

Press release

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Consumer worlds. Focusing on everyday life

Whether at markets, from door to door, in department stores or online: where and how we shop have changed significantly over the past 170 years. The way we consume and what we consume are also constantly changing. A wide variety of photographs as well as graphic products from the poster to the shopping bag bear testament to that. The exhibition at the National Museum Zurich shows eclectic imagery from everyday life.

The first part of the exhibition covers the history of the main sales locations. They have multiplied since the mid-19th century following economic and social developments from industrialisation to digitisation. Markets and street and door-to-door selling have been joined over time by shops, wholesalers, department stores, shopping centres and online shops. Photos and graphic objects attest to the unique character of each of these sales points as well as showing historic aspects of the retail business. These include the introduction of self-service, the presentation of products in display windows, advertising, and shopping as a leisure pursuit.

One centrepiece of the exhibition is a kiosk, which stood at Viale Francesco Balli in Locarno in the early 20th century. For a long time, it was a classic kiosk selling newspapers, sweets and cigarettes; its range expanded from the late 1990s to include outdoor adventure activities and computers with internet access. And like the kiosk's product range, its appearance has also changed over the years. New coats of paint plus bright billboards and advertising labels gave the kiosk, which was painstakingly restored for the exhibition, its distinctive appearance and make it a multi-faceted symbol of everyday and consumer culture.

Whatever is bought must also be consumed. The second part of the exhibition is about the act of consumption as documented and idealised in photography and graphic art. Eating, drinking, driving, travel, television and following fashion not only reflect basic needs but also social trends, such as the pursuit of prosperity, status and identity.

A slideshow with holiday snaps of married couple Yvonne and Jakob Hohl-Galbiati in the second part of the exhibition exemplifies rising prosperity since 1950. Like many other Swiss people, the travel guide and her insurance inspector husband

could afford to travel abroad regularly in the 1960s – not least because of a growing supply of affordable flights and paid leave. The photos show the couple going on cruises, sightseeing and sunbathing by the sea. The pictures are shown in slide shows with family and friends and testify to the search for a change of scene and recreation as well as a strong growth in wanderlust.

The exhibition has items from the collections of the Swiss National Museum and, together with an extensive selection of pictures, objects and stories, provides varied insights into the development of everyday consumption and its economic, social and cultural significance.

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