

Revival of plays to tell story of city over 40 years

A BIRMINGHAM contemporary art gallery is reviving two plays originally written in Digbeth 40 years ago.

Heath Mill Lane-based Eastside Projects is set to premiere performances that were first staged in 1975.

Happiness in the Homeland and *There we were and here we Go* were created by Roger Coward and four other artists - Gavin Brown, Roland Lewis, Evadne Stevens and Frances Viner - who worked together as part of an Artists' Placement Group project in Small Heath.

The plays pose questions about what has changed in Birmingham in the last 40 years and whether the city has learned to embrace multiculturalism.

The group of artists created one play themselves and, through improvisation, worked with local residents to write a second play that described life in their community at that time.

Happiness in the Homeland explores the reaction of two teenagers to their Irish mother's wish to marry a Guyanese immigrant.

"The play offers a domestic take on the classic coming of age story; exploring how embedded world-views transform amid family relationships and considering love, racism and the growth of a city," said Gavin Wade of Eastside Projects.

"Following group improvisation it was written by Pauline Walton who, in 1975, was 18 years old and working as a shop assistant in Small Heath.

"The second play, *There we were and here we Go*, focuses on themes of leadership and participation that all remain relevant in Birmingham today," he added.

The revival is produced and directed by two members of the original group - Roger Coward and Frances Viner - who are bringing to Birmingham a company of actors - Alan Magor, Minal Patel, Samantha Béart and Sarah Allen, Stage Manager Liam Walsh and Designer Fiona Lockton for the unique performances.

The performances, on Friday, June 5, complement a wider exhibition of original material including photographs, publications, sculpture and video works, which also form part of the stage set for the revival. For more information and to book tickets visit www.eastsideprojects.org.