PRESS RELEASE

“Live better! The search for the ideal way of life” exhibition

Vegan, fit, green – on the origins of self-optimisation

The Bernisches Historisches Museum and the University of Fribourg will be putting on an exhibition about the life reform movement from 13 February to 5 July 2020. The focus is on their ideas, practices and products, from the movement’s beginnings at the turn of the twentieth century to the present day, showing how society came to embrace initially radical concepts. www.bhm.ch/livebetter

More and more people follow a vegan diet, young people are taking to the streets to raise awareness of environmental issues, and fitness experts are all the rage on social media. But healthy eating, environmental protection and physical culture are not just a modern trend. At the turn of the twentieth century, during a time of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, people were concerned this period of upheaval was creating a world that was hostile to life. The adherents of the life reform movement attempted to counter these conditions through individual self-optimisation on various levels. Around the turn of the twentieth century, the first Reformhäuser (a type of health food store) opened in Switzerland, and people began soaking up the sun in light-and-air baths and growing their own vegetables. Expressionist dancers, anarchists and artists experimented with alternative forms of living, such as the community at Monte Verità near Ascona. The “Live better! The search for the ideal way of life” exhibition is divided up into six different areas and takes visitors on a journey through the history of the life reform movement. Objects, photographs and audiovisual stations provide fascinating insights into its achievements – and its dark side.

Cooperation with the University of Fribourg

The exhibition is based on findings from a research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and conducted by the University of Fribourg. “Our research shows that Switzerland played a very important role in the transnational life reform movement”, explains Damir Skenderovic, Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Fribourg and head of the research project. They also noted that the ideas and practices that drove the life reform movement continued throughout the twentieth century.

Presenting these research findings to the general public in the form of an exhibition was also something the museum was keen to do: “The Bernisches Historisches Museum provides a platform for current events and contemporary history, and is open to working with other institutions,” explains Director Jakob Messerli.

High-resolution images:
www.bhm.ch/bilder-livebetter

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