



MUSEUM
OF AUSTRALIAN
DEMOCRACY
OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE

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The nation's first prime ministers captivate Canberra-based artist

Leading contemporary artist Alison Alder reinterprets and reinvigorates portraits of our first political leaders in *onetoeight: Australia's First Prime Ministers*, a new contemporary art exhibition that opened today at the Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) at Old Parliament House.

Developed during Alder's fellowship with the museum's Australian Prime Ministers Centre and motivated by the early period of our nation's democracy, *onetoeight* brings these important historical figures a little closer to us.

Daryl Karp, Director of MoAD, says it is a powerful exhibition creatively merging history and art, while celebrating the achievements of our first prime ministers.

"This exhibition shows us a dramatic time of change in our history that was lively, dynamic and parallels our own," says Ms Karp.

The exhibition sits alongside the museum's other, more conventional offerings, such as the Prime Ministers of Australia gallery and Prime Ministers of Australia website, to paint a rich picture of the challenges of being the Prime Minister of the day.

Inspired by a picture of Stanley Bruce's cabinet where they were all wearing a lapel badge, Alder presents each prime minister wearing a badge to reference a key aspect of their time in office. Neither explicitly positive nor negative, we are left to form our own opinion.

"That's what made it tricky," Alder, head of the ANU School of Art's Printmedia and Drawing Workshop, says of *onetoeight's* subjects. "I found I couldn't be partisan looking back. I started to see the nuances of the political situation at the time."

With frequent changes of prime minister and realignment of voting patterns, Alder also sees similarities between today's political climate and the early Federation era. This is represented by a Term-O-Meter animation, tracking the changing political hues of individuals and governments.

What about the women? The first prime minister's wives, including Margaret Fisher, who took part in historic marches for female suffrage, the intelligent Jane Barton and stalwart Florence Reid, are also honoured in intense patterned wallpaper that forms the backdrop to the exhibition.

"The wives are really important as well," says Alder. "I don't think any of those men married shrinking violets. They are all strong women."

Alison Alder is a Canberra-based visual artist whose work blurs the line between studio, community and political art practice. Her work has been exhibited in several key exhibitions including Making It New at the MCA Australia and is held in many public collections, including the NGA.

onetoeight: Australia's First Prime Ministers will be on display at the Museum of Australian Democracy until February 2018. Entry is free after museum admission. Open daily 9am-5pm. www.moadoph.gov.au

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