

JEANS

and
much
more

An exhibition at the Nordiska museet, Stockholm

[1984]

What are jeans?

In a way, one can say it's a matter of taste how you determine the borderline between jeans and »ordinary» trousers. But, to begin with, before jeans became a fashion, they could be defined as trousers • made of stout twilled cotton cloth with indigo-dyed warp and white weft i.e. denim • seams sewn with two needles with yellow thread • yoke-cut in the back • waist-band of double cloth with belt-loops • five pockets • rivets and strengthenings of thread on exposed parts • metal buttons.

Gradually, as jeans have become a garment which »everybody» wants to wear, irrespective of age, sex and social class, they have been adapted to various wishes with respect to shape of body etc. In addition there is the demand for variety that is a feature of the entire history of costume, i.e. fashion. As a result, there are today many types of trousers which are called jeans, although they may have picked up no more than a few characteristics of the original jeans.

Jeans have become a theme with variations: in the one case, the emphasis is on the cloth — blue denim — and the cut, the details, labels etc vary almost indefinitely • in the other the emphasis is on the cut, and you vary the type of cloth (corduroy, satin etc) and colours (pastel, oatmeal, eggshell) according to the dominant fashion-trend. Fashion is always attuned to social developments, and since public opinion is now (1980) reacting against industrialized and computerdominated society, it is only natural that today's jeans have reverted to the original model avoiding unnecessary details.

The first jeans

Jeans originated in the USA. The history of this garment which has now conquered the world starts with Levi Strauss, a young man who emigrated in the 1840's from Bavaria in Germany to America. In 1850, like many

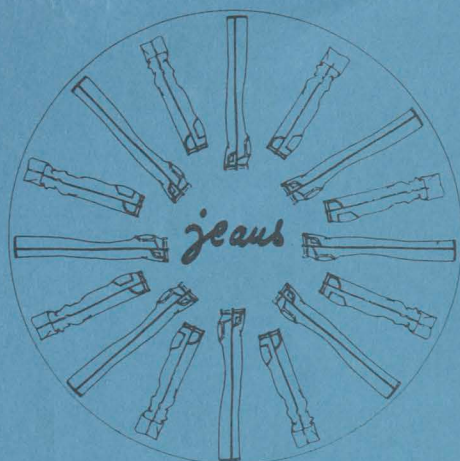
Translation:
NK:s cowboy-»Jeans» are here again — from 4—19 years and sizes 48—50
From an advertisement 1950

Nu har NK:s
cowboy-
"Jeans"

— från 4 till 19 år
samt storlekar
48—50—

åter kommit in





The jeans wheel is rolling on.
From Habit 13/1977

other immigrants, he went to San Francisco to find a job. He brought with him some bundles of stout cotton-cloth which he intended to sell as material for tents and wagon-covers. It turned out, however, that what the gold-diggers needed were durable trousers, and soon Strauss had established contact with a tailor.

At first the trousers were made of brown canvas, but from the 1860's on, stout indigo-dyed cotton-cloth was used. This was imported from Nîmes (de Nîmes) in France: hence the name denim.

Gradually, other companies were founded in different parts of America, among others, one by HDLee in Kansas City in 1889, whose products are well-known to the Swedish public. All these factories concentrated on producing working-clothes for gold-diggers, cowboys etc, and garments for the armed forces. Not until after the second World War did the demand for jeans sweep the nation from coast to coast, especially among young people.

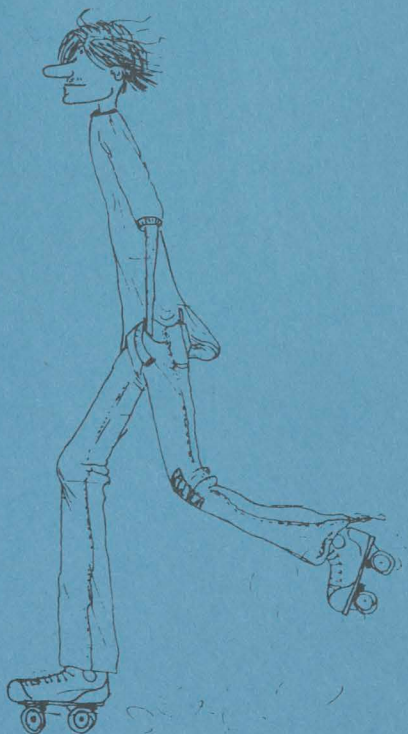
Jeans in Sweden

It was after the second World War that jeans made their appearance on Sweden too. Since the end of the 19th century overalls had been made of blue cloth. Such garments were especially suited to production in large series, and so became one of the staples of our ready-made-clothing industry. Likewise, since the 1930's we already had some production of leisure-wear, including trousers made of blue cloth.

Out of the restrictions and isolation of the war years grew a great longing for things new. New fashion and new gadgets were exciting, particularly if they came from the USA. Prominent among such new fashion articles were jeans. Seamen, journalists and businessmen were the first to discover jeans, in the course of their travels in America, and it was partly through their introduction that production could be started in Sweden. Algots in Borås had the capacity, and, moreover, a long tradition in making working-clothes and leisure-wear.

At first Algots had hardly any competitors but in 1960 the doors were opened for the importation of jeans from the USA. These first imported American jeans were like the original model, that is, the type that for decades had been used by hardworking people. After a few years, however, the market and the public were ready for a transformation. It was the Stockholm firm, Gul & Blå (Yellow and Blue — the Swedish national colours) that introduced a new trend in 1968 with their so-called V-jeans. Jeans became fashionable.

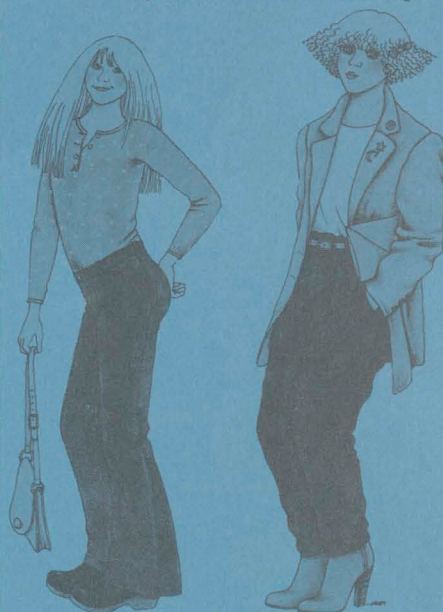
Today we have some 200 different brands of jeans in Sweden. Manufacture on such a large scale and high-powered marketing methods occasion-



Drawing 1979 by a pupil, eighth grade

MODEHETSEN ÖKAR!

Ena året tajt... ...andra året lösigt



Vi byter till och med kroppsställning

Translation:

The pressure of fashion is growing
One year tight the next year loose
We even change posture

Poster from The national Swedish Board for Consumer Policies 1979

nally made the need for quality-control acute. On several occasions steps were taken by the National Swedish Board for Consumer Policies to ensure that consumers received reliable product information and to safeguard the quality of the goods offered.

Jeans in the Nordiska museet

For some time now we have been especially interested in jeans. Our study of jeans is part of the Samdok-project i.e. a project for the documentation of our own time: the aim is to study contemporary culture as it happens and document it for posterity. We have, for instance, a fruitful collaboration with school children all over the country: they have answered our questions and helped us formulate the different facets of the concept »jeans». The exhibition »JEANS and much more» gives a brief outline of the history of jeans in Sweden. Among other things it shows how deeply the jeans vogue has penetrated society, how it has influenced a great many other products and has left its mark far beyond the sphere of clothes.

Inga Wintzell

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