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Timely to recall Whitlam's Blacktown legacy

By Jade Wittmann

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Artist and 'It's Timely' curator Gary Carsley with his contribution to the exhibition. Picture: Joshua Morris

Blacktown Arts Centre will host a discussion about the legacy of Gough Whitlam, who chose the suburb to launch the "It's Time" federal election campaign in 1972.

A panel of writers and artists will share their thoughts on the former Labor prime minister, who introduced free university education, Medibank (Medicare's predecessor), FM radio and the Australia Council for the Arts, at the free Sydney Writers' Festival event on May 23.

They include authors Jane Caro and Fiona McGregor, film producer Gary Paramanathan and artist **Gary Carsley**, who curated the current related *It's Timely* exhibition.

Carsley's interest in the topic sparked when he was commissioned to write an essay on an exhibition of emerging western Sydney artists at the Blacktown Arts Centre in 2011.

"The idea the whole framework of confident, culturally experimental progressive Australia could begin in the western suburbs was a radical proposition, but it's true," he said.

"At the core of Mr Whitlam's address in Blacktown was that for a country as prosperous and secure as this one, there needed to be greater fairness.

"I think the panel has been chosen with a view to creating the most diverse group of people to engage with the complexities of western Sydney.

"They often use 'diversity' as though it were a type of rash that you could address with an ointment, when [the western suburbs] are incredibly complex and cosmopolitan places with people from all over the world."

Carsley said though the *It's Timely* exhibition had been in planning for two years it was good timing it opened so near to the release of the federal budget, from which people will lose many of the benefits Whitlam introduced.

'How on the mark are they?' he said.