

# Signs

## Language without words

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**Styles of clothing, hand gestures, uniforms and tattoos – we come across signs everywhere in our daily lives. They point to rules and practices, signalise belonging to a certain social group, stand for ideologies and symbolise power structures. An exhibition of the *Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* addresses this phenomenon and now, after Bonn, Leipzig and Berlin, is also coming to the Grand Duchy in a version supplemented with Luxembourg examples.**

The exhibition goes to the root of the non-verbal language of signs and their messages, but also looks at the inherent misunderstandings. With approximately 600 photographs, interactive stations, media installations and objects, it highlights the meaning of non-verbal communication in society.

Men and women each possess specific, symbolic attributes from birth: pink and blue, later high heels and ties. Uniforms assign roles, and the executive's armchair is wider than the employee's stool. Rockers wear cut-offs with patches as a sign of their belonging to a group; tattoos on the other hand are supposed to enhance the body's individuality. Colours can warn or seduce. Hearts on tree trunks and padlocks on bridge railings are a sign of eternal love.

Religions have always employed firm systems of signs such as prayer postures or blessing gestures. But some sign languages have been lost over time. The exhibition addresses, for example, the gallant conversations between noble ladies of the 18th and 19th centuries, using their fans.

The exhibition will help people learn to decipher signs, for example in politics, where, by means of clothing and body language, a calculated external impact in the media is achieved. Political protest falls back on strong, catchy symbols: from peace signs to the Guy Fawkes' masks of *Anonymous* and *Occupy*. Street art, on the other hand, has developed its own graphic and pictorial signs that are often only understood by insiders.

The meanings of signs vary, however, depending on the cultural and historical context. In this way, the same hand gesture can signal approval in one country, but be a severe insult in another. Traditional symbols can lose their original meaning and may, for example, become fashion accessories.

A documentation room as well as a small cinema enrich the entertaining and informative tour through the exhibition.

An exhibition by *Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*