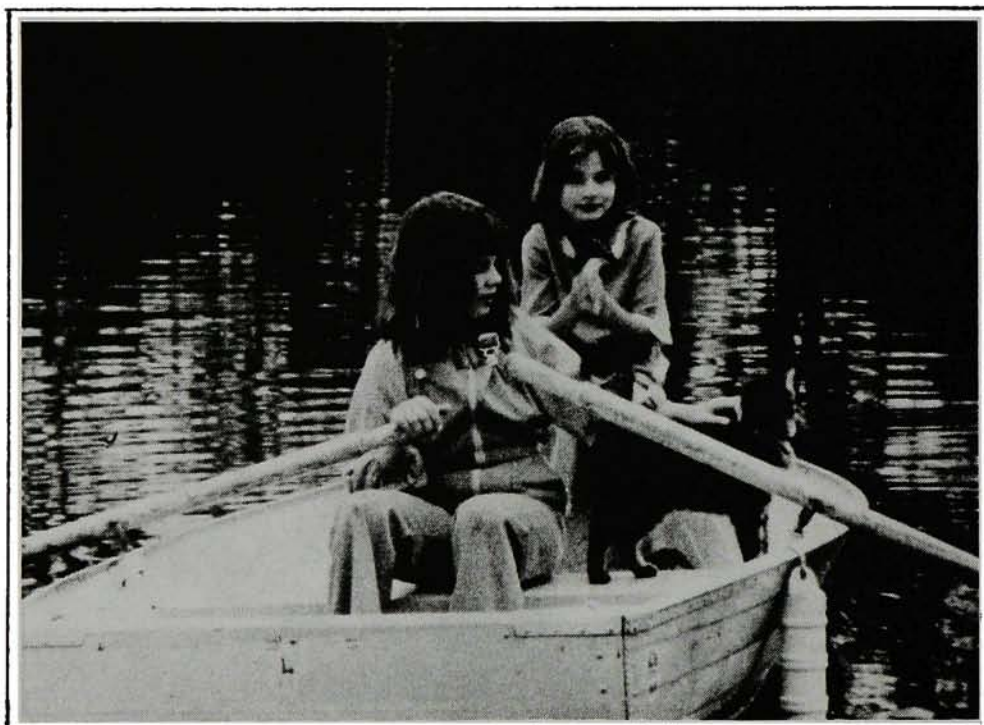
different backgrounds and motivations. If the film had been in Swahili or Hindi, it would still have had the same charming effect, for it is the photography that lures us into the film's soft, bucolic world.

Ondaatje has achieved more than just a tasteful representation of the man-made, and the natural habitat. Without sacrificing the repertorial aspects of the film, she has artistically interpreted and presented the land, houses and furniture as a kind of visual tone poem.

This simple, spare poetry is capable of creating a multilayered image around one small object, like a blue bottle on a wooden window-ledge or a horse walking through long grass.

The tranquil feelings of the three families are aptly communicated and reinforced by the visuals. Indeed, the combined efforts of Ondaatje, cameraman Jim Kelly, and Margaret Van Eerdewyk, who did the editing with Ondaatje, have resulted in a film that I could willingly see again and again. It satisfies on all levels.

Alan Stewart



A world to explore **Where The Bittersweet Grows**

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