

Artist Placement Group (APG) was a pioneering British art experiment, with an international reputation, formed by a group of artists in 1966 including John Latham, Barbara Steveni and Stuart Brisley. The group was formed to examine the potential of artists in relation to industrial and commercial organisations and, later, Government, from the belief that 'context is half the work'. The project emerged from the idea of artists being an underused resource in society with Latham coining the phrase 'incidental person' to replace the word artist. Coward became involved with APG in 1971 and exhibited with them in France, Germany, Austria and the UK.

Roger Coward was born in Great Malvern in 1939 and lives and works in Powys, Wales. His work was featured in the recent Tate Liverpool exhibition 'Art Turning Left: How Values Changed Making 1789-2013' exhibition. He was Senior Lecturer in Film Making at the University of Westminster for twenty years and went on to train and practice as a Psychoanalytical Psychotherapist for a quarter of a century. He is an author, and has edited and designed of a new artist book surveying the overall 1975 project, published by Eastside Projects. Previously he has directed eight documentary films including a BBC1 Arts Film. In the theatre he was an Assistant Director at the Royal Court Theatre, was Co-Director of the Recreation Ground lunchtime Theatre, directed for the Edinburgh International Festival Fringe and the Soho Theatre, London with his production, 'Jack', being televised by the BBC.

Frances Viner's work as an actor, director and writer includes co-founding Raving Beauties. Twice commissioned by Channel 4, this company toured internationally and published four anthologies based on their shows. Their latest book 'Hallelujah for 50ft Women' (published by Bloodaxe Books) is a collection by new and established poets about women's relationships to their bodies. Her work as a writer includes 'In Blood', commissioned by the Arcola Theatre, which fused Brazilian myth, capoeira and 'The Bacchae' by Euripides. Frances is currently Artistic Director of Hallucinating Angels, a community art and theatre collective based at the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill.

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YOU AND ME HERE WE ARE
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EXHIBITION GUIDE

Roger Coward

'YOU AND ME HERE WE ARE'

16 May to 11 July 2015

Public preview, Friday 15 May 2015, 6-8pm

TWO BIRMINGHAM PLAYS

Performances: Friday 5 June, 6.30pm, 8.30pm

Saturday 6 June, 4pm, 6pm, 8pm

Tickets 6 pounds, book at www.eastsideprojects.org

This summer Eastside Projects and Roger Coward re-visit his 1975 Artist Placement Group project in Birmingham. Focusing on Small Heath as part of the Government's Inner Area Study, the exhibition of original material includes the artist's film 'The Most Smallest Heath in the Spaghetti Junction', plus a new artist's book, a symposium 'The Studio in Society' (Saturday, 4 July), and a revival of two plays devised and performed in Digbeth in 1975.

In the autumn of 1972 the Department of the Environment initiated three urban studies which sought to develop a more comprehensive approach to the improvement of the environment. The studies were meant to provide guidance for local authorities and the 'inner area study' in Birmingham was concerned with the particular problems of Small Heath. Coward was the first artist to be placed in a Government Department on an open brief.

In Birmingham in 1975 Coward worked with four other artists – Gavin Brown, Roland Lewis, Evadne Stevens and Frances Viner. The group, by living and working together, became a self-reflecting microcosm of society as a structure for producing art. They trained three community groups to use video in order to present their views to the City Council officials and elements of these are included in the 'Spaghetti Junction' film. A range of archive material and feedback images produced by the artists are also included in the exhibition.

Prior to this project Coward had not been operating as an artist but as a filmmaker and in theatre. As part of the APG project the group also produced a number of original plays. The revival of two of these plays is produced by

Coward, and directed by Frances Viner, who was part of the artist group originating and performing the plays in 1975. The actors, stage manager and designer have been selected in Birmingham through open auditions.

The first play 'Happiness in the Homeland' explores the reaction of a teenage daughter to her Irish mother's wish to marry a Guyanese immigrant. After improvisation by the group it was written by an 18 year old Small Heath shop assistant called Pauline Walton who, after a search by Eastside Projects, Coward recently made contact with again after a forty year gap. The second play 'There We Were, and Here We Go' explores themes, which remain relevant in Birmingham today, of leadership, participation, organisation and authority. By reimagining both plays now Coward aims to open up discussion and thought about these themes which still dominate politics today, and encourage debate about the wider issues that context based art projects generate.

For interviews and images contact [effy\(at\)eastsideprojects.org](mailto:effy@eastsideprojects.org)

The exhibition is accompanied by a new artist's book: 'YOU AND ME HERE WE ARE', which is available to buy in the gallery and at www.eastsideprojects.org for 15 pounds.

'THE STUDIO IN SOCIETY' SYMPOSIUM

Saturday 4 July 2015, 1-4pm

Speakers: Roger Coward, Gavin Wade (Director, Eastside Projects), Antony Hudek (Director, Objectif Exhibitions, Antwerp), Claudia Hummel (Director, Institut fur Kunst im Kontext Universitat der Kunste Berlin), Janna Graham (Public Programmer, Nottingham Contemporary).

Eastside Projects

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Free entry, open Wednesday to Saturday, 12-5pm

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Eastside Projects is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. In partnership with Birmingham City University.