

## Press Release

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## Hannah Arendt and the Twentieth Century

An exhibition by the Deutsches Historisches Museum



Hannah Arendt is one of the great political thinkers of the twentieth century. Her emphatic judgments are as controversial today as her questions are relevant. Headstrong, controversial and stimulating, she wrote about totalitarianism, antisemitism, the situation of refugees, the Eichmann trial, Zionism, the political system and racial segregation in the USA, the student protests of the 1960s, and feminism. The Deutsches Historisches Museum is devoting a temporary exhibition to the **life and work of Hannah Arendt**, both of which reflect the history of the twentieth century and the demands that it continues to make on us today.

As **Prof. Dr. Raphael Gross**, the President of the Deutsches Historisches Museum, remarks: 'The twentieth century lies at the heart of Hannah Arendt's thinking. She asks what the faculty of historical judgment can do after the Holocaust and she analyses the elements and origins of totalitarian rule. Her topics are often related to what she experienced in the course of her own life. They concern issues such as human rights, the rights of stateless persons, and the ability of a post-totalitarian society to distinguish between facts and opinions'.

### Exercising the Faculty of Judgment

The exhibition focuses on Hannah Arendt's influence as a political theorist. With reference to key episodes and topics in contemporary history, it casts light on how the judgments made by her, as a Jew who had fled Nazi Germany, arose in response to the challenges of her time, and it examines the reactions they provoked. Arendt's arguments also challenge people to exercise their own faculty of judgment, which is essential for reflecting upon the present in the light of the past.

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### **Judgments and Controversy**

The exhibition traces Hannah Arendt's experience of the twentieth century through sixteen historical topics. Among the highlights are historical video recordings, such as her oft-quoted televised interview with Günter Gaus from 1964, and a number of recently filmed interviews with other people, such as the philosopher Ágnes Heller, who died in 2019, the politician Daniel Cohn-Bendit, and the cultural expert Stefanie Lohaus. The controversies in which Arendt became embroiled are also featured. An audio collage introduces visitors to the judgments she formulated and the arguments that they triggered.

'Arendt did not invoke any programme, political party, or tradition. This makes it difficult to classify her thinking, but also interesting: Was she a leftist? A liberal? A conservative?' asks **Dr. Monika Boll**, the curator of the exhibition.

The presentation points out how Hannah Arendt's commentaries continue to shape discourse today. The topicality of her thinking is illustrated, for example, by her reflections on the precarious status of refugees, which drew on her own experiences of flight and emigration. Similarly, Arendt's work for Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc. from 1949 onward prefigures current debates about provenance research. The New York-based organisation took on the task of locating cultural property looted by the Nazis and transferring it to the USA and Israel.

### **Feminine and Intellectual. Hannah Arendt's Style**

In addition to the overview of her intellectual achievements, the themed exhibition casts a spotlight on Hannah Arendt as a person. One section is dedicated to works by the photographer Fred Stein, whose striking portraits have had a strong influence on people's perceptions of her. Thanks to a generous donation to the Deutsches Historisches Museum from Edna Brocke, Hannah Arendt's niece, the exhibition is able to present many of Arendt's personal belongings.

### **Friendships**

Among the more unusual objects is Hannah Arendt's Minox camera, which people used to call a 'spy camera'. It inspired her to take up photography as a hobby and her friendships are documented here in a large number of photographs.

Friendship meant more to Arendt than just the pleasure of social contact. She kept up many friendships, which may have formed a kind of safety net over the abyss of flight and displacement. A decentralised presentation introducing her friends occupies the entire second floor of the building. Among them are notable figures such as Karl Jaspers, Mary McCarthy, Martin Heidegger, Heinrich Blücher,

Walter Benjamin, Anne Weil, Hans Jonas, Günther Anders, Edna Brocke, Lotte Köhler and Wystan H. Auden.

The exhibition contains **around 300 objects** from the collections of the Deutsches Historisches Museum and other institutions, such as the Hannah Arendt Bluecher Literary Trust, the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem, the German Literature Archive in Marbach, and the Hannah Arendt Centre in Oldenburg.

To accompany the exhibition, Piper Verlag has published a **catalogue** in German (228 pages, approx. 80 illustrations, 22 €), with a variety of essays that offer current perspectives on Hannah Arendt's political and historical judgments as well as the reactions that they provoked.

### **Important information about visiting the exhibition**

Based on the recommendations of the Berlin Senate and in compliance with the nationally prescribed hygiene and protective measures, the Deutsches Historisches Museum will open the exhibition "Hannah Arendt and the 20th Century" to the public as a first step from May 11, 2020.

**Tickets** for the exhibition will be available online with a binding time window. The generally applicable distance and hygiene rules apply in the Deutsches Historisches Museum. Wearing a mouth and nose mask is a prerequisite for visiting the exhibition. Cloakrooms are only available to a limited extent. Therefore, please avoid carrying backpacks and bags larger than 30 x 20 x 10 cm.

The educational offers of the museum are also affected by the restrictions. There are currently no guided tours or group offers. Instead, visitors can individually explore the exhibition on Hannah Arendt in the Pei Building through audio tours offering a comprehensive insight into the life and work of the political theorist. Bringing your own headphones (3.5 mm jack plug) is recommended.

In addition to the reopening, the DHM is continuing its digital offers. On the [website](#), the [DHM-Blog](#) and the [social media channels](#) there are contributions to the current exhibition that are being added gradually, including the audio collages created in cooperation with rbbKultur about the life and work of Hannah Arendt.

You can find up-to-date news and information on visiting the exhibition on the [DHM website](#).