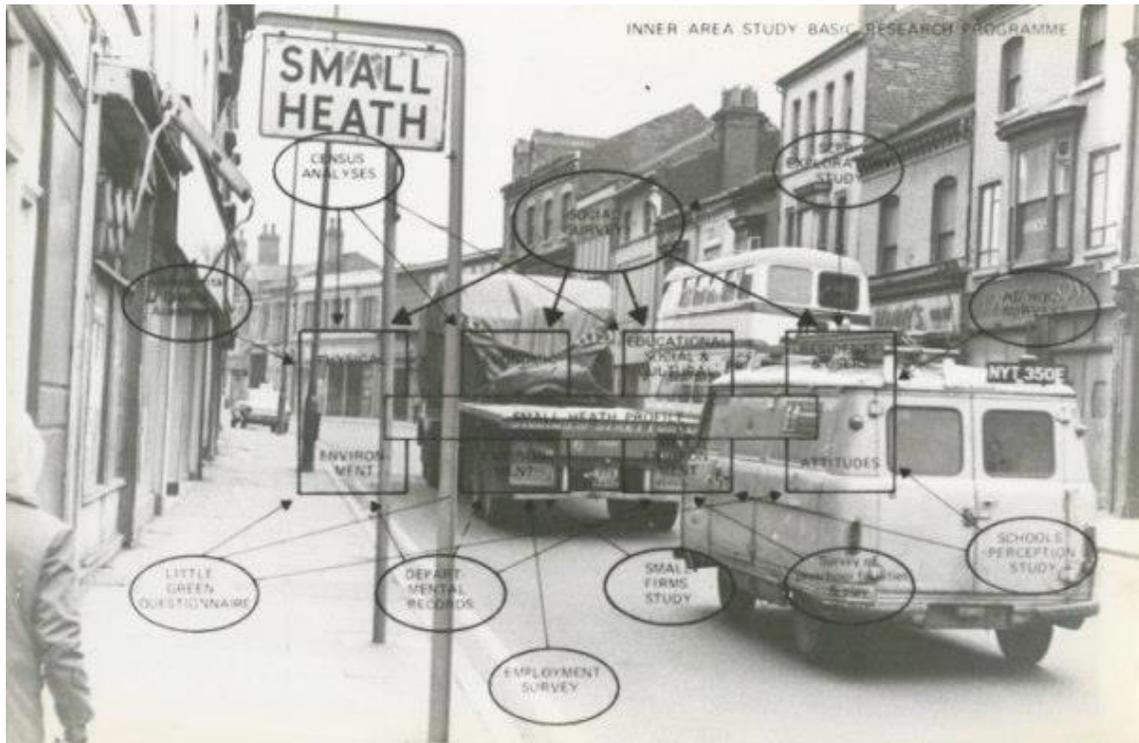


Eastside Projects: For immediate release



Roger Coward: Two Birmingham Plays

Performances: Friday 5 June, 6.30pm & 8.30pm as part of Digbeth First Friday

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

Tickets £6, advance booking via www.eastsideprojects.org

What has changed in Birmingham in the last forty years? Have we learnt to embrace and utilize Birmingham's longstanding multicultural character? Is art useful as a tool to affect society?

This June Eastside Projects will premiere a new revival of two plays, originally devised and performed in Digbeth in 1975. *'Happiness in the Homeland'* and *'There we were and here we Go'* were presented forty years ago 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 group of artists created one play themselves and, through a process of improvisation, worked with local residents who wrote a second play that described their experience of 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 close up, 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. 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, participation, organisation and authority that all remain relevant in Birmingham today. The subject matter shifts wildly - from the 'Age of Aquarius' through to education, religion, deprivation and group working itself - as the cast of characters confess and test their own personal politics whilst attempting to deal with the responsibility of offering advice that could support life in the inner city

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 these unique performances. The performances compliment a broader exhibition of original material including photographs, publications, sculpture and video works, which also form part of the stage set for the revival.

By re-imagining and re-presenting both plays now Coward, Viner and Eastside Projects aim to open up discussion about the themes within both plays which are still relevant to life, politics, and Birmingham today.



ENDS

Notes to Editors

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.

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 (b.1939, Malvern, lives and works in Powys, Wales) His work was featured in the recent Tate Liverpool's "Art Moves Left – How Values changed making" 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 BBC.

Frances Viner's work as 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 (pub. 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.

Eastside Projects makes art public and is based in a free public gallery in Digbeth that is being imagined and organized by artists, in partnership with Birmingham City University. Eastside Projects commissions, produces and presents contemporary art and demonstrates ways in which art may be useful as part of society. Entrance is free and we open Wednesday to Saturday, 12–5pm.

For interviews and images contact effy@eastsideprojects.org

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An Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation in partnership with
Birmingham City University.