

## Exhibition questions cult of fitness

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A gym during the early days of the fitness movement (Forum Schlossplatz)

**Fitness and beauty have long been celebrated by western society in magazines and advertising.**

Now that obsession is being challenged by a new exhibition - "Fitness. Beauty Comes From the Outside" - at the Forum Schlossplatz Museum in Aarau.

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The exhibition examines the historical roots of today's preoccupation with body shape, and shines an ironic as well as critical light on the fitness movement, which began at the start of the 20th century.

"It is a critical exhibition that tells us that fitness is very popular, but for some people maybe the fitness aspect is not as important as being with a group or relaxing after work," exhibition organiser Andreas Schwab told swissinfo.

"People who don't work out are still confronted with fitness, and we wanted to show that this came from history and that there is not only a present of fitness but also a past," he told swissinfo.

### **Fitness centre**

The exhibition is set up like a fitness centre, with a changing room, three rooms showing different aspects of the fitness phenomenon in modern society - history, practice and the quest for happiness - and finally the shower.

The history room guides the visitor through the development of the fitness cult in the early 20th century.

"Fitness had a militaristic role because it was the body

cult of the Nazis that started it, so fitness in the 1950s was kind of discriminated against, nobody wanted to do it," said Schwab.

Only in the 1970s, when actors Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jane Fonda brought the fitness idea back to Europe did it become popular.

The second room is dedicated to the practice of fitness. It explains how for centuries the way to the perfect body has been systematically conceptualised and how the fitness industry has developed in accordance with changing ideas about what constitutes the "perfect" body.

### **Keeping in shape**

The third part of the exhibition focuses on five individuals and their relationship to fitness. The show normal people with bodies of all different shapes.

The fourth room, called the shower, displays 17 life-size photographs by Yoki van de Cream, showing people of all ages who are confident with their bodies. The images are accompanied by sound effects recorded in a shower at a fitness centre.

The media and especially advertising have long used images of young, fit bodies to sell health, beauty and happiness.

And attitudes to fitness can be viewed as a reflection of society, saying much about our values and the way we deal with beauty and ageing.

Schwab says the exhibition is aimed at much as athletes as couch potatoes. "We don't just want the specialists here, it is for everybody," he emphasized.

The exhibition runs at the Museum Forum Schlossplatz until November 2.

swissinfo, Daniela Silberstein in Aarau

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