



Press release 10.01.2020

ALPHABETUM VI

Free Emoji

Exhibition: 22.02.2020 — 31.05.2020, Opening: 22.02.2020, 19:00 uur

Location: West Den Haag in the former American Embassy, Lange Voorhout 102, The Hague

More info: www.westdenhaag.nl

With Free Emoji, the Alphabetum is investigating the contemporary status of writing after the emergence of emoji.

Technically, there is no difference between typing an emoji (like ☺) and the letter A. In both cases, typing refers to a specific meaning which is defined by a unique Unicode code-point. The former causes an emoji graphic to be displayed, the latter, the graphic shape of a letter A. Behind the scenes, the similarities maintain. Each unicode character has its own textual 'human readable' description, so ☺ will be 'Grinning Face' (Unicode U+LF600) and A will be 'LATIN CAPITAL LETTER A' (Unicode U+0041). For any device, they are both graphics, shapes defined by Bézier curves, and possibly colours.

The difference is in use. We usually compose text characters into words where the significance emerges, whereas emojis immediately signify something, maybe something ambiguous, but still, we get an idea immediately with the emoji, while with text letters we have to read (= decipher) first. This leads to a further difference, while we can compose text characters to produce any meaning, emojis (currently) offer a limited set of pre-defined meanings. The amount and kinds of emojis available are restricted not by the technical capacity of your device or properties of the internet, but by the global companies provide the platforms and hardware.

Would you agree if your device would not allow you to compose your own words, but only the ones which are implemented in the device? This is precisely the case with the emojis we use, and it doesn't have to be that way.

Emojis possibly point to a revolution in communication, when words, which have run the world for generations, may be ceding their prevalence to images. So it is even more important that the emoji-landscape be emancipated. Please join us as we explore together what emojis are, why they are the way they are, how they reveal what we are, and what they might be if they were free.

If you have any questions, please contact MJ Sondejker: marie-jose@westdenhaag.nl or (0)70.3925359

The former American embassy 'Onze Ambassade' is managed by ANNA Vastgoed & Cultuur and Art Institute West Den Haag. The program of West is supported by the municipality of The Hague and the Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science.