



Media release

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Enlighten 2026: The *Department of Memories* takes over Old Parliament House

The Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) at Old Parliament House will once again come alive during the 2026 Enlighten Festival, transforming the iconic heritage-listed building into the *Department of Memories* – an immersive after-dark experience featuring live performances, karaoke, craft activities and more.

From 27 February to 9 March 2026, the building’s iconic façade will be illuminated with large-scale illustrations by acclaimed artist Sam Wallman.

Barrie Cassidy, Chair of the Board at Old Parliament House, says Enlighten is a highlight of the MoAD calendar and creating spaces for people to share their stories is essential for a healthy democracy.

“When we invite people to share their experiences, we’re not just collecting memories. We’re building empathy and understanding, which are essential for democracy to thrive.”

For four magical nights, MoAD will open its doors after dark, inviting visitors of all ages to step inside Old Parliament House and explore the *Department of Memories*. An (un)official, fictional agency dedicated to collecting and cataloguing our personal memories.

Visitors can meet the Department's Minister of Memories, Venus Mantrap, belt out a forgotten favourite at karaoke, peruse the banned book library and say hello to our resident magpies.

The team at MoAD have curated evenings filled with immersive art installations and hands-on experiences where visitors can share their own stories – the hilarious, the heart-breaking, and everything in between.

Amy Wolgamot, MoAD's Head of Engagement, says Enlighten provides the perfect time to be playful with how we engage visitors with democracy.

“For Enlighten this year, we've created a fictional agency dedicated to collecting and celebrating memories of all kinds. Our memories, whether they're joyful, painful, funny, sad or awkward, are the wonderfully strange glue that helps hold democracy together.

Our event asks visitors to leave a personal memory behind in our growing art installation inside the centre of Old Parliament House. This memory archive is something visitors can explore over four nights. You may just discover that it's not only you who has waved at someone who wasn't waving at you, and it's not just you who feels a little scared sometimes,” Ms Wolgamot says.

Grab a friend or the family and make new memories exploring the many silly offices in the *Department of Memories*:

- Office of Knick-Knacks and Trinkets
- Office of Words to Warbles
- Office of Grudges and Gripes
- Office of Record Management (don't be fooled, it's karaoke)
- Office of Big Important Things
- Office of Flashbacks
- The Cryogenic Chamber
- Library of Bits, Bobs and Banned Books
- Office of Short-Term Memory

Some of the activities on offer:

- Share a **memory** and leave it behind in our growing art installation
- Belt out a forgotten favourite at **karaoke**
- **Scrapbook**: from family recipes to minor embarrassments
- A chance to meet 'Minister', **Venus Mantrap**

- Enjoy the rare opportunity for food and drinks in the **Members' Bar**
- A visit to the hardworking magpies in the ***Office of Words to Warbles***, created by Canberra artist **Tom Buckland**

KEY INFO

Enlighten Illuminations:

27 February – 9 March (inclusive), from 8pm, free

Department of Memories, 7pm-10.30pm, free after-dark activations:

Friday 27 February

Saturday 28 February

Friday 6 March

Saturday 7 March

Members' Bar food and drinks:

6.30pm-10.30pm on event nights

Location:

Museum of Australian Democracy (MoAD) at Old Parliament House

For media enquiries:

Media enquiries: media@moadoph.gov.au or call (02) 6270 8120

Images

Available [here](#)

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Sam Wallman

Sam Wallman is a cartoonist and illustrator based in Naarm (Melbourne). Sam's work has been published in the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, *Labor Notes*, *The Age*, the ABC and SBS. Illuminations created with support from Liz Elton Studio.

Tom Buckland

Canberra-based Tom Buckland is the artist behind the whimsical *Office of Words to Warbles* a playful installation within the *Department of Memories*. Working with recycled materials, Buckland creates playful, interactive and experimental installations, video and performance work.

Venus Mantrap

Venus Mantrap is a much-loved mainstay in Canberra's LGBTIQ+ performance spaces. Their unique take on drag performance, merging elements of cabaret, performance art and comedy, has captivated Canberra audiences for over 15 years.

Ms Constance Spry's Letter Writing Service

Ms Constance Spry's Letter Writing Service has, for over ten years, provided a space for people to connect with themselves and each other. Referencing the offices and systems of a whimsical yesteryear with wit and elegance, they have one simple philosophy: whatever needs to be said deserves to be said in a letter.

ABOUT ENLIGHTEN

Now in its 16th year, the ACT Government's 2026 Enlighten Festival will once again light up the nation's capital over 11 days of culture and creativity from Friday 27 February – Monday 9 March.

Enlighten provides a unique opportunity to explore Australia's celebrated cultural institutions in a whole new light as they unite to present original major architectural projections and creative collaborations.

Expect world premieres and Canberra-firsts that transform familiar spaces with stunning artwork, exclusive public programs, art installations, and unique experiences curated for the festival.

As part of the Enlighten Night Shift program, MoAD will open its doors late to welcome visitors into the *Department of Memories*, welcoming visitors across four memorable evenings on 27–28 February and 6–7 March 2026.

Image caption: For four magical nights, MoAD will open its doors after dark, welcoming visitors of all ages to step inside Old Parliament House and explore the *Department of Memories* – a fictional pop-up dedicated to collecting and cataloguing the moments that shape our lives.